



Leveraging the Integration of HIPs to Foster an Equity-Centered Reflective Practice among Entering Education Major Students.

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Abstract

Evidence suggests that when two or more High Impact Practices (HIPs) are implemented around the same goals, this can impact student engagement, especially among marginalized students [1], [2]. Some well-documented HIPs include first year experiences, ePortfolios, common intellectual experiences, and diversity or global learning. This paper will highlight the collaborative development process for creating an assignment for a First Year Seminar (FYS) course for Education majors that incorporates integrative learning, electronic portfolios (ePortfolios), and project-based learning. The goal of the assignment is to increase students' awareness of historical events related to equity and access to education in the United States and to foster a reflective practice about their roles as educators and social justice advocates in today's evolving world [3], [4].

Keywords: *Social Justice, Education, ePortfolios*

Introduction

Two-year (community) colleges in the United States enroll a growing number of college students. The American Association of Community Colleges indicates that there are 11.8 million students enrolled in both credit and noncredit programs, which represents 41% of undergraduates in the United States [5]. Community college students are likely to require academic remediation and aspire to advance towards a baccalaureate degree at a four-year college [6]. Historically, community colleges have become the entry point to postsecondary education for minority and underrepresented students [7]. LaGuardia Community College (LaGCC) is part of the City University of New York (CUNY). LaGCC is located in Queens and enrolls approximately 18,000 students yearly from a diverse student population, representing over 145 different countries and 77 different languages [8].

Over the years, scholars have identified best practices to increase retention and graduation. The American Association of Colleges and Universities is a leading organization that seeks to advance college learning. They have identified eleven research-based High impact Practices (HIPs) for institutions to consider [1]. HIPs such as electronic Portfolios (ePortfolios) and First-Year Seminars (FYS), discussed in this paper, help institutions increase student learning and success. ePortfolios are digital webpages where students curate and display artifacts that represent their learning over time [9]. At LaGuardia, students use the Digication platform. This web-based platform allows students to create ePortfolios where they can upload a variety of multimodal elements. These ePortfolios can be shared privately with a class, an instructor, or publicly with outside audiences. Over time, students (re-)organize, (re-)design, and determine the audience of their ePortfolios as they get closer to graduation and transfer.

FYS courses help sustain engagement during the first year of college. At LaGCC, the EDF course is coordinated by the Education and Language Acquisition (ELA) Department and taught by faculty in the discipline. This course is required for all Education students at LaGCC. Since its implementation in the Fall of 2019, the Program has offered approximately ten sections each academic year. The course is anchored to three main areas: (1) an introduction to the education field, (2) an introduction to the advisement model



and academic structure of the major and (3), an introduction to the Core ePortfolio that students will use across the curriculum. This paper will discuss the design, implementation, and evolution of the Dream Deferred Integrative Learning assignment for the EDF course. We will discuss the origins of the assignment including the main goals and its connection to social justice and how it has evolved. We will conclude by discussing the collaborative process among the instructors and the current iteration of the assignment.

The Assignment

The ELA Department offered three sections of the EDF course in its first semester, Fall 2019. In addition to the three main areas of focus, the course introduces Integrative Learning (IL) and Digital Communication, a LaGCC general education core competency and communication ability. Moreover, the course addresses different learning objectives, such as increasing student understanding of the field of education birth through 12th grade, state requirements, and foundational knowledge in the education field; understanding the purposes of higher education and the policies and expectations of the College; becoming familiar with different types of research methods used in the field of education, how theory influences teaching practices, concepts of ethics and values; and developing habits of mind to succeed in college. While taking the course, students also receive program-specific advisement and are introduced and connected with their respective advising teams.

In the first semester, one of the authors implemented a 3-hour lesson designed to introduce the concept of IL to her class. IL is characterized as the ability to make connections among ideas and experiences, across the curriculum and co-curriculum, to synthesize and transfer learning to new situations within and beyond campus [10]. The lesson began with an explanation of IL and its importance in the context of the college's General Education Outcomes Assessment. Then, students were introduced to Langston Hughes' poem "Harlem", written during the height of the civil rights era in the US [11]. The class next discussed the history of civil rights, social justice issues related to education in the 1950s, and Ladson Billings' chapter, "A Dream Deferred" [12]. The Ladson-Billings' chapter introduces culturally responsive pedagogy, its history, the teaching of African American children, and an approach to teaching students from diverse backgrounds, and is titled after a phrase in "Harlem". Students, in small groups, then designed and presented posters illustrating what exploding a dream deferred meant to them. After completing and presenting their posters, the class reflected on how the three disciplines, literature, history, and education, informed their understanding of a dream deferred and its connections to education.

In March of 2020, and as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic, CUNY shifted to distance learning. The authors worked collaboratively during the first two weeks of the semester to move their materials to an online learning management platform to make course content accessible to students. It was during this time that we began to align the use of materials across all sections of this course. The move to distance learning resulted in a series of online modules that covered the same goals. The authors implemented the use of different digital tools to foster student engagement in an online environment. The introduction and use of these digital tools aimed to address the lack of in-person interaction during the pandemic. Along with these, the authors also integrated other key materials that aimed to expose students to historical events with a focus on how these events impacted their evolving roles as educators. These materials included the implementation of the School Narrative assignment, the New York Times documentary *The Fight to Desegregate New York Schools*, and the documentary *Stolen Education* [13], [14].

In Spring 2020, one of the authors introduced a School Narrative. In the narrative, students needed to reflect and share one meaningful experience they had in their educational journeys, and were prompted to write about the experience in the context of a schooling environment. This narrative was integrated to bring in students' personal perspectives and backgrounds into discussions of the education field, and prompted students to make intentional connections to their roles as educators and personal educational experiences. In subsequent revisions, the authors prompted students to connect their



experiences to their interest in becoming a teacher. While the author who introduced this assignment made it part of the grading scale for the course, the remaining authors introduced it as an ungraded assignment.

Focusing on aligning materials across all sections, the authors decided to introduce the New York Times episode *The Fight to Desegregate New York Schools* in the Spring of 2020 [13]. This film features the vastly different experiences of two students, a White and a Black student who live not far from each other, from two different schools in New York City. By integrating this film into our class discussion, we prompted students to think about issues of equity, such as resources, and whether segregation was still present to this date in a city where they live. Moreover, after reviewing the timeline for the civil rights movement, this film is an opportunity for students to reflect about the larger field of education through the lens of segregation.

In Fall 2020, we introduced the documentary *Stolen Education* [14]. This film features the story of eight Mexican-American children in first grade who were systematically held back due to their Spanish speaking heritage in Driscoll, Texas in the 1950s. The concept of segregation by language added a new dimension to the discussions of segregation and advanced students' understanding of social justice beyond race. Then in Spring 2021, we made the school narrative required in all sections of the course. In order to address the need to get a baseline understanding of students' sense of their educator identities and roles as educators as linked to social justice prior to completing the assignment, one of the authors piloted using the ePortfolio to document prior knowledge of the issue, specifically trying to take the in class activity directly to the ePortfolio. However, this led to some students deleting or hiding sections, as such we needed to rethink this approach. This led to the current Spring 2022 iteration of the final assignment, in which students must integrate their reflections related to the prior external elements as hyperlinks to avoid losing students' pre-thinking data.

Conclusion

In this paper, we discussed the evolution of our EDF assignment. We illustrated that the collaboration among the authors was fundamental to ensuring that the assignment addressed the learning objectives of the course. This collaboration among the authors with the rapid move to distance learning during the pandemic opened a window to revisit the assignment, make refinements, and add material to advance students' understanding of the issues discussed. We've done this work supported by two HIPs: FYS courses and ePortfolios. At LaGCC, we've built a robust FYS experience in which ePortfolios work as a catalyst to document student learning. The reflective practice is exemplified in the reflections students wrote in response to each aspect of the assignment we've developed and refined over time. When the curriculum is anchored in more than one HIP, this can increase students' engagement with course content and achieve better outcomes. In collaboratively designing our course, we focused on addressing issues of equity and social justice in the field of education, digital communication and integrative learning.

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