

Editors' Introduction: Shifting the Balance

Laura Cruz, Editor-in-Chief

Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence
The Pennsylvania State University

[With the *Transformative Dialogues* editorial team: Chas Brua, Eileen Grodziak, and Jacob Kelley]

News from the Editors' Desk

- *Transformative Dialogues* is now moving to a biannual (two times per year) publishing schedule. Although this is a reduction from our previous schedule (three times per year), we do plan to continue to publish approximately the same number of articles overall.
- Summer is often a constructive time for reflection and scholarship. If you would like your work to be considered for our next issue (Fall 2023) we are suggesting a submission deadline of July 17th.
- We are pleased that our new capacity to assign DOIs to articles published in the journal is leading to higher reading and citation rates. Our current project is to assign DOIs to articles from our back catalog so that those authors (and articles) can benefit similarly.

Shifting the Balance

Much of the conversation about post-pandemic higher education has focused on persistent challenges to personal well-being, whether of students, faculty, or even entire academic communities. Under the prevalent medical model, the common responses are often to identify the underlying mental health disorders (or circumstances) and remediate them. Critics of the medical model have argued that more proactive strategies, intended to strengthen coping skills such as resilience, may be more effective, efficient, and, arguably, compassionate in re-fashioning universities into emotionally supportive environments.

One example of just such a proactive strategy is life balancing. Based on a popular theory in occupational therapy, life balancing is about ensuring that a person is spending time doing those activities that not only ensure basic needs are met, but also those that provide affordances such as competency, meaning, and purpose (Matuska & Christianson, 2008). If a person is spending too much time engaging in one type of activity and not enough in another, the therapist might suggest a need to shift that balance to strengthen their sense of well-being (Matuska, 2010). In many ways,

the articles in this expansive issue of *Transformative Dialogues* share a similar goal—the need to shift the balance within our classrooms, our teaching and learning practice, and, arguably, our personal and professional lives so that we all can flourish in the current climate of higher education (Cruz et al., 2023; Dahl et al., 2020).

In one sense, balancing can refer to a process of acclimating to shifting roles and responsibilities. In his essay, “Shepherding from Within the Flock,” for example, Ted Murcraay discusses how he navigated the transition from faculty member to faculty (also called educational) developer within the context of a peer learning community. In her essay, “Ask Me Why I Asked,” Janel Seeley talks about how the work of faculty/educational developers is itself shifting from the de-centering of expertise (e.g., *what* faculty/instructors learn) toward the emergence of peer-driven models of engagement (e.g., *how* faculty/instructors learn), such as her center for teaching and learning’s signature collaborative conversations. Building on the concept of peer models of engagement, Eleanor V. H. Vandegrift, Christine M. Andrews, Beth Beason-Abmayr, Andrew Moiseff, Marvin H. O’Neal III, Debra B. Pires, Steven Robinow, and Tamara J. Brenner present a faculty development model in which instructors work collaboratively to solve shared teaching and learning challenges.

Collaboration can also refer to shifting the balance of power within a classroom or university setting, making greater space for student voice or voices (figuratively speaking). For example, Michelle Briegel, Sonya Jakubec, Andrea Shippey-Heilman, and Paxton Bruce (a student-faculty research team) illuminate the balancing act between personal and professional responsibilities that student-parents face as they navigate the complex interface of college life. Similarly, Bidy Brooks, Erin Dick, Peter Olszewski, and Laura Cruz partnered with non-traditional students to evaluate a range of syllabi. Together, they identified the critical components that matter to students who may be returning to college after engaging in other life experiences such as parenthood. The two previous articles argue for making space to include specific student populations, but Kenneth George and Randi George reflect on how our collective experiences with remote learning under the pandemic have opened up new kinds of spaces—especially virtual ones—where many student voices can be expressed.

The shifting balance of power in the classroom can also refer to making more space for students to make meaningful choices about learning, both for themselves and others. In their large-scale study, Stacey Livingstone, Julia Adrian, and Erilynn T. Heinrichsen gathered extensive data about how many of their students were still struggling to balance basic physical and emotional needs with their academic goals well even after the pandemic has receded. Their recommendations include the continuation of many of the compassionate policies enacted under COVID-19 conditions, such as flexible options for attendance and assignment deadlines. Looking at pedagogical practices from another perspective, Jacob Kelley and Betsie Garner used principles of user experience research and design thinking to model the choices made by students on the margins (e.g., at both the high and low ends of engagement). The student-faculty pair used these marginal use cases, in turn, to radically re-imagine what an inclusive and engaged introductory sociology course could look like. Astrid Hindemith asked her students (pre-service teachers) to choose whether they preferred individual over collaborative assessments. Interestingly, they chose the collaborative assessments, despite the expression of concern for the burden of responsibility to others that this might entail.

Shifting the balance can also refer to bigger and broader efforts to effect change beyond the level of the classroom. Ruth Smith and Christine Ballengee Morris, for example, discuss how they used critical reflection not only as the basis of the curriculum across a new, online arts education program but also as a tool for questioning their assumptions as educators and agents of change. Julia Sargent, Caroline Elkins, Jane Wilson, Carina Bossu, and Elizabeth FitzGerald examine current models of measuring the impact of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), with the intention of fostering critical conversations about what we *want* the impact of SoTL to be not just on individual scholars but at the institutional, arguably even super-institutional, levels.

Last but not least, the authors of the remaining two articles in this issue of the journal ground their work in larger efforts to balance the past, present and future not only of higher education but of society writ large. Patricia Koustorous suggests that “one small action”—in her case, adopting labor-based grading—represents an active step toward addressing systemic inequities in higher education. Clara Burgo makes the case that if educators wish to be agents of social justice, they can do so not only by the choices they make in their classrooms, but also in how they integrate the lived experiences of their students into the deeper foundations of what it means to learn and, perhaps most importantly, to love what they are learning both within and across disciplines. In a similar spirit, we hope this article, along with the others in the issue, enables you to fall a little bit back in love with teaching, learning, and scholarship in the contested, complicated, and often confounding climate in which we all live and work.

References

- Cruz et al (forthcoming, 2023). What women can teach us about flourishing in post-pandemic higher education. Chapter in Joseph DeVitis & Pietra Sasso, eds. *Human Flourishing and Higher Education*. Identity & Practice in Higher Education-Student Affairs (IPHESA) Book Series. Information Age Publishing.
- Dahl, C. J., Wilson-Mendenhall, C. D., & Davidson, R. J. (2020). The plasticity of well-being: A training-based framework for the cultivation of human flourishing. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *117*(51), 32197–32206. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2014859117>
- Matuska, K. M. (2010). Workaholism, life balance, and well-being: A comparative analysis. *Journal of Occupational Science*, *17*(2), 104–111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2010.9686681>
- Matuska, K. M., & Christiansen, C. H. (2008). A proposed model of lifestyle balance. *Journal of Occupational Science*, *15*(1), 9–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2008.9686602>