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Introduction for Fall 2023 Issue

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INTRODUCTION

Jason Olsen, Ph.D.

Some of the realities of the last few years might seem too unbelievable to have made for a convincing work of science fiction. A world shut down by a virus that forced all of us to rethink the way we lived our lives? Technology capable of creating complicated and coherent texts out of thin air in seconds? Educators suddenly relearning how to teach their students seemingly from scratch? All of us trying to innovate to keep up with a world that moves more quickly than we could have ever thought possible? Well, maybe science fiction is the perfect guide for us as we traverse this brave new world—a place of unsettling familiarity, great unknowns, and remarkable possibilities.

Speaking of *A Brave New World*, a quote from Aldous Huxley’s science fiction classic comes to mind when considering our world and its constant change: “Every change is a menace to stability” (Chapter XVI). Of course, while stability can be an admirable goal, complacency isn’t, and if change can “menace” complacency, maybe that’s a way for instructors to remain effective. The world is changing, and the way our students learn is changing, too. Perhaps an overreliance on stability—especially in a world that pushes against it—will prevent educators from innovating in ways that will impact their students’ abilities to succeed.

Our articles in this issue of *Journal on Empowering Teaching Excellence* are far from fiction, but the methods and innovation on display are as creative and bold as anything you might find in more fanciful volumes. A changing world means the things that worked before simply can’t work in the same ways any longer. As Mary Shelley writes in the sci-fi masterpiece *Frankenstein*, “Nothing is so painful to the human mind as a great and sudden change. The sun might shine, or the clouds might lower: but nothing could appear to me as it had done the day before” (169). This realization of change shouldn’t be wholly negative—just because things have changed doesn’t mean they’re inherently worse. They just require a different mindset than what might have worked before.

That’s a driving force of “Adapting Interteaching to a Hybrid Format: A Framework for Implementation” by Carmen Farrell (University of South Carolina Beaufort). In this article, Dr. Farrell discusses ways of revisiting a pre-pandemic era teaching innovation (interteaching) into our new reality of myriad teaching deliveries at the university level (specifically in hybrid courses). Interteaching was envisioned as a method exclusive to in-person teaching, but that is no longer the norm, and this article reminds us that effective teaching strategies deserve adaptation.

Our next article shows us the importance of adapting to our ever-changing world by reminding future teachers of the importance of “relationships and lived experiences.” Crystal C. Loose (West Chester University of Pennsylvania) and Rose Jagielo-Manion bring us “Preservice Teacher Education Preparation: Implementation of Personalized Learning and Technology in the Fifth Industrial Revolution.” This study examines how well preservice teachers understand the concepts of personalized learning and how recent cultural developments in technology have required different classroom skills than previously required.

Brennan L. Bean’s (Utah State University) “Teaching Reproducibility to First Year College Students: Reflections From an Introductory Data Science Course” takes us directly into a science course to chart changes in methods in a world confronted by ChatGPT and other technological advancements that change what it means to be a student and an instructor. As Dr. Bean explains, “Computer programming is a form of modern writing that can be directly relatable in reproducible assignments,” thus showing the evolution of writing and language across disciplines.

“Evaluating Active Lecture and Traditional Lecture in Higher Education” by Kathleen Klein, Jennifer Calabrese, Adam Aguiar, Sunny Mathew, Kimoni Ajani, Sunny Mathew, Rania Almajid, and Jennifer Aarons (all of Stockton Uni-
versity) deftly discusses active and traditional lecture methods in the classroom using data compiled from a study that compared these two methods. This article is valuable for understanding why active lectures (described in the article as “a teaching method based on a student-centered approach that encourages student engagement, interaction, and participation during lectures”) are such an effective strategy for our students and their constantly changing world (while discussing the potential merits and challenges of both lecture methods).

The issue’s content concludes with a book review of Geoff Marietta and Sky Marietta’s *Rural Education in America: What Works for Our Students, Teachers, and Communities*. The review, written by Sunshine L. Brosi (Utah State University Eastern), Marilyn M. Cuch (USU Uintah Basin), Spencer Spotted Elk (USU Blanding), Julie Stevens (USU Ephraim), Gustavo A. Ovando-Montejo (USU Blanding), is thoughtful discussion of the book, framed by the fact that each of these reviewers teaches at a rural campus in the Utah State University Statewide system, giving them unique insight into the book’s investigation into rural education.

Finally, let’s end with a quote from another great sci-fi writer—Douglas Adams, who found plenty of levity in the world’s challenges. In *Dirk Gently’s Holistic Detective Agency*, Dirk says, “Let’s think the unthinkable, let’s do the undoable. Let us prepare to grapple with the ineffable itself, and see if we may not eff it after all” (188). We, fellow educators in higher ed, need to keep changing and evolving to serve our students and ourselves. It is often challenging and seldom easy, but it is necessary to educate our students in the ways they need and deserve. Sometimes our innovations will work brilliantly, and other times they will fail just as brilliantly, but if we consider our methods and what’s right for our classes, maybe we won’t, as Douglas says, “eff it after all.”

**References**

