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FA 2020 About This Issue: The Power in Slowing Down

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About This Issue

*By Kim Hales, Editor in Chief
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Welcome to the Fall 2020 issue of Utah State University's *Journal on Empowering Teaching Excellence*. Keeping in mind that all of the articles in this issue were in the process of being researched, composed, and submitted well before the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the intuitive and investigative way these authors approach excellence in their field and the timeliness of their efforts to document and share their expertise. This issue offers readers the chance to slow down, take a breath, and explore strategies that enhance the learning experience for students and for instructors under any circumstances and in any content field.

This issue begins with a book review of Gail Rice's 2018 book, *Hitting Pause: 65 Lecture Breaks to Refresh and Reinforce Learning*. Michelle Arnold's (2020) review explains the science-based background and the storytelling style of this book. Arnold states, "Dr. Rice provides ample scholarly evidence that shows pauses facilitate collaboration among students, create a positive and safe environment for learning, and allow students the opportunity to learn how to learn instead of what to learn." This is an informative review of a book that offers essential strategies for slowing down the information super-flow and provides a common thread for the rest of this issue.

Empowering teaching excellence starts at the pre-service phase in Karen D. Hager, Barbara J. Fiechtl, and Summer Gunn's (2020), "Assessing Student Performance Using Video Recordings in Field-Based Experiences." In this age of rapidly changing technology, Hager, et. Al. use video recordings to offer consistent and constructive feedback to undergraduate students engaging in classroom student-teaching experiences. This technique removes some of the complexities of supervisor, classroom teacher, and student schedules and discusses important details surrounding permissions, training, and software download requirements when implementing new technology.

Conversations that promote productive learning environments are the root of excellent teaching practice. In "Enacting Rhetorical Listening: A Process to Support Students' Engagement with Challenging Course Readings" Jessica Rivera-Mueller (2020) offers a discussion on how to create productive learning environments surrounding challenging course

readings. As a social justice educator, Rivera-Mueller acknowledges that “creating productive dialogue can be difficult” and this article explores the rhetorical theory “rhetorical listening” as a way to “creating an understanding of our individual and collective engagement with an author’s ideas. In doing so, educators can help students grasp the active—rather than passive—nature of reading.”

Slowing down the super-flow of content so that students have an opportunity to engage in assessment and reflection is the pinnacle of excellent teaching. Shawn Miller’s (2020) article, “Implementation of a 25-minute Mini-lecture on Learning and Studying in Large-Enrollment First-Year General Chemistry Courses” shows how the slowing down, assessment, reflection process can be implemented in higher education classrooms. Miller states, “instructors can and should assist their students by showing them that approaches to learning and studying can change, and by providing specific guidance on how to change.” This article breaks down a lecture on studying and learning into a manageable and essential addition to any course.

Elena Shvidko (2020) offers insight on instructor response as a way to enhance the feedback experience for both students and instructors. Her article, “Taking into Account Interpersonal Aspects of Teacher Feedback: Principles of Responding to Student Writing” explores the dynamic regarding instructor feedback at the most basic, human level. Shvidko’s article offers insight and instruction on the importance of thoughtful, constructive, and collaborative feedback to student’s writing. She explains the difference between appropriation and intervention and gives specific examples to help instructors identify and improve their feedback style.

One other way to improve feedback style is explored in “Effects of Three Classroom Research Experiences on Science Attitudes”. Lauren K. Lucas, Frances K. Hunter, and Zachariah Gompert (2020) explain how changes in the lab experiences for a beginning biology course created more authentic scientific inquiry opportunities and impacted science attitudes. While not all of the results were as expected, the article takes a close look at how to use feedback to continually improve teaching methods for an enhanced student and instructor learning experience. By being thoughtful in ways to improve teaching methods, Lucas, et. Al. share yet another way that the ‘quality over quantity’ approach impacts learning at all levels.

Whether it be videotaping, guided classroom conversations, lecture-based, or written, feedback is the backbone of educational excellence. We use it to mentor beginning undergraduates, writers, readers, explorers, and experimenters. And, if we are thoughtful, feedback becomes a loop by which we slow down learning, we engage reading, writing and exploring, and we collaborate our way to becoming better.

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