

# Learning Community Assessment

Report from the Learning Community  
Assessment Subcommittee

Learning Community Institute, May 13-14, 2002

# LC Assessment Subcommittee

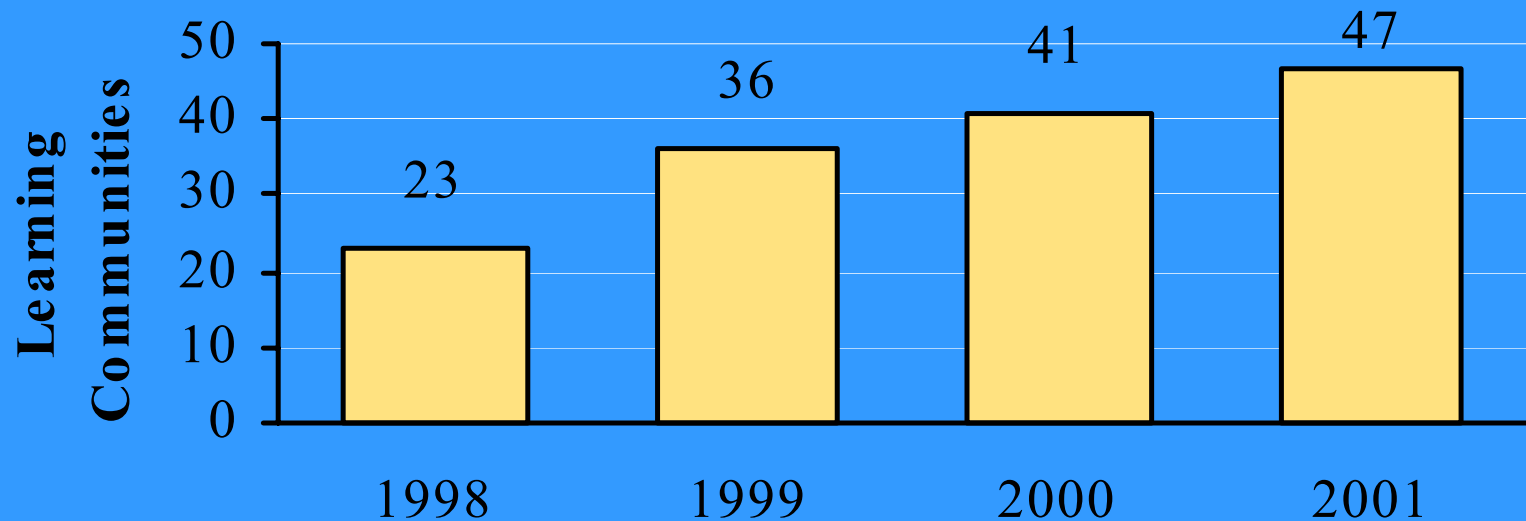
- Bob Bergmann
- Michelle Cook
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- Mary Huba, Co-Chair
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- Tom Polito
- Mack Shelley
- Elizabeth Wardle
- Don Whalen
- Bin Zhang

# Overview\*

- Growth of Learning Communities
- Assessment Findings to Date
- Future Directions

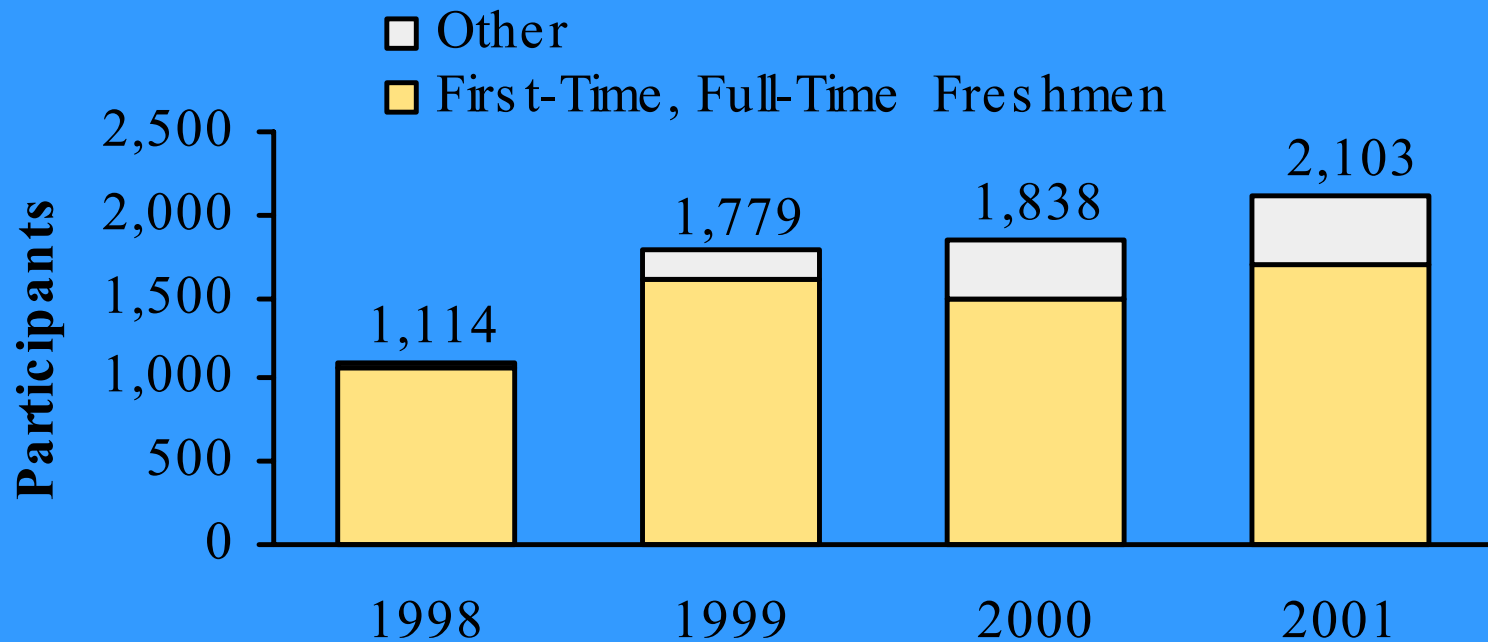
\*Huba, M., Ellertson, S., Cook, M., & Epperson, D. *Assessment's role in transforming a grass-roots initiative into an institutionalized program: Evaluating and shaping learning communities at Iowa State University*. Manuscript in progress to appear in a forthcoming AAHE monograph edited by Jean MacGregor.

# Program Expansion in Three Years



Since 1998, the number of communities has doubled.

# Expansion (continued)

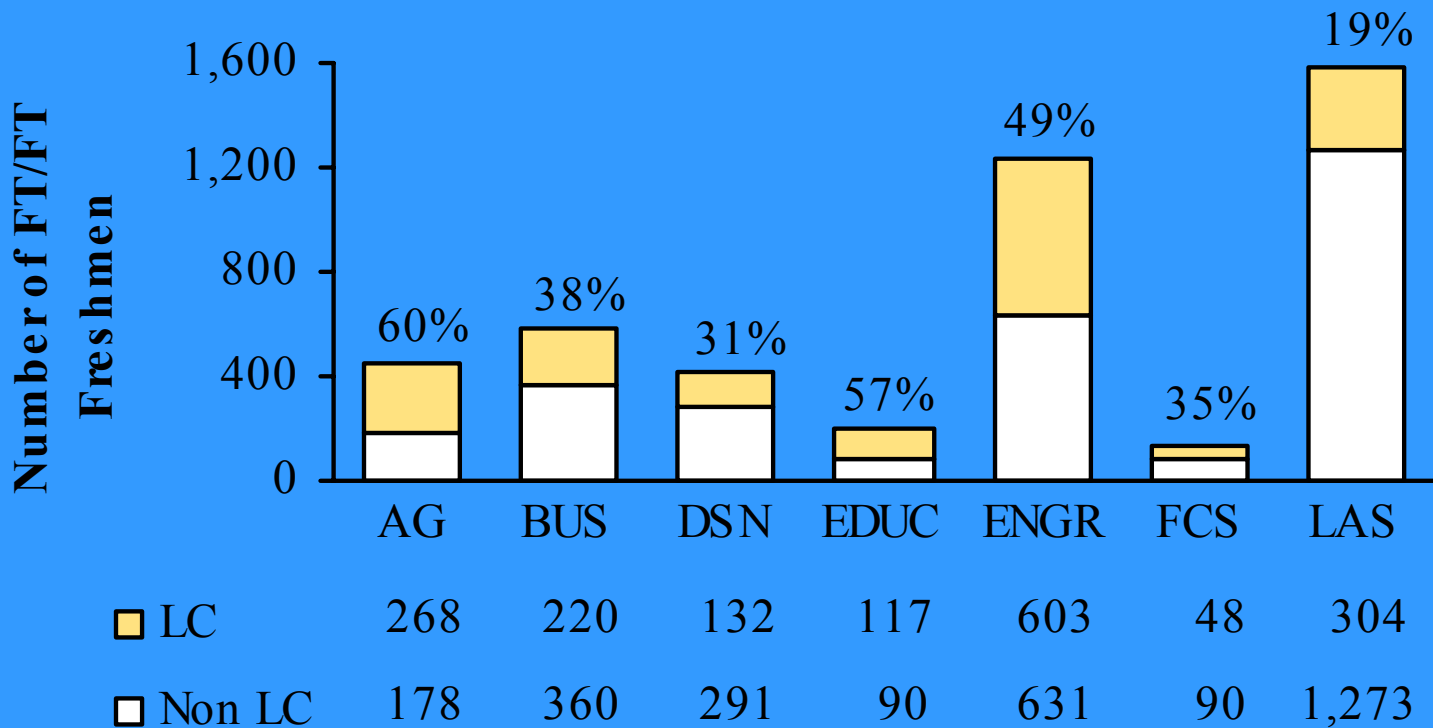


- Since 1998, the number of participants has almost doubled.
- The number of upper-level students is increasing.

# Participation Rates in Fall 2001—Majority/Minority

- First-time full-time freshmen 36.7%
- Virtually the same for
  - whites, males, and females
- Higher rates for all minority groups
  - African American 39.7%
  - Am. Indian/Alaska Native 41.7%
  - Asian/Pacific Islander 50.0%
  - Hispanic 51.0%
- Lower rate--international students 13.2%

# Participation Rates—Colleges



# Participation Rates—Colleges

- Varying participation rates for first-time full-time freshmen
- Highest rates: Agriculture, Education, Engineering
- Highest number of participants—Engineering

# LC Assessment Purposes

- Accountability
- Improvement
  - Understanding nature of the program
  - Understanding effects of the program

# Strengthening Learning Community Assessment

- University Level
- Individual Community Level

# Strengthening University Level LC Assessment

- Surveys
- Studies of Academic Performance
- Retention Studies

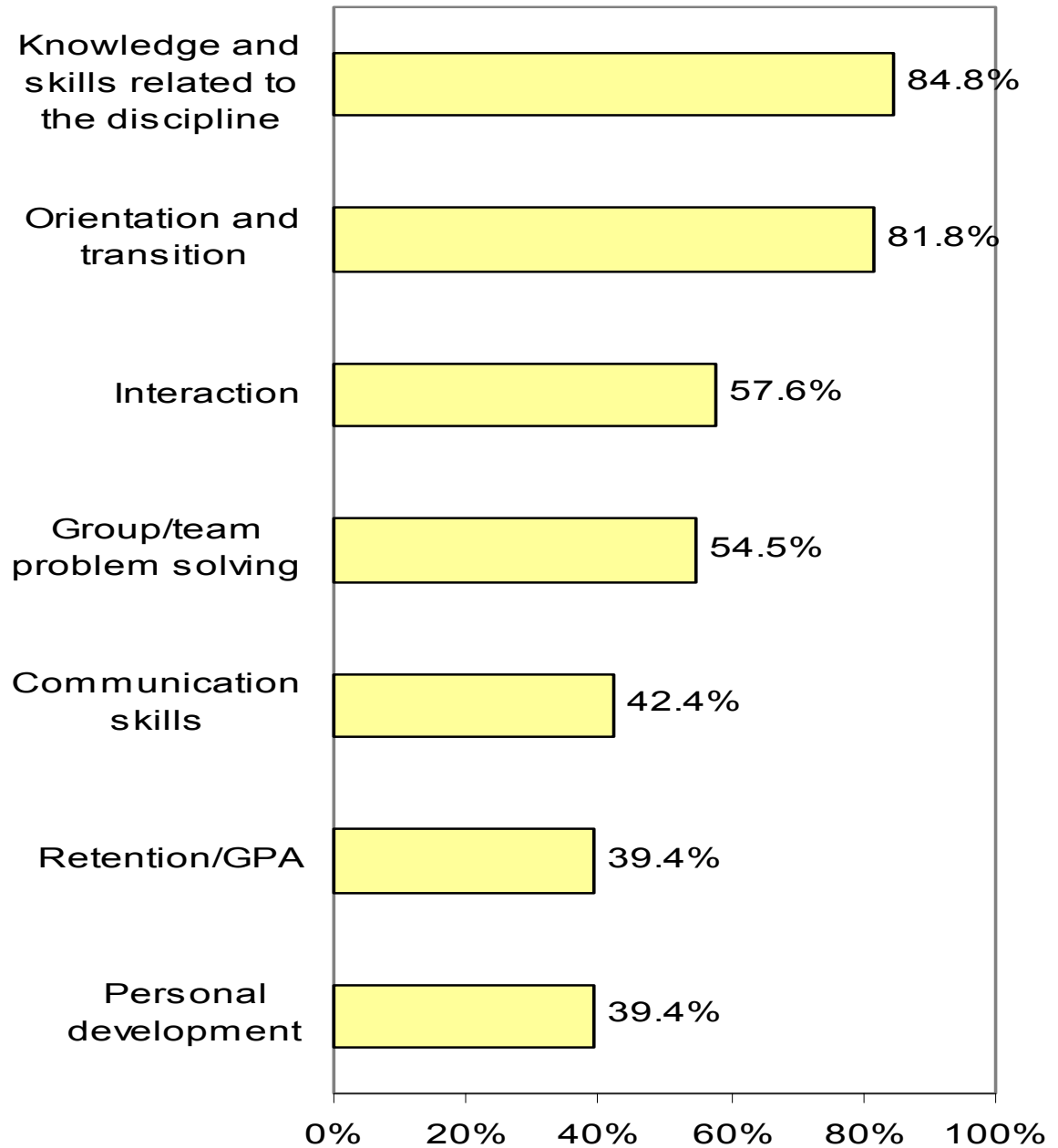
# Surveys

- Academic Environment Survey
- ISU Undergraduate Education Survey
  - LC and Control Students
  - Pretest/Posttest Design
- Learning Community Survey

# Intended Learning Outcome Summary Methodology

- Collected intended learning outcomes from learning communities
  - 2000-2001 (n = 41)
  - 2001-2002 (n = 35 funded communities)
  - 2002-2003 (n = 33 funded communities)
- Grouped into common themes or categories by year
- Reviewed how the intended learning outcomes have changed over time

# 2002- 2003 Intended Learning Outcomes Summary



# Changes Over Time

- “Tightening-up”
  - LCs identifying fewer intended outcomes
  - LCs defining outcomes more clearly
- Emphases
  - Continuing
  - Increasing
  - Emerging

How have your learning  
community's intended outcomes  
changed over time?

# Survey Results

## (Fall '00, Fall '01)

- Initial similarities between LC and Control students
  - Looking forward to
    - Meeting people/making friends
    - Learning new things
    - Doing well academically
    - Living independently
    - Having fun

# Survey Results (cont'd)

- Initial similarities (cont'd)
  - Worrying about
    - Grades
    - Classes
    - Studying
    - Time Management
    - Meeting people/making friends
- Initial differences
  - Higher average ACT and HSR for LC

# Students' Use of Time

## Posttest '00, '01

- Some differences by year
- In both years,
  - LC students reported more time
    - Studying in groups
    - Community service/volunteer work
  - No reported difference in time spent in recreational/social activities

# Involvement in Experiences that Promote Learning, '00, '01

- No reported difference between LC and Control students
  - Ability to see connections among classes
  - Ability to see connections between personal experiences and learning

# Involvement (cont'd)

- LC students more likely than Control students to report
  - Earning high grades in classes
  - Experiencing high expectations from professors
  - Understanding nature of anticipated major
  - Having experiences that “fit together” in helping reach goals as student
  - Receiving prompt feedback about progress in classes

# Greater LC Satisfaction with Opportunities to . . .

- Interact closely with faculty
- Participate in organizations
- Work collaboratively on class projects
- Develop or participate in study groups
- Apply learning to real world problems
- Practice skills learning or have learned

# Greater LC Satisfaction with . . .

- Level of support from faculty
- Overall quality of instruction
- Overall quality of classmates
- Overall experiences at ISU

# No Difference in Satisfaction with . . .

- Opportunities to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds
- Availability of academic advisor

# Self-Assessment of Knowledge and Skills—Pre and Post

- Oral Communication/Leadership
- Time Management
- Teamwork
- Written Communication
- Knowledge
- Critical Thinking
- Diversity
- No consistent LC advantage
  - Overall
  - For LCs with intended outcomes in these areas

# Learning Community Survey— Fall 2001

- Learning Community Experience\*

	Mean	Median	n
Overall	6.7	7	879
Social Activities	6.3	7	862

\*Nine-point scale: 1 = Very Dissatisfied,  
9 = Strongly Satisfied

# Learning Community Survey (cont'd)

• Peer Mentor	Mean	Median	n
– Overall	7.2	8	811
– Availability	7.1	8	801
– Helpfulness	7.3	8	803
– Knowledge			
• Discipline	7.2	8	796
• ISU Resources	7.5	8	800
– Level of Concern (for my academic success)	7.0	7	799

# Most Satisfying Aspect of Learning Community

- Meeting people/making friends
  - In general
  - In my major
  - With similar interests
- Having people as resources—asking questions, studying, helping with classes
- Fun times/social events

# Most Disappointing Aspect of Learning Community

- None
- Not enough group activities/social events

# Influences on Decision to Join a Learning Community (n = 867)

- Academic advisor at ISU (24.3%)
- Learning Communities brochure (16.5%)
- Correspondence from department or college (14.2%)
- Parent/guardian (11.8%)
- Orientation (11.6%)

# Summary of Survey Initiative

- Useful and consistent findings
- Methodological challenges
- Resource-intensive
- Less frequent administration?—Need your input!

What survey findings interest you  
the most?

# Academic Performance

- LC students reported earning higher grades
- Analysis 1
  - Actual first-term GPA
  - Students responding to survey in Fall '00
  - Average LC GPA higher than Control GPA
  - Advantage disappeared when ACT was statistically controlled

# Academic Performance (cont'd)

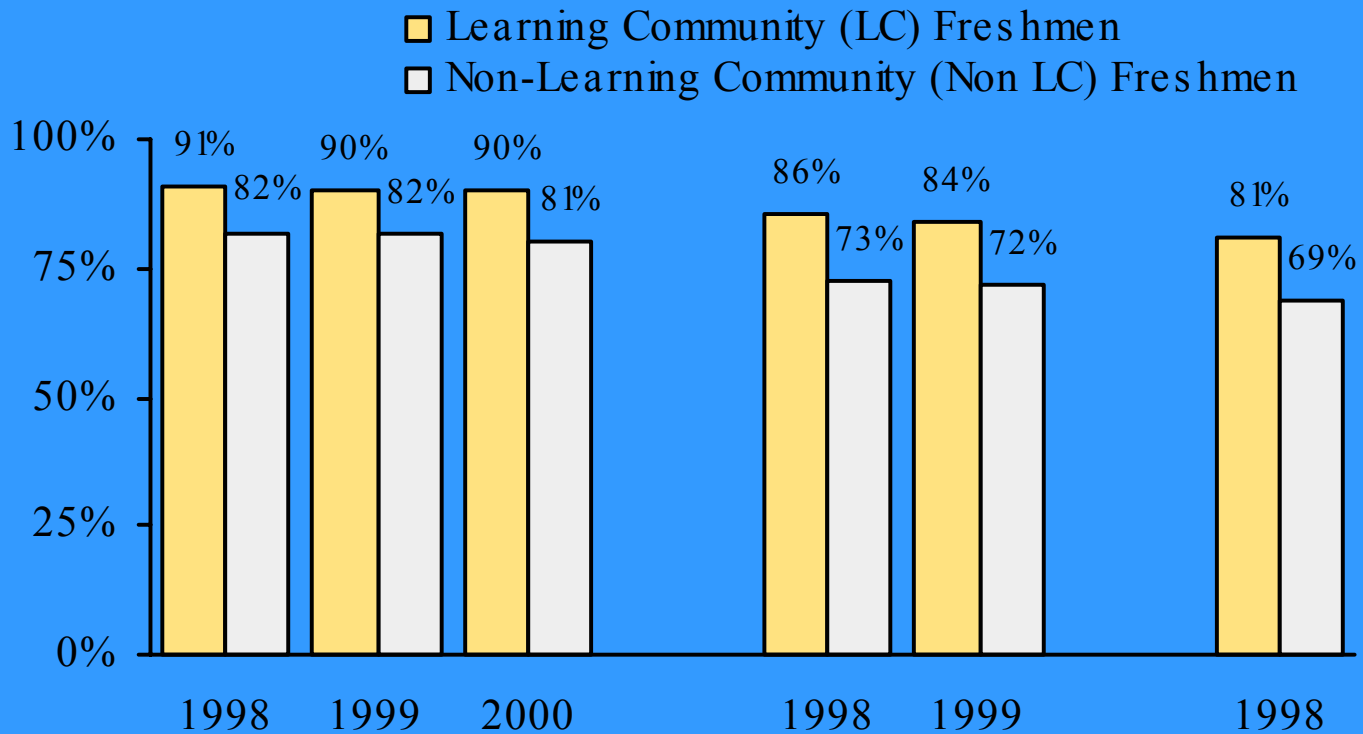
- Analysis 2 (Epperson, 2002)
  - Actual first-term GPA
  - All LC and Control students in '98, '99, '00
  - Average LC GPA higher in each cohort
  - Advantage persisted after statistically controlling for ACT and HSR

# Comparison of First-Term GPAs 1998-2000

Year	<u>LC</u>			<u>Control</u>			Sig.
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	
1998	2.93	0.8	1080	2.52	0.93	2720	**
1999	2.87	0.82	1603	2.52	0.92	2419	**
2000	2.87	0.82	1491	2.48	0.93	2800	**

\*\*p< .01

# Retention



## Retention (cont'd)

- Enhanced 1-, 2-, and 3-year retention among learning community participants
- Findings persist after statistically controlling for HSR and ACT
- Initial \$1.5 million investment has led to about \$2.5 million in tuition savings

# Expanded Retention Study

- What characteristics of teams account for retention findings?
- Pilot study with Fall 2000 data
- Dependent Variables
  - Retention
  - Participants' perceptions/satisfaction
  - Academic achievement

# Expanded Retention Study

## (cont'd)

- Independent Variables
  - Team structure
  - Nature of learning experience
  - Degree of instructional emphasis
  - Student characteristics

# Conclusions from University- Level Assessment

- Learning communities are about making connections.
- Connections lead to a positive first semester, better grades, and enhanced satisfaction.
- More satisfied students stay at ISU.

In your opinion, what aspects of learning communities lead to these positive findings?

# Strengthening Individual LC Assessment

- Faculty/Staff Development
  - Direct Methods
  - Indirect Methods

# Direct Methods of Faculty/Staff Development

- Guidelines for Best Practice
- Brown-bag lunch discussions
- Workshops
- Institute sessions
- Individual consultation

# Indirect Methods of Faculty/Staff Development

- Structural changes
  - RFP Form
  - Annual Report Form

What kind of assistance do you  
need to strengthen your LC's  
assessment?

# Future Emphasis of LC Assessment Subcommittee

- Continue university-level assessment
- Emphasize assessing for improvement and enhanced learning
- Strengthening *individual* LC assessment
- Greater knowledge of the particular
- Provide direction without stifling creativity