EDITORIAL: EDUCATORS AS ARCHITECTS OF ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY

Thomas D. Dyer, PhD, Grand Canyon University

REFLECTION

Since our last issue, we have welcomed two new esteemed members to our editorial board, Dr. Jamie Els and Dr. Aimee Whiteside. Their extensive experience and dedication to the field of scholarly engagement have already proven invaluable as they join us in shaping the direction of the journal. Their fresh perspectives and insights will undoubtedly enrich our discussions and broaden our horizons in the pursuit of scholarly excellence. We are excited as they join an already elite team of scholars, Dr. Laura Cruz, Dr. Jean Mandernach, and Dr. Dalia Sherif.

In the age of digital connectivity, we have witnessed a significant surge in the interaction and engagement of our community on social media platforms. The lively discussions, shared insights, and collaborative endeavors that have emerged from these interactions have been nothing short of inspiring. It is heartening to see the Journal of Scholarly Engagement becoming not just a repository of scholarly work but a dynamic hub where scholars from diverse fields come together to exchange ideas, challenge one another, and collectively advance our understanding of scholarly engagement.

Additionally, we are delighted to introduce the JSE newsletter "Reflective Insights", a new addition to our efforts to promote scholarly discourse and engagement. This newsletter will provide a regular platform for us to share thought-provoking articles, tips and tools, upcoming events, peer reviewer spotlights, and reflections on the evolving landscape of scholarly practice and engagement. We hope it will serve as a valuable resource for our readers and spark meaningful discussions that extend beyond the pages of our journal.

In keeping with our commitment to enhancing the quality and relevance of our content, we have updated the "Guide for Reflective Practice." This comprehensive resource aims to guide scholars in their exploration of reflective practices, offering both seasoned academics and budding researchers a framework to refine their approach to scholarly engagement. We encourage all our contributors and readers to take advantage of this updated guide as we continue to foster a culture of reflective scholarship.

CURRENT ISSUE

The evolving landscape of higher education, influenced by both pre-existing trends and the seismic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, has brought about remarkable shifts in how students engage with learning and how educators facilitate that engagement. The Digest of Educational Statistics (2021) highlighted a significant and steady increase in enrollment in distance learning courses before the pandemic. This trend, which continues to rise, underscores a fundamental shift in how students seek to obtain degrees. The pursuit of higher education has become increasingly non-traditional, with learners embracing online and remote modalities for their studies. The flexibility offered by distance learning is a driving force behind this transition, allowing students to balance their educational pursuits with other life commitments. Today's learners are increasingly exploring non-traditional avenues for higher education, with community colleges and trade schools gaining prominence alongside traditional universities. The allure of these institutions lies in their ability to provide focused, practical, and often more cost-effective educational pathways.

As the higher education landscape transforms, classroom engagement remains a common concern among educators. Students entering classrooms bring with them a tapestry of educational experiences, diverse backgrounds, and preconceived expectations of faculty interactions. Meeting these unique needs and expectations requires thoughtful consideration from faculty members.

Educators now find themselves in dynamic roles, not just as purveyors of knowledge, but also as architects of relationships and communities that nurture positive relational school cultures. Understanding student behavior within the

appropriate social context becomes paramount. The work of Manassah et al. (2018) and Zehr (2015) emphasizes the importance of promoting a social web of connections within all learning environments, recognizing that students are integral to the educational community. The articles in this issue of the Journal of Scholarly Engagement reflect on the need for community cohesion and connection in higher education classrooms.

The November 2023 issue of the JSE features three empirical studies, two reflective practice articles, and one community profile article that provide a variety of insights about teaching and learning, the application of disciplinary knowledge, and the intersecting concepts that bridge disciplinary boundaries.

Smith, a French teacher at a large public suburban high school in the northeastern United States, delved into the challenges posed by their high school world language departmental grading policies. The aim was to identify and assess potential strategies to address these limitations. Drawing on John Dewey's theories of reflection and experience, the author navigated the problem of not knowing which strategies were most effective in dealing with specific grading policies. They categorized challenges into four distinct areas and engaged in a process of reflective evaluation and decision-making, drawing from their own experiences and the insights of other scholars. This reflective journey proved to be stimulating, complex, and contemplative. Ultimately, engaging in reflective practice proved to be instrumental in evaluating the effectiveness of their teaching practices and pinpointing strategies to overcome specific limitations.

Beddow shares a compelling case study of their reflective practice as a university faculty member in the context of undergraduate college forensic science classrooms. The focus of their exploration lies in understanding and cultivating a sense of community among their students. Drawing from personal experiences and informed by relevant literature, the author delves into a heartwarming situation they encountered, examining it through the lens of scholarly discourse. Through reflective inquiry, they arrive at the conclusion that a positive learning environment plays a pivotal role in fostering this sense of community. This piece contributes significantly to the discourse on building classroom communities in higher education.

Behler, Brown, and Pybus shed light on a transformative initiative undertaken at a community-based rehabilitation recovery center. Residents at the center faced the dual challenges of poor dietary habits, stemming from their history of substance and/or alcohol use disorder, and limited access to fresh produce. To address these issues, an interdisciplinary team launched an evidence-based practice project centered around a nutrition education program. Notably, fresh produce donations from community food banks were secured, enabling residents to apply their newly acquired knowledge. The outcomes of this project were nothing short of remarkable, with tangible improvements observed in dietary behaviors, increased physical activity, and a noteworthy rise in fresh produce consumption. This initiative serves as an inspiring example of the power of collaborative, evidence-based interventions to positively impact the lives of individuals in recovery.

Valenti and Downey examined the transformative impact of a volunteer community outreach program on a group of 28 undergraduate students majoring in behavioral health disciplines at a private four-year university in the southwestern United States. These students undertook the role of co-facilitators for psycho-education groups at a local high school, following comprehensive pre-facilitation training and active participation in weekly processing group sessions. To gauge the program's effectiveness, researchers employed a mixed-method pretest and posttest design, utilizing a researcher-developed Likert assessment to measure perceived levels of career clarity and preparedness among the participants. The results of the study revealed significant and positive shifts in the students' feelings of career clarity, preparedness, and confidence both during and after their volunteer experience.

Anderson addresses a critical issue within the context of community colleges in the United States, where over six million students, many of whom are non-traditional, grapple with the unique challenges of balancing work, academics, and familial responsibilities. The study recognizes that a lack of intrinsic motivation can hinder these students' success and persistence in school. To combat this, the research explores the effectiveness of charismatic teaching techniques employed by college faculty to nurture motivation among community college students. The findings reveal a

significant predictive relationship between charismatic teaching encompassing professional knowledge, positive character traits, humor, and quality teaching techniques and intrinsic motivation. In other words, charismatic teaching techniques hold the potential to enhance students' internal drive and motivation.

Martin discussed the relationship between self-efficacy and technological, pedagogical, content area knowledge (TPACK) among 84 National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) in Arizona. Through a correlational analysis, the research reveals significant positive correlations between self-efficacy and three domains within the TPACK model. Notably, the study underscores the crucial link between integrated technology knowledge and self-efficacy beliefs among K-12 NBCTs. These findings have broader implications for educational stakeholders, including school administrators, professional development leaders, and university curriculum designers. They emphasize the need to strengthen technological training for teachers with advanced certification and provide valuable insights into potential refinements of the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards.

As we engage with the articles and insights presented in this issue, we encourage our readers to reflect on these transformative changes in higher education. The evolving relationship between students and educators presents both opportunities and challenges. In a world where students have an array of choices, from online learning to traditional universities, community colleges and trade schools, the role of educators in fostering engagement, building communities, and embracing positive relational school cultures is more vital than ever. The editorial staff will continue to work in the advancement of knowledge managing the peer review process and overseeing final revision as we continue to publish valuable scholarly activities.

References

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