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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

Jason Olsen, Ph.D.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, “if I have lost confidence in myself, I have the universe against me.” While we can safely assume that Emerson wasn’t thinking about any insecurities toward classroom technology or his perceived shortcomings in math or science, his quote rings true for our Spring 2022 issue of the Journal on Empowering Teaching Excellence. If there is one theme that carries through the research at the heart of this issue, it is that without confidence—and that is, confidence built on recognizing the value of the things teachers study and do—educators may not have the universe against them, but they’ll lose their ability to teach their students effectively. In that situation, the universe itself might as well be lost.

One thing that is most certainly not lost is our admiration for the work we’ve received and can share in this issue of JETE. This issue is my first as Editor-in-Chief, and I would like to welcome Nichelle Frank as our incoming Assistant Editor. Nichelle and I are excited to take the reins and continue JETE’s dedication to sharing vital research on higher education pedagogy. One of the key figures in shaping JETE over the last several years has been Kim Hales, our outgoing Editor-in-Chief. Kim’s contributions to both JETE and me personally as her successor cannot be overstated. Kim’s impact on this journal is felt in this issue and will be felt in all issues that follow.

To continue the outstanding research and writing that makes up JETE, we need you. We always encourage submissions, and we are always reading for our future issues. Please click the *follow* button on our homepage, <https://digital-commons.usu.edu/jete>, for updates on new issues and calls for articles. You are always encouraged to send us your work.

You are also encouraged to send reviews of recently published (within the last three years) academic books. I wrote a review in this current issue (I discuss Karen Costa’s fantastic 2020 release, *99 Tips for Creating Simple and Sustainable Educational Videos*), and I encourage our readers to submit reviews of recent books for us to consider for future issues. Whenever you read a book that really speaks to you, you want to share that book with as many people as you can (that’s certainly how I felt with Costa’s book). Let JETE help you be that messenger by submitting your book reviews to us.

The articles featured in this issue provide great examples of significant research in higher education teaching today. Two of these articles share research and valuable reflection on utilizing self-portraits in college courses for students and instructors to better understand student relationships with the course subject. In “Pre-Service Elementary Teacher’s Perceptions of Themselves as Learners of Math and Science,” researchers Diana Moss, Rachel Wilson, and Danielle Divis discuss how pre-service elementary education teachers see themselves as learners of mathematics and science through before–and–after drawings that depict their relationships with those subjects. Samantha Sommers, Michelle Unigarro, Danielle Vantassel, Claudia M. Bertolone-Smith, and Alison Puliatte’s “Draw a Picture of Yourself Learning Math: What Pre-Service Teachers’ Self-Portraits Illustrate About Their Complex Relationships with Mathematics” also looks at self-portraits as a means of understanding a pre-service teacher’s relationship with the subject material, focusing exclusively on math (including insight on how math is learned). The two articles are fascinating in tandem, each discussing a unique study at a different institution. In the article by Moss, Wilson, and Divis, they explain that “limited research exists on using drawings to explore the images and experiences that pre-service teachers associate with mathematics.” We are excited to say that this issue of JETE is fortunate to be able to expand that now less-limited area of research.

One of the recurring motifs of the articles discussed in the previous paragraph is the importance of those pre-service teachers gaining personal confidence in their subject matter in order to teach it more effectively. That theme is also present in “Technology in Teacher Education: Student Perceptions of Instructional Technology in the Classroom” by

Jennifer Zakrzewski and BriAnne Newton. The researchers discuss a study that gathered data on pre-service teachers' perceptions of classroom technologies and the benefits of those technologies. The article compellingly lays out the benefits of technology integration and the essential information found via their research, including how matching confidence with experience is a crucial step toward effective teaching with technology.

The benefits of language learning at the college level are at the heart of “Checking In: Learner Perceptions of the Value of Language Study in College” by Julian Ledford and Tijá Odoms. Ledford and Odoms share research that gathers student perceptions of the value of second language study and subsequently analyze said research to show the importance of language learning at the college level. As with the above articles, it includes specific student feedback that gives readers a clear sense of how students view course contents.

We also are pleased to share “Transforming Curriculum: A Process for Implementing Problem-Based Learning in a College-Level Course” by Morgan Robertson and Marla K. Robertson, an engaging approach to teacher processes. By sharing and analyzing an assignment built around Problem-Based Learning, educators can better understand the process of incorporating similar projects into their syllabi. Especially beneficial is the hands-on, process-oriented nature of the article—including a valuable discussion of how student feedback and responses compelled the authors to adjust the assignment analyzed in the project.

While Emerson might not have had to travail the landscapes of changing technologies and declining support for language programs (among other challenges), his emphasis on confidence still rings true. We grow our own confidence—and instill confidence in our students—by showing them the value of what they are learning. To close with another quote from Emerson: “The mind, once stretched by a new idea, never returns to its original dimensions.” The articles in this issue will stretch our minds in ways that will inevitably lead to success in our classrooms.