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Preface

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PREFACE
WHY SPIRALING UPWARDS?

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The book title, *Spiraling Upwards,* was inspired from the cyclical system described in Gallagher's (1999) article *Improving Science Teaching and Student Achievement Through Embedded Assessment.* Embedded assessment is a recursive, iterative system of gathering information about students' ideas and reasoning, followed by analyzing this information for students' current understandings including naive concepts or misconceptions. Instructors "must make sense of the information from students" (p. 1) to then determine the next instructional steps to advance learning. The teach, assess, analyze, and adjust steps complete one cycle of the embedded assessment process, and the teaching/learning cycle spirals up to be repeated again and again over a period of time. As instructional practices are modified to respond to student needs, students' emerging understanding of ideas is furthered. Instructors who engage in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) use research methodologies to capture this process, as well as commit to sharing and publishing their findings in professional forums with peers.

Each chapter of this book shares a "spiraling upwards" story, how each author goes through a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning journey while highlighting their teaching, assessing, analyzing, and adjusting to better support students' learning within their disciplines. These chapters capture the SoTL experience and professional transformation faculty underwent as they explored the extent to which their teaching approaches impacted student learning and how the research project made visible the learning experience.

THE SoTL SEMINAR

The authors of this book engaged in a year-long seminar with the first semester focusing on learning the tenets of SoTL and SoTL research design. The second semester focused on implementing the research project in classrooms. Pat Hutchings' books *Opening Lines: Approaches to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* and *Ethics of Inquiry: Issues in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* were two primary resources used for monthly reading assignments. The goal of the seminar was to support faculty participants in conducting SoTL research projects and writing chapters to contribute to a book of completed works published by the Faculty Development Center. Books completed by previous SoTL seminars at Eastern Michigan University include *Toward Transformation: EMU Faculty Journey into the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* and *Making Learning Visible: The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning at EMU*. The seminar convened at least once a month for large group discussions of the reading materials and for getting feedback on research projects and plans for implementing the studies in classrooms.

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PEER-REVIEW

Authors spent the summer writing a chapter about their SoTL experiences including the data analysis and evaluation of student learning. Chapters were reviewed by the SoTL Seminar facilitators, Jeffery Bernstein and Karen Busch. An additional peer-review was conducted by an external colleague chosen by each author.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The selected quotes below are from each author's chapter highlighting the spiraling upward effect that new awareness of instructional practices had on the impact of student learning. Authors courageously revealed how they teach, how they assess, what they learned about student learning, and what ideas they had for making changes for the next instructional cycle.

Chapter 1 - Ametrano: Learning Ethical Decision Making: Reflections on the Process

Summary:

Ametrano examines the way that changing her teaching paradigm from teaching-centered to learning-centered helped her better teach her students about ethical decision making in counseling.

Quotes:

- "I moved from being "teaching-centered" to being "learning-centered," a paradigm shift that Weimer (2003) sees as necessary for effective instruction and student learning. She notes that faculty make too many decisions about learning for their students; that instruction is too teacher-centered; and that when the priority is on covering content, students don't understand what they've learned. She notes, "beginning with learning can start a change process that ends with transformed teaching" (p. 54)" (p. 17).

- "I began this project intending simply to observe students in the process of learning to make ethical decisions. By the end I realized that I had learned nearly as much about my teaching as I had learned about their learning" (p. 18).

Chapter 2 - Fields: Imagine the Possibilities: Content Analysis of an Interracial/ Interethnic Communication Course

Summary:

Fields' research supports what Ashcroft discovered in 2003, that race still matters in the United States (p. 1). Her study examines an Interracial/Interethnic Communication course. The research investigates the use of a web blog as an instrument to study the relationship between communication and race in the classroom. The study examines the potential impact of discussing communication and race in a classroom setting.

Quotes:

- "The use of a weblog as an instrument to study the relationship between communication and race changed the dynamics of the classroom. The weblog promoted supplementary dialogue" (p. 5).

- "Further examination of communication and race in the classroom will encourage communication departments to offer several courses in interracial/interethnic communication and/or expand research in the area of interracial/interethnic communication" (p. 10).

Chapter 3 - Harten: The Use of Structured Role-Playing to Foster Learning Beyond Content Knowledge

Summary:

Harten examines the helpfulness of role playing in assisting students to develop the necessary clinical skills alongside the content knowledge normally learned during lecture-based courses on the topic of aphasia, and found that students felt that the role playing was an effective way to help them learn how to treat and explain aphasia in a pseudo-clinical situation.

Quotes:

- "I decided to evaluate the effectiveness of these instructional methods by gathering data on the students' perception of their learning, as well as their perception of how each instructional method contributed to their acquisition of the course objectives. By gathering their own perceptions of the course methods, I hoped to shed some light on how students learn and develop clinical skills in the field of speech-language pathology" (p. 2).

- "As an instructor, it was validating to me that students in this class valued several different instructional methods as beneficial for their learning process. As I mentioned before, although adding different instructional methods to a course is time-consuming, it is worthwhile if the methods prove conducive to learning, and if they promote the transfer of knowledge and skills to a student's professional life" (p. 12).

Chapter 4 - Jones: What Running a Class Wiki Taught me about Teaching History

Summary:

Jones creates a Web 2.0 application, the wiki, to see "behind the scenes" the learning behaviors of his students. He compares and contrasts the learning that took place between students who chose to write a traditional term paper and those who chose to participate in the class wiki project.

Quotes:

- "Teaching is very much an iterative process. We learn our material, develop some lectures, and teach a class. And then, in the delivery we find that some lectures or projects worked and that others did not. We make changes, go again, and reflect again. Each step is a learning step, not only for students but for teachers as well. With each change, teachers improve. It is this cyclical process around planning, delivery, reflection, and reform that makes teaching and learning an upwards spiral" (p. 1).

- "SoTL has an investigative method: By observing our object of study we learn how it operates, how it changes. If the subject (our student's learning) cannot be seen, then we have little evidence by which we can estimate learning and the effectiveness of our teaching" (p. 1).

- "With the advent of new text-based technologies in the early twentieth century, teachers have opportunities as never before to "look under the hood" of student learning and see how students go about the process of constructing their knowledge about a particular topic" (p. 1).

Chapter 5 - LaRose: The Impact of Preservice Teachers' Experiences and Beliefs on the Learning and Teaching of Peer Conferencing

Summary:

LaRose examines the effectiveness of peer review (or peer conferencing) of writing in the classroom for pre-service teachers. She attempted to make visible the biases that her students held at the beginning of the semester with relation to peer conferencing in order to see how their perspectives colored their feelings about peer conferencing.

Quotes:

- "Studying my students' experiences, attitudes, and beliefs about peer conferencing and their participation in conferences in my class has provided me with new insights about the complexity of using peer conferencing at every level of schooling and has caused me to think about how the long-lasting impact of prior experiences with an instructional strategy as learners may affect my students' perceptions and practices as future teachers." (p. 11).

- "I better understand the importance of purpose, partners, and process as teacher considerations for more effective conferencing experiences, and as I continue to analyze and reflect on my literacy teaching, I am sure that I will revisit these issues with growing understanding" (p. 12).

Chapter 6 - Liggit: Humanizing Academic Accountability: Embedded Assessment Gets at the Heart of Teaching and Learning

Summary:

Liggit grapples with the tension between institutional accreditation requirements for assessment of student learning and the desire for faculty to teach and assess student learning as an autonomous endeavor. Instead of conducting a SoTL research project in an individual course like the other authors, Liggit studies her department's program assessment practices during a time when the department was completing their periodic program review for institutional accreditation. "What is unique about our journey is we started out by addressing program assessment, and, along the way, faculty had also discovered new ways to improve their teaching methodologies. Surprisingly, the methodology that indicated we were making the right kinds of steps to move our assessment efforts in a positive direction was using the reflective practice of embedded assessment" (p. 2)

Quotes:

- "Embedded assessment blurs the lines between documenting what and how we teach with how well we teach. By writing down the ideas and decisions made during the teach (or implement), assess, analyze, and adjust steps of embedded assessment, we were able to provide a rich picture of the student learning and continuous improvement processes required for HLC reporting" (p. 2).

- "An added benefit to this model is that it also fostered faculty development toward building an assessment culture, rather than a testing culture (Treagust et al., 2003)" (p. 2).

- "We found this method to be a more humanized approach to program assessment, because faculty were less resistant to the work, and the process aligned more naturally with what they were used to experiencing in their own classrooms" (p. 2).

Chapter 7 - McVey: Teaching Emerging Technologies to Pre-Service Teacher Candidates

*Summary***:**

"My question, as a scholar of teaching and learning, is whether we could more effectively introduce teacher candidates to an interactive affordance, for example, a small-scale social networking application, by placing the tool into the context of personal experiences and the individual need of the student teacher" (p. 1). McVey examines whether introducing social media technology as part of a class helps students learn how to use the technology and provides them with the tools required to creatively find applications for the technology, thus teaching them to find new ways to apply new technology in the future without having to be taught each new form of technology.

Quotes:

- "Connecting novel tools and applications to a core understanding and to the way we, as educators, are helping them to think and see the world, is one of the challenges of the profession. With each pass at the task, and with each new class of students, I am finding myself, in my profession as a teacher, spiraling upward toward this goal" (p. 10).

- "For my colleagues in Higher Education, I hope this project makes some larger suggestions about how we seek to engage students to learn tools and applications they may not put to use until later in their career. Connecting novel tools and applications to a core understanding and to the way we, as educators, are helping them to think and see the world, is one of the challenges of the profession. With each pass at the task, and with each new class of students, I am finding myself, in my profession as a teacher, spiraling upward toward this goal" (p. 10).

Chapter 8 - Shyu: The Formation of a Space: A Review on the Teaching of Freshman-Year Design Studio

*Summary***:**

"My research attempts the following: (1) to understand how the first-year students behave when facing design problems with little or no previous experience, (2) to examine the functionality of design tools/methods based on historically significant design theories, and (3) to assess the pedagogical effect of teaching activities delivered in the design studio" (p. 2). Shyu examines whether or not design can be 'taught' and discusses the importance of a studio setting with open communication between the students and instructor, and found that studio teaching does improve a student's understanding of design principles, even if they have no prior experience with interior design.

Quotes:

- "This study was intended to reflect an important concept I learned from an SoTL seminar that teaching and learning are not two separate ends of a linear relationship but an integral entity that may grow organically to benefit each other. Students' feedback on learning is imperative in providing insightful information for the betterment of teaching" (p. 2)

- "Teaching practice is no longer a one-way act, in which the instructor only prepares the materials for the students to learn through lectures, assignments, and exams. Rather, it is a bilateral relationship between the instructor and the students, both sides will benefit from a healthy input-output mode of interaction. A successful pedagogical delivery can be more likely to happen when there is a channel that facilitates two-way communications" (p. 13).

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