Paths to Learning: An Introduction

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In 2002, I joined the staff of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition as its third associate director. Around that time, John Gardner, our former director, spoke with Darlene Hantzis about writing a monograph for the Center on feminist pedagogies and the first year of college. Darlene was unavailable then, so Tracy Skipper and I added the idea to our list of potential future monographs, which we revisited over the years. As things turned out, the timing was never right for one reason or another, but we remained committed to writing the book one day. When I left the Center in 2009, Tracy, Toni (now on staff at the Center), and I agreed that if this volume materialized, I would be involved in some way. In 2012, I finally got the call.

We realized there were a number of issues in higher education that made it an ideal time to move the book idea from the back to front burner. The first of those concerns came in 2011 from the bombshell book, *Academically Adrift* (Arum & Roksa, 2011). The powerful sound bite from the book was that students were not learning to the desired degree during the college years. Arum and Roksa's (2011) results inflamed the public, policymakers, and educators from coast to coast.

Although some researchers (e.g., Astin, 2011) have questioned the methodological approach and findings since the book's publication, nothing seemed to defuse what felt like a broadside attack on higher education, in general, and faculty, who were singled out as part of the problem, in particular. Perhaps the reason the book's claim hit so hard was because it questioned the very purpose of a post-secondary education at a time when the cost of college was also being challenged. How could institutions of higher education justify their price tag if students were not developing their critical-thinking, reasoning, and writing skills during college?

A second tension that prompted the book is related to the general nature of this and other critiques. Most of them assume a monolithic view of higher education, which does not accurately represent the nature of higher education today. From public to private, small to large, research to liberal arts to community college, and online to brick and mortar, higher education institutions are more diverse than ever before. Different types of schools have different missions (Morphew & Hartley, 2006) that lead to different outcomes. However, this variability is lost in these broad-brush criticisms that seem to suggest that all institutions are the same.

Often, a generalized view of institutions leads to a generalized view of students, which is also inaccurate. For instance, college rankings from *U.S. News & World Report*, which is the most likely way the public gets institutional information (Redden, 2013), focus on the experience of traditional students (i.e., first-time, full-time, residing on campus, traditional aged), assuming all students fit this profile. However, only 15% of students today are considered to be traditional (Hess, 2011). Therefore, this small segment of the student population is determining the reputation of an institution.

So who are our students? Nontraditional students have become the majority on many campuses. These students tend to be older, having delayed enrollment because of financial (Advisory Committee, 2012) or other personal reasons. They may also be students of color, financially independent from their parents, the first in their family to attend college, full-time workers, single parents, attending college part-time, and/or coming from a low socio-economic class (Horn & Carroll, 1996). In addition, they are more likely not to follow a straight progression through college (i.e., graduating from the same institution they initially enrolled in) since more than half of today's students attend more than one institution during their college experience (Adelman, 2006).

And, that experience varies greatly depending on the student's circumstances. For instance, a 35-year-old student who works full-time and attends a community college after first going to a four-year institution (a reverse transfer) experiences and expects different things from the college experience than a 19-year-old enrolled

at a residential college. What this means for faculty is they need to serve a wide variety of students at a diverse set of institutions with different available resources. This rebuttal is not meant to ignore the fact there may be issues at certain types of institutions or for some students, only that it is important to be specific about where there are problems and what those problems are and for whom, so they can be addressed in a responsible and meaningful way (Bok, 2013).

In addition to these tensions, a third event affecting our classrooms is the shift to providing online educational options. Online education in some form plays a critical role in higher education today. Some states (e.g., Texas) are demanding a less expensive college degree, which relies on the use of online courses and/or programs. The reasons are clear. Institutions gain additional revenue and improve their graduation rates (if successful), and students appreciate the flexibility of these offerings (Jos Vias, 2008). As a result, online enrollments are on the rise. In 2009, there was a 4% increase (from 17% to 21%) in the number of students enrolled in online courses with a total of 5.6 million taking at least one online course (Kaya, 2010). This increase is seen at all types of institutions. In fact, "more public colleges than private non-profits—74.9 percent versus 60.5 percent—say it's [online education] part of their long-term plans" (Kaya, 2010, para. 3). Consequently, blended (online and in-class elements) and all-online courses have changed the educational landscape.

A more recent technological phenomenon is the arrival of the massive online open courses (MOOCs). These free, large courses have provoked a lot of attention since their initial introduction in the summer of 2011, with many institutions rushing to jump on the MOOC bandwagon. However, today some institutions (e.g., Amherst College, American University) have put the brakes on, wanting to determine if this offering makes sense for their students (Kolowich, 2013). Other institutions have taken the concept of MOOCs in a new direction. In the fall of 2013, 16 colleges and universities offered a DOCC, or distributed open collaborative course, which takes some of the technological elements of MOOCs but uses them to support brick-and-mortar classroom discussions (Jaschik, 2013). In these instances, instructors from multiple institutions will use the same video featuring an expert in the field (like a MOOC) to introduce the week's theme. However, unlike MOOCs, this "technology enhanced learning environment" allows campus-based instructors to create a unique classroom experience by developing their own syllabus for their class of 15 to 30 undergraduate or graduate students, recognizing that students have valuable knowledge and expertise to share in a traditional classroom setting (Juhasz as cited in Jaschik, 2013, para. 14).

The fact that not all institutions are choosing to ride these current trends may reflect caution, thoughtfulness, or resistance to change. And, at this point, it is anyone's guess how much or little MOOCs, DOCCs, or other innovations will change higher education. Yet, regardless of the ultimate direction higher education takes, all of these events and formats bring new challenges to the professoriate, and a host of questions emerge: What is the job of the instructor? How do the current tensions affect how faculty teach? How do instructors address the needs of a diverse group of students? How do faculty adapt to the constantly changing terrain of higher education? Nevertheless, before we attempt to address some of these questions with this book, it may be helpful to briefly discuss the history of pedagogical practice that led us to the current situation.

A Historical View

Any historical discussion about education begins with the Greeks. Both Plato and Socrates are well known for their educational views. In *The Republic*, Plato (360 BCE/1974), Socrates's student, explained that education was important because it led to the health and success of the city-state. The educational goal was goodness of character. Exposure to the arts and humanities was critical to him because it was through this exposure learners were able to discern what makes a virtuous character.

In addition to these philosophical views, the beginnings of many pedagogic practices used today are seen in these early examples as well. For instance, pedagogically, debate and discussion were at the heart of Plato and Socrates's approaches to teaching, since these methods bring to light contradictions and a deeper understanding of the truth. Another specific tool Socrates introduced was a version of peer feedback. He used inner and outer circles of students to discuss topics of interest—the inner circle discussed (or debated) a passage of text, while the outer circle observed and took notes during the discussion. When the discussion was over, the students in the outer circle provided feedback to those engaged in the debate. Students alternated roles in future discussions. This way all students got the opportunity to discuss and critique over time.

In 1762, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762/1979) published *Emile* (also known as *On Education*) to present his views on education. In the book, he advocated learning through exploration. He explained, "let them [students] learn nothing in books which experience can teach them" (p. 251). Further, he felt it was important to teach at the students' level and not above, so they would maintain their curiosity and interest. His hands-on approach to differentiated learning was echoed hundreds of years later in John Dewey's work.

Dewey (1938) felt the teacher's role was to facilitate the student's experience. Like a successful chess player, the teacher must consider what is already known about a topic and the unique characteristics of that student to help guide her or him into various experiences to stimulate learning. The basic elements of this approach are to focus on learning through experience rather than through textbooks. For example, instead of talking about principles in the abstract, Dewey advocated grounding the learning in everyday experiences to which the student could relate. This approach would inspire ongoing curiosity and, in turn, the desire to learn. Dewey was opposed to the instructor who "ladle[s] out [what is known] in doses" (p. 381). Therefore, he did not believe the teacher was the repository of all knowledge controlling what, when, and how students gained information. Learning was an active event, which faculty facilitated.

Similarly, Lev Vygotsky (1926/1997) believed the role of the teacher was to support learning by teaching students how to "acquire such knowledge and to make use of it" (p. 339). Over time, that level of support would lessen until the students were able to work independently. Vygotsky described this changing role of students when he said,

> Until now the student has always stood on the teachers' shoulders. He has looked upon everything through the teacher's eyes and judged everything by the way his teacher thought. The time has come to place the student on his own two feet and to recognize that there is not very much knowledge the teacher can impart to the student. … The child must himself be made to walk and to fall, to suffer pain from injuries, and to decide what direction to follow. (p. 342)

This view recognizes the value of students playing an active role in their learning and experiencing failures. It is only through these experiences that students learn. Further, Vygotsky is credited with the concept of scaffolding—guiding students through the process of getting and using information on their own. In practice, this could be done through a class exercise that uses a concept and then has students complete a similar exercise on their own. In this way, students gain the skills and confidence by doing the lesson in class, which they then use in a different context later. This results in students becoming active, independent learners.

In spite of the fact that many educators from the earliest days have advocated a more engaging approach to pedagogy, one might wonder where the lecture approach came from and why it has had such an enduring hold on the professoriate. Cohen

and Kisker (2010) detailed the history of higher education instruction and explained the varying reasons lecture started and stayed a primary teaching method since the founding of colonial colleges. The main reasons for its dominance seemed to be practical. At the first colleges, books were not readily available, so faculty needed to provide the information. And, because education was about developing taste and not adding to the knowledge base, as it was in the time of the Greeks, students focused on memorizing and reciting what was known and recognized as "truth" (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

Since those early days, there have been many curricular developments, such as the addition of electives and the development of disciplines, which have led to faculty specialization and a shift from content acquisition to making new discoveries (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). By the late 1880s, faculty were balancing teaching with research at many institutions. This division between liberal arts and research created a tension regarding the purpose of higher education. Where Harvard University and the University of Virginia represented the research agenda, Yale faculty fought for the more traditional, classical approach (Rudolph, 1990). In fact, they famously supported the importance of a traditional curriculum that focused on offering a liberal education in the *Yale Report of 1828*, which other institutions used to support a similar goal (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). This division reflects one of the first signs of institutional diversity that was beginning to take root in the United States. There was no longer one type of institution serving a select population of students.

Other institutional, legislative, and social changes led to additional transformations in the academy. For example, the first Morrill Act in 1862 established land-grant colleges, which brought students to the academy who were interested in engineering and agriculture. Almost 40 years later, junior colleges (now known as community colleges) were established to provide remedial and vocational education (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). With institutional diversity, student populations continued to grow more diverse as well. This shift reflected the belief that a post-secondary education was no longer the province of only the elite but for everyone who wanted one. This belief was solidified with the passage of the GI Bill in 1944 that supported the influx of military veterans into the higher education system.

Societal events also affected the academy (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The civil rights movement, the war in Vietnam, and the space race were just some events that had an impact on the curriculum, which, in turn, changed the professoriate. For example, the feminist movement in the 1970s and 1980s paralleled scholarly work (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1978) that explored different ways women approached knowledge and learning. As the scholarship expanded, notions of pedagogy did as well. To explain, a critical component of the feminist movement

was the notion of consciousness raising, which was a process where small groups of women met to discuss, share, and "come to better understand … their lives" (Boxer, 1998, p. 20). Insights from this practice contributed to pedagogical shifts from lecture to discussion and the teacher as facilitator rather than the expert. The increase of females in the professoriate also supported these shifts. In addition, these changes fit well with the work of Paolo Freire and other critical theorists (see Chapter 4) who came to similar conclusions by different routes around the same time. As a result, more quantitative approaches (e.g., lecture) in the classroom made way for more qualitative ones, such as discussion (Stromquist, 1999).

In spite of these developments, the most common teaching method remained the lecture. Efficiency in the classroom has always been an important motivator in higher education (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). For some, lecture ensures students are given information that can then be easily assessed with objective tests (e.g., multiple choice questions on computer-scored forms). Subjective methods of testing (e.g., papers and essays) are more challenging and time consuming for the instructor to grade and may not measure content acquisition as easily. Nevertheless, as the conversation shifted from teaching to learning, the central question was, Which methods lead to learning that lasts? Researchers found it was the pedagogies that used active-learning techniques that led to increased learning (McCarthy & Anderson, 2000).

Evidence of the value of these more innovative approaches was supported by the work of Astin (1991), who advocated talent development, a concept suggesting that college is supposed to add value rather than have students hit some arbitrary standard of knowledge. A decade later, Kuh and colleagues (2005) found through Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practice) that more engaging pedagogies produced greater learning. This supported the development of new assessment tools, such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), that look beyond mere knowledge acquisition to the use of engaging pedagogies and their link to student learning.

The Purpose of This Book

Today, higher education is again in the crosshairs of multiple tensions as stated above. Still, at its core, it is an enterprise devoted to student learning. Teachers who are dedicated to this goal may feel at a loss regarding ways to more fully engage their diverse students. As a faculty member myself, I struggle with facilitating my students' learning, adopting constantly changing technological tools, and attempting to provide differentiated instruction that helps students wherever they are. Over the

years, I picked up various books for help; and although I learned from all of them, the deep, but narrow focus of these resources frustrated me. With limited time, I looked for a "best of" book that would offer an overview of a range of theoretically based approaches to give me ideas on what may work best for my students and for me. I found no such work in the marketplace. It is from this brew of events and challenges that the idea of the book took its final shape.

You will notice two main changes from that original idea discussed by John Gardner and Darlene Hantzis. First, the volume is not focused on the first year. Student challenges do not end in the first year, so these chapters speak more generally to the undergraduate experience. Second, although the book's initial focus was on feminist pedagogy, now it has expanded to cover a range of theoretical approaches that seem to be of particular interest today.

The book begins with two foundational chapters to provide a context for the other chapters. Jillian Kinzie in Chapter 2 summarizes the most current research on the important role engagement plays in learning. Then James Groccia and his colleagues give an overview of some key theoretical approaches to teaching and learning in Chapter 3. They discuss six different theoretical families from behaviorism to andragogy. Although there are distinctions between pedagogy (teaching children) and andragogy (teaching adults), I should note you will find a more generalized use of the term *pedagogy* in most chapters. For the purposes of this book, it will serve as the term for teaching all students, even adults.

In Chapter 4, Nana Osei-Kofi returns to that original kernel of the idea for the book by discussing critical pedagogy more broadly. Although not strictly a pedagogical method, there are ways to incorporate elements of this theory within the classroom. The next three chapters look at more specific pedagogical approaches. Laura Rendón and Vijay Kanagala write about contemplative pedagogy in Chapter 5, which involves engaging students in learning through introspection and other meditative practices. Then, in Chapter 6, Laurie Schreiner describes strengths-based pedagogy and how valuing students' contributions can produce greater learning. James Groccia and his colleagues, in Chapter 7, introduce integrative group learning methods and then give examples that include collaborative, cooperative, and problem-based learning strategies.

Chapters 8 and 9 capture the current thinking about two topics of particular interest today: (a) online or blended classes and (b) assessment. Amy Collier has the task of covering the issue of engagement in online or blended classrooms, providing information about both the current status and use of technological tools, while Wendy Troxel tackles the topic of classroom assessment. Over the years, I have often heard colleagues express interest in attempting new approaches to

teaching only to feel stymied by how to grade these efforts. Unable to overcome their assessment challenges, they end up making only marginal changes to a course rather than rethinking their approach. In Chapter 9, Wendy helps to break down the large topic of classroom assessment in a way that makes it applicable regardless of the specific pedagogical choice. Finally, in the last chapter, I offer a summary of the key findings from the volume to help readers as they consider adapting and adopting some of these practices in their own classrooms.

This book is an attempt to provide a succinct view of some pedagogical paths available to faculty. Each chapter is grounded in theory while offering examples of how these theories can be applied in a classroom. We hope it offers you the sort of "best of" overview that results in sharpening your skills and, in turn, helping your students become more confident learners who will prosper now and in the future.

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