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## **Crossing Borders: A Narrative of Social Pedagogy**

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### **Summary of Composition Practice**

This practice is drawn from Composition 103, the introductory writing course taken by all students on CUNY campuses. The practice, a narrative essay, is the introductory assignment for the course and is tethered to two other community-focused and social practices. The essay assignment asks students to do two things: 1) take the Subway to a stop they have never been to before and interact with the community through observation, sensory detail, and metacognitive perception, and 2) identify and articulate a time where they have felt like an “other” or outsider. This practice views social pedagogy as experiential and is structured to immerse students in a community of visual signs, symbols, people, and geography they are unfamiliar with. They are then able to develop a nascent voice as an immigrant in this community.

Prior to the completion of the essay, students participate in a reflective exercise that takes them to another member’s ePortfolio. Based on a set of reflective prompts, students comment on one another’s portfolios, focusing on the identification of metacognitive thought and process. Following this activity, students then engage with a full-class Jam Session. Based on the philosophical theme of borders as simulations of reality that creates the framework of the assignment, students respond to a prompt focusing on critical thinking around this issue. During the Jam, students also respond to one another while attempting to have a verbal discussion

in the class simultaneously. Engaging in both virtual and live discourse simultaneously allows students to revise their Jam posts instantly based on what they are hearing in class. The Jam gives students the opportunity to reflect on the experiential component of the assignment and the class reflection through the lens of a virtual Socratic Seminar. Merging their feelings, thoughts, and actions together in a rapid-fire Jam Session gives depth to both the experiential practice, the narrative, and the reflection. It illustrates, in real-time, the knowledge-centers that have been enhanced by the sequence of practice.

## **Full Description of Composition Practice**

The following are brief descriptions of the assignments that define and enhance the narrative experience in Composition 103:

### Description-

Sometimes I feel out of place, like everyone around me knows exactly what's going on and I'm missing out. I feel like I don't fit in. But, even worse, everyone seems to be staring at me like I don't belong there. But instead of noticing what's around me and reflecting on my role in this new environment, I cling to my fear and run away. What if I paused, took a moment to embrace this new place, to see what I can contribute, to learn about where I am and why I came here in the first place? What if I wrote my way through the streets and penned a line through the sidewalks? What if I shared my story with an audience of common voices? What if I became a poet?

We will begin our experiment with narrative by mixing imagination, storytelling, and with a trip outside of your comfort zone. Here's what we will be doing:

1. Between now and Friday, hop on the Subway and go to a stop in a neighborhood you have never been to before. When you get off, make some notes about what you see. What is the neighborhood like? The people? The stores? The restaurants? How does walking around this neighborhood make

you feel? How is it different than your home? Feel free to take some pictures that you can share in your ePortfolio along with your essay.

2. For your essay, you are going to write three to five pages of autobiographical narrative. Your focus for this composition is a narrative (story) about a time you have felt out of place or like an outsider. Easy, right? Here's the catch. Using the notes you made on your Subway trip, you are going to write two stories within one narrative. How can you tell the story of your trip on the Subway at the same time you tell the story of a time you have felt like an outsider? Let me give you an example.

#### Reflective Exercise-

In the comments section of your team member's ePortfolio, answer the following questions based on your reading of their narrative essay:

Where are some places that you see the author thinking about social constructs? This may not include an obvious reference to this term, but you should be able to see thinking through patterns of language and references to people and things.

Where can you identify places in the essay where the author feels part of a community? Where do you see places where he/she feels as though they have drifted away from a community? Turn to emotion in the essay to answer this question and stray away from the obvious.

Where do you see the author creating borders in order to simulate an idealistic or contrived reality? Discuss why.

#### Jam Session-

How A Jam Works:

1. Based on our discussion of the first chapter of *Diasporas*, I will pose a question as a baseline for our conversation.
  
2. Everyone will open to my ePortfolio and navigate to this page.

3. In the comments box at the bottom of the page, each of you will offer a brief (no more than two sentences) response or reflection to the prompt.
4. After everyone is finished, you will go back and skim through the other responses and pick one you want to respond to.
5. You will make another comment, including the person's name you are responding to, directly speaking to what he or she said.
6. I will participate as well.
7. It is completely fine, and encouraged, to discuss what is being said out loud at the same time as you are typing. This is hard but we can give it a shot.

Today's Jam Session:

Making a direct reference to the *Diasporas* book (meaning you have to speak directly to what is being said in the book), try to respond to the following question:

How is digital media and the growth of technology responsible for making borders simply a simulation of reality?

Remember, think deeply, and don't be afraid to write out your thoughts, no matter what.

The Learning Outcomes that parallel this assignment string are:

Listen, read, and write critically and accurately by engaging texts in multiple genres;

Analyze and make connections across texts through strategies such as note taking, annotation, paraphrasing, and summarizing;

Access, evaluate, and synthesize information resources to support claims they make in their writing;

Demonstrate research skills using appropriate technology, including gathering, evaluating, and synthesizing primary and secondary sources;  
Explain their writing process and employ strategies for revision and improvement of their written work based on awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses as writers;  
Monitor their learning using faculty feedback, grades, and other learning assessment results and use it for reflection (for example, through ePortfolio).

## **Analysis of Composition Practice**

Based on the preceding assignments and course learning outcomes, we can answer the following questions based on this practice:

What kinds of knowledge and understanding does this practice seek to help students construct? Please be specific. In what ways are these understandings integrative (as defined above)?

Students are identifying voice through their engagement with multiple communities. Not only are they passive observers in a foreign place, they are interacting with these visualizations and sensory descriptions with one another through ePortfolio commenting and Jam Sessions. Moreover, they are developing unique identities through critical thinking about broad-spectrum issues that merge traditional academic practices with experiential learning. Student ePortfolios provide a place where the understanding of these voices and identities come together. This exercise, though, focuses on the philosophical concept of borders as a simulation of reality. Integrating Baudrillard's simulacra with an experiential learning component, students begin to understand borders as implicit social, academic, and cognitive constructs. This preliminary discussion will lead to a later dialogue about ePortfolio and the virtual identity. One student writes in his narrative assignment that "nervous feelings were overridden by a sense of curiosity and a hunger for exploration." Referencing his experience traveling to a new location in the City, this student's thoughts exemplify the shift ePortfolio is making in the construction (and deconstruction) of experienced and applied knowledge.

Thinking about the knowledge students constructed from this assignment sequence, the experiential seems to blanket the practice with authenticity.

How does the practice design the communication of understanding? What are the students communicating? How does it employ or draw on the ePortfolio?

Based on their experiences both in the classroom and in the field, students were able to tether their unique observations to both the reflective exercise and to the thoughts generated in the Jam Session. The in-class activities produced a unique community where they were able to merge original experience with a set of common prompts. All of their work was completed and discussed within their ePortfolios. This practice of integrative social pedagogy within the portfolios provided yet another community of thought. Students were then able to discuss borders as simulations of reality in the context of the digital, allowing them to incorporate live experiences with a simulated, digital discussion.

What audiences are involved? How does the nature of this audience shape students' communication? What kind of interaction is involved? How does the social interaction (communication, exchange, sharing, audience, different perspectives) seek to change or deepen students' understandings?

Digital media and technology can make borders a simulation of reality by blurring the lines that define "immigrant" and "native". Digital media and technology makes it easier for one to understand and assimilate with any member of any group. However, I think new borders will start to form based on one's interconnectedness with technology.

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Multiple audiences interact at different times during this string of activities. In the essay portion of the assignment, students interacted with the professor and the population of the neighborhood they visited as part of their Subway ride.

During the reflective exercise, students interacted with another member of the class. And, for the Jam Session, they experienced an interaction with the entire class and the professor. One interesting event occurred during the Jam Session. A former faculty member was looking through the students' ePortfolios as the class was participating in the session. She noticed the rapid commenting and watched the Jam

live. In a text message exchange with the professor, she commented on the students' writing and thought. This led to a discussion of the nature of the global digital audience and the implications of writing online. Students were able to visualize and experience interactions on both the local and global fronts using ePortfolio as a catalyst for this practice.

Reflection: How does the practice involve reflection? What reflective prompts or processes are employed? What aspect(s) of the Rodgers/Dewey reflective framework does this practice engage? Inquiry: In what ways does this practice involve inquiry? To what extent does it help students examine themselves as learners? To value their own lives and experiences in their learning?

All exercises in this assignment strand are reflective in nature and evaluate distinct lines of inquiry. The Rodgers and Dewey reflective framework can be applied in the following ways:

Reflection as Connection: While reflecting on their own work and the work of other members of the class, students also made connections to multiple themes and practices through the Jam Session. The Jam gave students the unique opportunity to apply what they learned in the field and through their own reflective (narrative) practice with concepts and lines of inquiry generated by other members of the community.

Just as I did on the trip to a new neighborhood I looked around carefully. The overwhelming feeling of acceptance to their home helped me relax. The butterflies inside me had begun to fly away. I was at ease, just like in my neighborhood. I answered my own question without even realizing it. I figured the whole time I would have this awkward feeling take over my body as I cramped up into a ball where words that tried to escape my mouth never found the exit. However it was the opposite and I realized even with the absorption of all this attention I indeed became comfortable. The words 'thank you for everything' hardly felt adequate as I could not express my gratitude for the amazing time I had. I had walked in an outsider, but left feeling like this was home. It truly made me think. The more attention someone may get the more unpleasant the situation is. On the contrary this in the end worked out better for me. I may never know why.

5 Settings Manage Comments

Reflection as Systematic and Disciplined: The application of reflection in this practice was deliberate and scaffolded across the layers of the assignment string. Engaged in metacognitive thought, students examined their own

lines of inquiry, combined with the critical thinking of others, to generate conclusions and arguments that were not present in their original essay.

Reflection as Social Pedagogy: The social nature of this assignment string provided students to move the thinking from the narrative outward into a community practitioners and readers. The Experiential component highlighted in the philosophy of this assignment allowed students to participate in a community foreign to them and to then apply those feelings and observations to academic practice.

Reflection as Attitude Toward Change: By looking at the reflections of others in multiple digital contexts, students were able to then evaluate and reevaluate their lines of inquiry around the essay. Using these reflective practices as a catalyst for change, they applied their new understanding to a revised draft.

## **Practice Identifiers**

Location:

The practice occurs in Composition 103 which is part of the Guttman's First-Year Experience.

Scale:

This particular practice is part of this section of Composition 103. While the narrative assignment is part of the overall structure of the course within the Pathways approved curriculum, the instructor for this course developed this assignment for this specific section.

High-Impact Practices:

This assignment is part of Guttman's First-Year Experience and reflects the college's mission of providing students with opportunity to engage in active experiential learning within the context of their learning community. As part of CUNY's

Pathways program, the composition course is a writing intensive course that introduces students to multiple genres of writing.

## **Helping Students Advance Their Learning**

Reflection as a form of Integrative Learning:

Make connections within a course

Make connections among academic experiences, co-curricular & lived experiences

Reflection as Systematic and Disciplined form of Inquiry:

A structured and scaffolded process

The Reflective Cycle

Connecting their learning to Gen Ed or programmatic competencies

Reflection as Social Pedagogy:

Sharing their ePortfolio w/ and getting comments from faculty

Sharing & engaging in integrative ePortfolio commentary w/ other students

Using their eP as a site for collaborative projects with other students

Reflection as a Process of Personal Change:

Considering their evolving personal relationship to learning and education

Professional Development – Were the faculty and/or staff who used this practice engaged in any of the following ePortfolio-related professional development?

Workshops

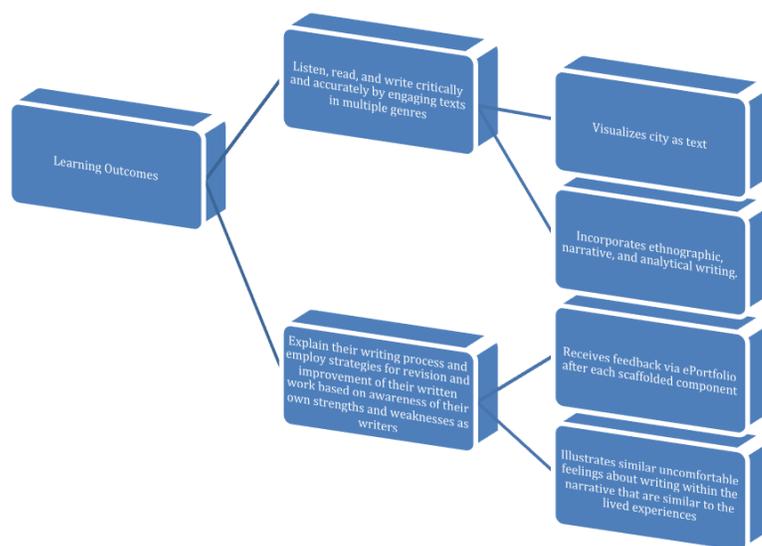
The faculty member is actively involved in the ePortfolio leadership team and has participated in professional development activities focused on reflective practice, integration of ePortfolio into courses, and on social pedagogy.

## Connection to the Catalyst

### Professional Development:

The instructor for this course was initially appointed as an Adjunct faculty member in August 2012. Soon after his hire, Mr. Jordan joined the Connect to Learning team and began working with other faculty on best practices for the integration of ePortfolio into his curriculum and pedagogy. Mr. Jordan participated in the college's workshops that introduced ePortfolio as an integrative social pedagogy and began experimenting with reflective prompts during his first semester at the college. In the spring 2013 semester, Mr. Jordan was appointed to a full-time instructor line and joined his colleagues on the C2L team in leading the ePortfolio Bootcamp and the Arts in New York City professional development seminars. Through the conversations in these workshops, Mr. Jordan developed the narrative assignment for this composition course. Interestingly, sustained and active participation in professional development served as a catalyst for both the transformation of individual pedagogy and student learning simultaneously. This experience highlights the power of professional development when it is applied to teaching and learning. This assignment was developed by a community of learners rather than by the instructor in isolation.

### Outcomes Assessment:



This assignment is listed as one of the Signature Assignments for Composition 103. While each faculty member designs his or her assignment based on the content and structure of the individual course,

the narrative piece is completed by all students enrolled in the course. This assignment is mapped to the Guttman Learning Outcomes (GLO) and will be assessed during the Spring Assessment Days in 2014. At the course level, the instructor evaluated this assignment using a scaffolded approach. First, he worked with students individually on revisions to the narrative draft. This interactive style of editing and revising is in line with Guttman's mission of high-touch teaching and learning. Next, Mr. Jordan integrated social pedagogy into the peer review process and asked students to answer guiding questions looking at each other's portfolios. This process gave students the opportunity to engage with a larger audience and invite feedback from individuals aside from the instructor. The Jam Session was evaluated holistically by the class. Mr. Jordan prompted students to respond both within the portfolio and verbally regarding the posts generated by members of the class. Throughout the Jam, the initial question was revised based on comments made. This gave students to take ownership not only of their individual answers but of the direction the digital and verbal conversation went.

**Technology:**

Digication's ePortfolio system, SmartBoard Technology, and the laptops available for each student gave this assignment life. Students were able to showcase their narratives to the entire class and engage in a portfolio-based revision process on the laptops available in each classroom. During the Jam Session, SmartBoard technology gave the class an opportunity to visualize the responses made by each member of the class in real-time. The availability of this technology also allowed for a verbal conversation to take place simultaneously that deepened the critical thought process.

**Scaling Up:**

This practice has been the centerpiece of several conference presentations. Alongside the Arts in New York City practice, our team has shared the effectiveness and results of this practice at the AAEEBL National conference in Boston in 2013 and the regional conference in Providence earlier that year. Part of our scaling-up process is sharing the stories of our unique college with a wider

audience and receiving feedback from our colleagues nationwide that gives us the opportunity to reflect on the work on our campus.

### **Impact and Evidence for Composition Practice**

Based on the learning outcomes listed above, students who completed all areas of the assignment string were successful in meeting these outcomes. The evidence of success points to the qualitative data generated from this assignment, which is shown in the Composition 103 portion of the PowerPoint Slides. Looking at the language harvested from the Jam Session, students instinctively used words like “connections” and “perspective.” While this is a preliminary evaluation, this type of language signals the deep reflection that this assignment string sought to invite. As the NCC moves towards its first Assessment Days this Spring, this work will be evaluated in the context of our institutional learning outcomes.

### **Next Steps for Composition Practice**

This practice could be strengthened by including multiple avenues for experiential learning. Rather than asking students to focus on a Subway ride as part of their narrative, the instructor could open this idea up to other areas. Also, to deepen the reflective cycle, students might participate in a Twitter Jam Session while they are at their destinations in an effort to merge the experiential component of this assignment with immediate reflection and integrative learning. During our Assessment Days this semester, this assignment will be shared with the Composition instructional team to be evaluated and revised collaboratively.

### **Conclusion**

This assignment gave students the opportunity to think through and within the context of their portfolios. The development of thought as students moved from the narrative to the Jam Session allowed them to construct an authentic identity both individually and as a learning community. This assignment also gave the instructor the space to experiment with ePortfolio pedagogy within a newly implemented and constructed course. On a larger scale, this practice has given the C2L team evidence

of effective integrative social pedagogy to share with our community and at conferences. This evidence invites feedback, the feedback inspires questions, and the questions catalyze change on our campus.

#### Citation

Jordan, C. (2014). *Crossing borders: a narrative of social pedagogy*. Retrieved from: <http://gcc.mcnrc.org/soc-practice-1/>.