EDITORIAL

A Treasure Chest for Instructors

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One of my most enlightening experiences as a beginning instructor in higher education was discovering scholarly research focused on teaching and learning. I became aware that I could access literature specific to the teaching approaches that I implemented and learn what other instructors found to be efficacious. This treasure chest of resources provided evidence for me to adopt particular teaching approaches. Combined with individually reflecting on my teaching, gathering students’ feedback, and modifying my instruction based on emerging themes, this became my scholarly approach to teaching.

Scholarly teaching integrates what is known about how people learn and research on promising teaching approaches to design meaningful, significant learning experiences. Instructors focus on who is in their class, what motivates their students to learn, how situational factors impact learning, and which teaching strategies can support students in achieving learning outcomes. Relevant literature on teaching and learning can emerge from fields such as Education and Psychology, in addition to discipline-based educational research, the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), and other methodological inquiries. Incorporating research-supported principles and practices while concurrently designing for course-specific contexts creates environments more conducive for learning. In this sense, scholarly teaching empowers instructors to view their classrooms as sites of inquiry, and to apply what is known about good instructional practices to their courses, whether or not they disseminate their findings more broadly through systematic research investigations.

In scholarly teaching, student learning is at the focus of course design, and instructors are responsive to the diversity of their learners, modifying instructional approaches as needed. Acknowledging the humanity of students is critical, and understanding that students’ lives outside of the course impact their experiences within the course. Such teaching approaches are inclusive, holistic, and value reflection and feedback.

A current illustration of scholarly teaching approaches continues to occur during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many instructors have had little choice but to try new strategies in their courses for the sake of instructional continuity and to respond to teaching at this moment. I see an uptick in the number of instructors accessing scholarly resources focused on teaching in technology-enabled environments, trauma-informed instruction, and alternative assessment and grading practices. Instructors modify their teaching approaches and gather feedback from students, and learn from the experiences of others through social media and other outlets. Theoretical frameworks
such as community of inquiry which focuses on social, cognitive, and teacher presence, and practices such as social-emotional learning are more commonly applied by an increased number of instructors.

Taking such a scholarly approach to instruction has the potential to improve a number of outcomes, as teaching, either formal or informal, is an integral component of academic life. However, in higher education we still wrestle with a number of contradictory paradigms. A major mission of colleges and universities is to provide significant learning experiences for students, yet, teaching may be devalued, and taking a scholarly approach to teaching may be challenging given institutional rewards systems. Future faculty may not receive training that prepares them to be future educators in college classrooms. These, and other paradigms limit the potential for what teaching and learning could look like in higher education by embracing and applying scholarship on teaching and learning in the decision-making process when designing learning environments. The utility of such research is threatened if it is published in journals that few ever read and apply.

As an educational developer, I see the role that I can play in bridging the gaps that exist in higher education with accessing relevant education literature. Research can be a starting point for instructors who want to take the next step in their teaching, or a confirmation that instructors are on a good path to advancing their students’ learning. I can refer instructors to studies to learn about, and be inspired by what has already been done. As a conduit of this information I can justify its validity in higher education settings. However, what if accessing scholarship in higher education was more intricately embedded within our institutional structures? This more systematic approach is warranted, particularly as we continue to educate a generation of students who continue to experience the trauma and challenges of a pandemic, social and global unrest. The traditional methods for teaching utilized in the past do not always work in the present. To acknowledge such, and take a scholarly approach to teaching in today’s classrooms is critical.

As a start, we can embed scholarly approaches to teaching in the discussions occurring within departments and programs. Keeping an eye out for, and locating literature relevant to teaching students within our disciplines, and creating intentional opportunities to discuss such articles on a regular basis can provide pathways for transformation in departmental curricula and teaching approaches. Instructors within departments can form communities of practice around specific teaching topics that engage colleagues in the literature. In preparing teaching portfolios for promotion and tenure review, instructors can cite the studies that they referenced, in addition to including their self-reflections, student feedback, and artifacts of teaching, to highlight how they took a scholarly approach to teaching. These are just a sampling of opportunities available to us in higher education.

As you read the articles in this volume, consider how you or the instructors in which you partner could use the findings to inform teaching efforts and take a scholarly approach to teaching. Unlock the treasure chest of resources.

The act of teaching should begin with an understanding of how people learn, and the implications of that understanding for teachers. Journals like InSight are providing us with ongoing opportunities to engage with those ideas. But as the field
continues to expand and evolve, we need to make sure we are validating and valorizing those teachers who are exploring and attempting radically creative new ways to teach. That can always include ideas for how to apply and adapt evidence-based practices, but it should also include strategies that push us into brand-new territories, creative techniques that might surprise ourselves and our students, and open new areas for future research. We tend to think about practice as deriving from theory, but reversing that direction can produce surprising new results. A creative teacher has a hunch, tries something new, finds that it resonates with their students, and then they or others seek to understand what might be underpinning its success. Just as we need theorists to speak to practitioners, we need such creative practitioners to clear new ground for theorists to explore.

**Tracie M. Addy, PhD** is the Associate Dean of Teaching & Learning at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania where she is responsible for working with instructors across all divisions and ranks to develop and administer programming related to the teacher-scholar model from classroom teaching to the scholarship of teaching. As the Director of the Center for the Integration of Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship, she develops and delivers programming on teaching and serves ex officio on the Teaching & Learning Committee. In addition to these roles, she performs scholarship on teaching and learning and educational development, primarily focusing on learner-centered practices including active learning and inclusive teaching. She is a co-author of the book *What Inclusive Instructors Do: Principles and Practices for Excellence in College Teaching* and a regularly invited keynote speaker.