Editorial: Assessing Teaching to Empower Learning

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Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching is one venue that enables scholarly teachers to have their educational efforts scrutinized and made public in order to effect instructional change resulting in the empowerment of learning. This volume of *CELT* publishes authors who are scholarly educators and thus are both researchers and teachers. However, as you will read in some of their articles that follow, faculty members who desire to excel at teaching but feel pressure to be productive in research find themselves in a chicken or egg situation. When administrators in charge of evaluating faculty productivity are tasked with assessing the merits of research, teaching, and service, they often end up relying on measures of research because there is either nothing to distinguish the teaching among colleagues or because teaching is not valued to the same extent as research. But of course, that is because faculty understand that research is the first priority in the development of a successful academic career (Adendorff, 2011; Briseño-Garzón, Han, Birol, Bates, & Whitehead, 2016; Kustra et al., 2015). So, which comes first - administrators placing emphasis on and granting credence to teaching or faculty producing excellent teaching productivity that merits note during the assessment of tenure and promotion applications (Shapiro, 2006)? This question raises the issue of what constitutes productivity in teaching.

The assessment of research productivity uses the rubrics of publications and successful grant applications. In addition, a review of research productivity often includes an assessment of the number and achievements of a faculty member's highly qualified personnel. The system for assessing research may have its flaws (Donovan, 2007; Feist,

1997; Frey & Rost, 2010; Gibb, 2012; Sahel, 2011; van Gunsteren, 2015) but at least there is a system that is dependent upon review by qualified peers. Indicators of teaching productivity are not as easily quantified. Student evaluations of teaching are fraught with bias (Miles & House, 2015; Nargundkar & Shrikhande, 2014; Ottoboni, Boring, & Stark, 2016; Stark & Freishtat, 2014; Uttl & Smibert, 2017; Uttl, White, & Gonzalez, 2017), though some argue they still have merit if judiciously used (Benton & Ryalls, 2016). Students need to have a venue to speak about their learning experiences, but are they in a position to evaluate someone's teaching ability when they themselves are still learning how to learn and have difficulty assessing their own learning (Bell & Volckmann, 2011; Lindsey & Nagel, 2015)? Is it appropriate to use the rubric of the number of students and number of courses that someone teaches to indicate teaching productivity? Or maybe we wish to assess excellence/quality of teaching rather than productivity. But, then, are we assessing teaching differently than how research is assessed (Henderson, 2009)? Yes, research assessment is based on quality as indicated by the quality of journals and grants in which the faculty member published and is successful: the assumption is that the peer review process of publication and grant application assesses quality. Is there something similar for teaching?

At the Augustana Campus of the University of Alberta, our Committee on the Learning Environment has been struggling with what multifaceted evaluation of teaching means and entails. Clearly, it includes student evaluations of teaching (SETs) but does not rely on them, although some have shown that SETs have no relationship to quality

of teaching (Uttl et al., 2017). Multifaceted evaluation of teaching also needs to include peer review of our teaching, similar to what is done for research grants and publications. In contrast to some scholarly teachers (Wuetherick & Yu, 2016), I am fortunate to work at a Canadian post-secondary campus that understands and accepts that the scholarship of teaching and learning is a valid research pursuit and can contribute to faculty development. But how is a multi-faceted evaluation of teaching done? In my experience, it is incredibly time-consuming and thus only happens to a great extent at the time of tenure application and teaching award nominations. It takes time to attend a colleague's class and provide constructive feedback and a summative assessment of teaching quality. It also takes time to produce and assess our teaching dossiers to determine the depth of reflection we have attained in considering our understanding of teaching and learning, how that understanding is manifest in the teaching strategies we implement in our classrooms, and whether those strategies are grounded in theory and evidence (Kenny & Evers, 2011). There are, however, many tools and approaches available for moving beyond the numerical ratings of SETs, which involve assessing student engagement with active learning (Eddy, Converse, & Wenderoth, 2015; Lund et al., 2015; Smith, Jones, Gilbert, & Wieman, 2013), critical reflection on SETs (Malouff, Reid, Wilkes, & Emmerton, 2015), cross-disciplinary class visits (Haave, 2014), and the assessment of self-reported teaching practices (Wieman & Gilbert, 2014). Can we develop a culture where it is accepted that the assessment of our peers' teaching is required to be a member of academia, similar to how we have established and accepted that evaluating our peer's research quality and productivity is necessary for the academic enterprise to continue? If teaching is valued as a scholarly activity similar to research, as many institutions profess, then maybe teaching quality and productivity needs to be evaluated in a manner similar to research.

So how does one become a quality scholarly teacher? We need to think of teaching as a scholarly activity similar to discovery research in that it requires integrating and interpreting research (Boyer, 1990)

that produces a fertile learning ground for our students. We are trying to create for students an environment in which they are able to experience how knowledge is created, interpreted, and communicated. A change in academic culture to view teaching as a scholarly activity on par with research (Kilgore & Cook, 2007) will enable us to empower learners to become scholars in their own right. Teaching and research are two sides of the same coin – they feed each other (Prektert, 2013) – and when done right, they lead to the third pillar of the academic pursuit, which is service. Empowering our students to develop as scholars produces communities in which citizens are prepared to use their learning in service to the life of their community. Developing our conception of teaching beyond one of knowledge transmission to one in which knowledge is contingent and context-dependent will develop deeper approaches to learning by our students (Varnava Marouchou, 2011).

Once we have accepted the fact that our teaching is a scholarly activity that needs to be developed and regularly peer reviewed, then faculty evaluation committees will be more willing to give credence to one's teaching ability as significantly contributing to attaining tenure and promotion. When that happens, the incentive will exist to become scholarly teachers who reflect on teaching praxis, study the evidence for how to best teach based on students' learning outcomes, and, finally, make teaching efforts public so that the academic profession can improve (Quinnell, Russell, Thompson, Marshall, & Cowley, 2010; Schwegler, 2013; Simmons, 2011). To empower our learners, we need to effect change in how we assess and develop our teaching. Doing so will better enable our students to become independent learners – the researchers of the future.

In this 10th volume of *Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching*, authors have reworked their presentations from the 2016 annual meeting of the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education into peer reviewed papers which reflect the theme of that conference: empowering learners, effecting change. We have grouped these papers into four sections: Empowering Teaching, Implementing

Change, Empowering Learners, and Effective Learning.

The first section leads with “Levers for Change in Educational Development in Canada” by Debra Dawson, the 2016 recipient of the Christopher Knapper Lifetime Achievement Award. One conclusion from her retrospective is that for teaching to continue developing, institutions need to develop more significant approaches for rewarding the efforts of both faculty and educational developers to improve teaching and learning. Without robust incentives, the current hegemony of research in post-secondary education will continue to eclipse teaching to the detriment of our students' learning. Arshad Ahmad, Denise Stockley, Ron Smith, and Amber Hastings, coauthors of the second paper, found from their survey that “The 3M National Teaching Fellowship” has had a positive impact on teaching at respondents' respective institutions in Canada, but the nature of the impact may be dependent upon whether or not the institution holds teaching in high regard or whether it is over-shadowed by research. The “Empowering Teaching” section ends with “Faculty Teaching Practices and Perceptions” by Gülnur Birol, Adriana Briseño-Garzón, and Andrea Han, which furthers their analysis of their teaching perceptions survey at the University of British Columbia that first appeared in last year's volume of *CELT*. Their continued analysis suggests that although many faculty believe that active learning promotes student learning outcomes, the lecture continues to be a common teaching strategy.

The five papers in the section “Implementing Change” all suggest different strategies to implement improvements in post-secondary education. Sawsen Lakhal, Dianne Bateman, and Janie Bédard share their best practices for “Blended Synchronous Delivery Mode in Graduate Programs”, which they have researched and developed for the Master Teacher Program in Quebec. “Implementing Competency-Based Education” by Lynn Curry and Marcia Docherty explains the objectives of outcomes-based education and the requisite considerations in its implementation. At the University of Toronto Mississauga, Fiona Rawle, Tracey Bowen, Barbara Murck, and Rosa Junghwa Hong have been engaged

in “Curriculum Mapping Across the Disciplines.” The outcome of their efforts is a greater disciplinary awareness of what students achieve in particular programs and what educational skills are common across the academy, resulting in greater program coherence. In “Engaging in Enhancement”, Jovan Groen discusses the competing tensions between the needs of learner development and the needs of the workplace, and expectations of program funders when academic programs are evaluated for quality to ensure that graduates obtain the skills purported to be developed by the program. Thus, this program assessment runs the risk of being more complicated and time-consuming. However, if the point of quality assurance is the improvement of academic programs and, therefore, student learning for a reasonable cost, then the time commitment and acceptance of complicated negotiations are well worth the effort. This section closes with Danielle Pierre reporting, in “Broadening Understanding”, the results of a survey administered to LGBTQ+ students. Her analysis suggests several strategies which instructors could implement to make such students more welcome in their classrooms.

The first three papers in the third section “Empowering Learners” present different approaches to supporting the particular needs of first-year students. Sheilagh Grills has developed “Learning Skills Workshops Supporting First-Year Courses”, which rescues students from dropping out of post-secondary education and improves their learning outcomes. “Enquiry-Based Learning Online” by Jacqueline Murray, Nathan Lachowsky, and Natalie Green discusses the implementation of an online first-year seminar that develops students' learning and research skills including teamwork skills. In “The Development and Delivery of a Multidisciplinary Research Course for First-Year International Science Students”, authors Priyanka Lekhi, Meghan Allen, Fok-Shuen Leung, Brett Gilley, Georg Rieger, and Joanne Fox describe the development of the course and explain how it promotes students' understanding of the contingent nature of knowledge and its construction through research. The last two papers in this section assess the impact of a fall reading week on students. Ken Cramer and Rebecca Pschibul explain

in “Student Time Usage during Fall Reading Week” how stress levels were lower after a fall reading week in students who reported using their week of no classes to complete assignments and to prepare for exams, by comparison with students who reported using their fall break predominantly for leisure. “One Week, Many Ripples”, by Heather Poole, Ayesha Khan, and Michael Agnew, suggests that to improve students' mental health, institutions need to better coordinate the midterm evaluation schedule so that these assessments do not accumulate before and after such a fall break. Despite this, students' retrospective view of the value of a full week fall break was positive: it helped them manage their mental health and academic assignments.

The fourth and last section of this volume of *CELT* collects four papers that examine different aspects of “Effective Learning.” Sherry Fukuzawa, Cleo Boyd, and Joel Cahn examine the changes in the motivation of novice students to experienced practitioners in their paper “Student Motivation in Response to Problem-Based Learning.” Contrary to expectations, the experienced students reported a decrease in their motivation with this learner-centered teaching strategy, whereas more novice students increased their motivation to engage with the course material. The authors suggest that this may be the result of the experienced students being uneasy to try a new learning approach when they have had past success with instructor-centered, externally motivating approaches. In “The Collaborative Case”, Colleen Sharen, Mark Feltham, and Michelle Braecker elaborate on their experience transforming an undergraduate learning experience into a publishable paper. From their particular case, the authors suggest how undergraduate instructors and students can best facilitate the transition from an instructor-student relationship to a collaborative partnership. Anne Barnfield, in “Did I do good?”, argues that students need ethical training in addition to the teaching of content that occurs in most undergraduate courses, and that this ethical training needs to be more than merely exhorting students to be academically honest. She provides examples for how to embed teaching ethics into disciplinary courses. This 10th volume of *Collected Essays on*

Learning and Teaching closes with an article by Daniel Gillis, Jessica Nelson, Brianna Driscoll, Kelly Hodgins, Evan Fraser, and Shoshanah Jacobs. Their paper, “Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Research and Education in Canada”, raises the concern that insufficient interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary educational opportunities are being made available to students despite the fact that many of the world's problems will need trans- or interdisciplinary problem-solving. The authors suggest a curricular framework that may overcome the administrative barriers to such educational programs.

This volume brings to a close our tenure as the editorial board of *Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching*. Roxanne, Janet, John, Michael, Lois, and I thank the support of our reviewers and readers over the last three years. We greatly appreciate that Suzie was able to step on to our editorial board this year so that Geneviève could renew herself on sabbatical. Thank you Kelly Keus and Samantha Christensen for your excellent copyediting and proofreading. Thanks also to the staff at the Leddy Library of the University of Windsor who continued to ensure that the Open Journal System that operates the journal runs smoothly. Dave Johnson, in particular, assisted in assigning DOIs to our articles and navigating the applications to add *CELT* to digital databases. Our publisher, The Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, has been incredibly supportive of our efforts to transform the presentations at their annual meeting into peer-reviewed scholarly papers. Our thanks in particular to Dianne Bateman, Publications Chair, and Robert Lapp, President. We give our best wishes and support to the next editorial board as they continue the efforts of *CELT* to effect change and empower learning.

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