Strategies for Times When More Is Less: Collaboration to Maximize the Educational ROI

A Presentation for the 8th Annual Summer Conference

Integration, Learning, Community: Pedagogy, Technology & Course Redesign VIII

by

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Session Description

We will discuss a method for using blogs in a student-centered way that increases student engagement, improves learning outcomes, and reduces the instructor’s workload. We will describe the previous methodology, the new method, and resulting outcomes. Participants will be invited to share ideas of how this practice can be used in other disciplines.
Example of a Team Blog and Peer Responses

Class Journal Group A 2/7
Post on February 7 2008

QU 201 Seminar on National Community: The 1960’s

Group A Blog February 7, 2008

Theme or Focus Question: What constitutes a National Community and what are the roles of the members within that community?

Three Specific Points:

- Putnam feels as if the TV is the main reason why people have become disconnected and less involved in their communities. He also states that readers of newspapers are more likely to be active rather than a TV viewer who is disconnected and an outsider. (Putnam 18). “The electronic revolution in communications technology was the first major technological advance in centuries that would have a profoundly decentralizing and fragmenting effect on society and culture.” (Pool 20). Although TV may absorb a lot of hours within someone’s spare time rather putting their time into the community, we feel that the advancing technology is one of the greatest evolutions. There have several nation altering incidents such as 9/11 and Katrina that without TV, besides newspapers there would be no way of knowing the extent of the damage and the much need for help. Newspapers may take a day to come out to the public with the news, but with TV your news is instant and leaves more of an impact. Mass amounts of information are available right at our fingertips making everyone aware and involved within the community. Due to technological advances and TV we are more aware of our surroundings and what is going on in our nation and world as a whole.

- We think Robert Reich makes interesting points to support the idea that there is a growing rift between the highest income earners and the poor. Reich correlates through data that the rich, due to them contributing greatly to America’s world economy, are being supported by America more so than the poor, through access to better education, higher spending on corporate centers, and less spending on public transportation. “Rather than increase the profitability of corporations flying its flag or enlarge the worldwide holdings of its citizens, a nation's economic role is to enhance its citizens' standard of living by increasing the value that they add to the world economy.”(Reich,1991, p.199) We feel this statement is very powerful because the citizens of America are all supposed to be treated equally and as a national community, togetherness is key. In class for week three's discussion topic, “What constitutes a national community?” groups 1, 2, 3, and 4 all said that we need to work together and look out for each other in some way or another. There can be no trust within a nation if America caters to and prioritizes the rich over the poor, just because the rich may be a better asset in the world economy. We also agree that there is definitely an evident unfair separation between the poor and the rich that does not seem to be going away any time soon.

- In the article “The Strange Disappearance of Civic America,” the author Robert D. Putnam uses inferences and statistical evidence from earlier decades to develop an explanation for the downfall of Civic America. He takes several different outlooks and explanations which people have developed and expresses his own opinion on them. One that we thought was very interesting was his outlook on the effects of education. Putnam states that “education is by far the strongest correlate that I have discovered of civic engagement in all its forms, including social trust and membership in many different types of groups… The four years of education between 14 and 18 total years have ten times more impact on trust and membership than the first four years of formal education” (pg 4). We found this very interesting, because in class we talked about how segregated students are in class rooms now compared to when we were in elementary school. In elementary school classes were based around learning games, pen pals, group projects, field trips, arts and crafts, and students learned in desks of four or tables. In middle school students sit in rows, teachers lecture while students take notes, and classes switch every 45 minutes. Why, in these four years which have “ten times more impact” then the first for years of education are we segregating students the most? In elementary
school kids are much more talkative and outgoing because they are still innocent and carefree. As education begins to change requiring independence and less student involvement, students begin to care less about the social interactions with those they don’t know. Because of this we believe that education does have a big impact on Civic America and that slight changes in the way classes are conducted can greatly impact this generation of kids.

http://youtube.com/watch?v=dGCJ46vvR9o

This is a video on YouTube showing how co-eds in a college setting find it hard to learn and get along within a classroom today.

Questions:

• What makes women the main cause of the decline in civic engagement? Putnam wrote his article in 1996, there was no division between the work loads of men and women. Men could have gone to PTA meetings, attended school functions, and been an active member in their community. Mr. Mom was a common phrase used in most households, portraying the stay at home dad, who would cook, clean and take care of the kids. It is not the 1950’s where a “Stepford Wife” image needs to be portrayed; it is the era of equal rights for men and women. He had no evidence prevalent in any of his statements that could lead to women being the main cause to the decline.

• Why are single people less involved in their communities and less trustworthy than a married person? Putnam states about a single person, they are “Significantly less trusting and less engaged civically than married people.” (Putnam 10). I feel as if it is the complete opposite. Single people have more time of their own as opposed to a married person who must coordinate their schedule with their partners. A single person, I feel is more likely to attend a fund raiser or be more active in their community, maybe they are looking to meet someone, and therefore they would attend mixers and church get-togethers or even a singles night. I feel as if married couples are settling, they have a lot more to worry about especially when kids come into the picture, they have to worry about homework, cooking meals, and organization within their household. A married person’s life may be more hectic and more involved within their own lives as opposed to a single person who wants to be busy an active with others. Although there may be a trust issue with that of a married person, a single person might have been hurt before and looking for the right person to trust. With a married person, they put all their trust into that one other person leaving them closed off to others. In some cases, even a married person does not even trust their own spouse, the one person that they are supposed to trust. In the TV show, “Sex & the City”, there are four single women, who are powerful and a major part of their workforce and make a major impact on the city. Carrie, the main character, writes a column for the newspaper and on several occasions host a seminar for single women looking for dates. That is clearly being an active member of the community and I feel as if it were a married person hosting the seminar the women would feel pressured and wouldn’t be able to relate, therefore because she is single they are trusting her as well. Putnam is possibly a married man and that is what has made him come to these conclusions. If he possibly proved what made him come to his conclusion I might not have questioned it, but he doesn’t even give backup to his statements. The single person is just as likely to be trustworthy and civically engaged.

• Why aren’t people more involved in the National Community today; regarding the War in Iraq and presidential elections? Putnam says that surveys show that people aren’t as involved in their communities as they were during the Depression and WWI. “Membership records of such diverse organizations as the PTA, the Elks club, the League of Women Voters, the Red Cross, labor unions, and even bowling leagues show that participation in many conventional voluntary associations has declined by roughly 25 percent to 50 percent over that last two to three decades” (Putnam 1-2). I can see it today in my own community, and especially with the younger generation. Many people don’t seem to care about voting or about the war. Television shows, magazines and newspapers are constantly trying to urge young people to vote, but to no avail. I know I am not even registered to vote, and I don’t know much about politics, and I’m sure most of my friends would say the same. What does this say about our community? If this kind of behavior continues…what does that mean for our national community?
Personal Experience

As previously stated, people just aren’t involved enough with the National community. Not enough people get involved in outside groups and activities. There are many groups that a person can belong to, including the group of voters. This is a group that we have a choice to belong to, and participate in. If you are over 18 you have the opportunity to be able to choose who you want to run this country. However, astonishingly, not enough people take this opportunity because many people don’t even vote. I am 19 years old, meaning I have been able to vote for 2 years now, and I am still not even registered. I know that many of my friends are the same way as I am, while some of them even say they could care less about politics or who lives in the White House. But the truth is, we need to start caring, because if we continue to live like this our country will fall apart and everything we have worked so hard for will just disappear.

Works Cited


Sample responses to the posted team blog

Student #1
QU 201 Seminar on National Community: The 1960’s
Group A Blog Response
February 8, 2008

While reading Group A’s blog the part that intrigued me the most was the second point under questions. “Putnam states about a single person, they are ‘Significantly less trusting and less engaged civic[al]ly than married people.’” (Putnam 10) says Group A. Although Group A disagrees with Putnam, I happen to agree with him. Many single people do actively become involved in their community, but a lot of that activity has to do with their own personal interests. Married people on the other hand, get involved in activities around the community because of interests of their own, their partner, and/or their children.

I know at my house my mom is involved in everything. She has groups and organizations that she is involved in for her own interests, as well as being part of the American Heart Association in my hometown because my dad is a cardiologist. She runs meetings and events to raise money and awareness of major cardiac problems. On top of all these things she, and my dad when he’s not at work, are part of organizations because of my brothers and I. I horseback rode, danced, and played hockey and lacrosse. Both my brothers played hockey and now play lacrosse and are big into music. Because of this wide array of activity, my parents are active in many things around our home and school. If my mom was single, she would not be involved in our activities or my father’s; she would solely be in her own groups/communities.

Another interesting point that Group A discussed was Putnam’s discussion on school being a major player in civic activity and trust. Group A used the quote, “education is by far the strongest correlate that I have discovered of civic engagement in all its forms, including social trust and membership in many different types of groups… The four years of education between 14 and 18 total years have ten times more impact on trust and membership than the first four years of formal education” (pg 4). Between the ages of 14 and 18 students are more likely to become involved in activities around school whether it is clubs, sports, or arts. However, I agree with Group A that in elementary school one is almost forced to be working in groups. As they said, when you were younger the class room was always set up in tables or desk groups so that people were put together and able to talk and get to know each other. This if you think about it, is not such a smart idea. Kids are usually talkative and disruptive, so why would you want to enforce those behaviors and be a contributor to it. It is hard for kids to sit still and be quiet for long periods of time, but as you get older you learn the control it takes to sit in class without being disruptive. If students were set up in group tables or desk, rather than lines and rows of desks, it would create a more engaged group of students. We even saw this take
place in class. It may even help to reduce the amount of social division that takes place in high schools, hopefully breaking down a barrier that separates groups of people. Watching “One Tree Hill” on the CW is a good example. There was a two episode special on how treatment and separation of high school groups can cause psychological and physical damage.

The idea of community, as well as national community, is a very broad statement; that to be able to create a community one must be able to define it. A community has many different components because of the difference in each form of community. However, today communities are very select and to become part you almost have to prove that you belong there. I think that we all need to take a good look at ourselves and others and realize we are very different from each other but that does not mean we all can’t get along. If we want to better our national community we need to first better our own individual communities. And as Putnam says that needs to take place first and foremost in the school systems.

Works Cited

Student #2
QU 201 Seminar on National Community: The 1960’s
Group A Blog Response
February 9, 2008

First and foremost, I think group A did a very good job in executing the instructions outlined for the first blog assignment. This group discussed many valid and pertinent issues presented in the first two readings of the semester. However, I must disagree with the answer to the third question posted. The question was, why aren’t people more involved in the National Community today; regarding … presidential elections? My answer would be along the lines of this year’s election is bringing about more civil engagement than I have seen in past elections. This election has many people up in arms. The fact a black man and a woman have a pretty good chance at winning the presidency has gotten everyone’s attention. It’s a neck in neck race for the democratic candidates and everyone is fervently watching. During Harold Ford Jr.’s speech on Wednesday night, he said the primary elections alone have gotten great public response. African-American voters are coming out in droves in Barak Obama’s favor. Obama commands entire cities, young people, and even the television legend Oprah Winfrey for support. I don’t necessarily think Obama will win the election but he has millions of people excising their civic duties than normal if this race were between two older white men. Some campaigns fall unto deaf ears, but not Obama’s. Whether you are for him or not he has caught your attention. Obama has certainly caught my attention. He is something innovative and fresh and for some reason I believe him.

Obama and Clinton are making history. They provide a new face of leadership for America. Just like the television was a fresh new invention at its time and captured virtually everyone’s attention as does a woman and black man vying for the presidency. For example, Obama won the South Carolina’s primary. I was shocked to hear the news that a black leader gains any respect in a southern state let alone win the votes of the majority. It is speculated that the African-American voters of South Carolina who have not voted in years all came out together and voted for someone who could bring about change and innovation.

Harold Ford Jr. said he was uneasy when an elder offered him to speak at preschool graduations. Ford thought this was ridiculous and no where to begin campaigning. He did it anyway to please the elder and the speeches turned out for the good. As he did, Ford encouraged his audience to do something extremely new and out of the ordinary. A woman and black man running for president is unprecedented but I think this is the direction my country needs to take. I have followed an older white republican man and an older white democratic man, but when will the time come when I follow an African- American or woman. I say that time is now.

Works Cited
Quinnipiac University Presents a Conversation with Harold Ford Jr. February 6, 2008.
Students’ Reactions to the Format of the QU 201 Course

Unsolicited email message:

- I just wanted to let you know I really enjoyed your class and think that it really opened my eyes to not only the 60’s but also a new way of learning. Being able to think through ideas and not be spoon fed information was [a] very interesting set up for a college course. I thank you for the time you spent with our class.

Final Reflections paper

- The atmosphere of the class was what really impacted me. This semester, Qu201 was the only class where I knew everyone that was in the class and was comfortable talking to people.

- To summarize this course, my overall reaction was that it was a perfect balance of assignments and presentations. Qu101 was a lot of busy work and assignments that we didn’t really get anything out of; in this course I feel there was the perfect amount of work and they all related to what we had to do. Additional comments are I don’t like using the blogs on blackboard. It is much easier for me to remember to do assignments that are concrete and not online. This was the first class I had to use the journals for and I didn’t care for it too much. Overall, I am very pleased I chose this course as an elective and it was the most enjoyable class I had this semester.

- This course thoroughly surprised me and made me remember how enjoyable a college class could be. This class was so unlike my other classes that it was truly a treat to attend. I can say that this is the only class in my college career that I did not skip even once, and this stems from the fact that it was an interesting topic, with an interesting goal, with a very interesting professor who made learning about the 60’s fun and beneficial.

- I would definitely recommend the course to my peers. It was unlike any course I have ever taken. All of the courses I have to take here at Quinnipiac University are note taking lectures. This was really hands on and the class was able to learn the material together.

- In this course, I was impacted the most by the interactions I had with my peers. I was greatly moved by some of the personal stories that they shared as well as their reactions to certain discussions in class. I found that the responses to some of the questions posed by our weekly presenters were very intriguing.

- The personal experiences which were written in the blogs on Blackboard were extremely powerful because it made me realize how each person has their own history and that is what makes them unique from everyone else.

- Additional comments and/or reactions I would like share about this course is that I was able to learn while having fun. I truly enjoyed this class because I was able to interact with all of my classmates and actually got to know who they were. This does not happen often seeing as I am a business major and many of my classes are not interactive but more along the lines of lectures and note taking. I was able to get a lot out of the class and looked forward going to class every Monday and Wednesday. Furthermore, I really enjoyed how we were asked what our opinions were and how class discussions were strongly encouraged. I am a firm believer that this is one of the best ways of learning because not only do you realize how much you know and can talk about it, but you also learn from what other people around you have to say.
References


