

EDITORIAL

Engaged Teaching to Enhance Teaching and Learning

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Student engagement is often regarded as an essential element for student success in learning (see [Looker, 2016](#)). This issue focuses on a related topic: “Teacher Engagement”, or rather “Engaged Teaching”. The concept of engaged teaching is perhaps relatively new, compared to student engagement in the SoTL literature. I have attempted to provide a definition of engaged teaching below, to help us both at the individual and institutional levels, to reflect on our teaching practices and SoTL work, and create an awareness of how we could enhance teaching and learning. The hope is also to spark discussion on engaged teaching and we welcome readers’ perspectives on this. Please share with us your comments and thoughts by email to info@ajsotl.edu.sg.

With the growing trends of online courses and blended learning approaches, there is often anxiety among higher education teachers that their role may be replaced or reduced by technology in time to come. What has in fact happened is that new teaching approaches and adoption of technology in teaching has not made teaching redundant but has instead transformed the *role* of teachers in higher education. This calls for the need to *renew* our investment in teachers and in active and engaged teaching methods, that will lead to active student engagement and learning.

So, what does ‘engaged teaching’ look like? I outline four key characteristics of engaged teaching (and learning) below in the hope that this may serve as a starting point to work towards a fuller definition.

Simply stated, engaged teaching requires the teacher (and learner) to be *highly involved*. Transferring content knowledge is no longer sufficient, and teachers need to go beyond content transmission to focus on actively engaging and promoting the holistic development of students. Teaching becomes less didactic and more facilitative as the teacher is fully immersed and actively connected to students. This means that the teacher needs to be both cognitively and socially congruent with their students (Schmidt & Moust, 1995). Thus, the focus of teaching becomes student-centered and learning includes outcomes other than mere subject content. In such an active teaching context, teaching and learning occur in a socially-connected setting, with learning radiating from peers, teachers, and experts alike and not from any one single knowledge

source. Students become more responsible for their own learning just as teachers take on even greater responsibility towards student learning.

The second characteristic is that the teacher is not only interested in the students themselves and course outcomes, but is *cognizant* of his/her own teaching and the students' learning, and is regularly reflecting on what works and what does not work. That is, the teacher is highly reflective and self-reflexive. The teacher embraces an overtly meta-cognitive approach and as result has a higher self-awareness of his/her own identity as a teacher, and of the teaching and learning processes.

The third characteristic is that the teacher takes *an investigative approach* to teaching and learning, such that there is a high focus on empirical evidence and systematic study of teaching practices and learning outcomes. This involves a systematic and scholarly, i.e. SoTL-ly approach to teaching and learning. Related to this, the fourth characteristic is that the teacher is no longer just investigating and keeping the findings to oneself, but is *sharing* them with a wider community, comparing the results against other studies and constructing and contributing knowledge on teaching and learning. When the knowledge obtained through reflective and investigative teaching is shared with peers and subject to further critique (i.e. critical peer review), it builds on existing scholarship and expands and extends both SoTL knowledge and practice (Boyer, 1990).

The proposal here is that, the more the number of characteristics of engaged teaching displayed, the deeper the extent of engaged teaching and learning. The intent of this simple definition is to help us examine the depth of engaged teaching. Readers' attention is directed to the reflection piece by Wu Siew Mei that we feature in this issue that is entitled, "Teaching Philosophy Statements: How do I Develop them" for some ideas on becoming an engaged teacher.

While the adoption of engaged teaching as a metric to assess the quality of teaching and learning may take time (cf. current university ranking criteria such as the Times Higher Education World University Ranking), journals like *AJSOTL* has already initiated the pursuit of scholarly teaching and dissemination of teaching approaches and scholarly investigations to inspire and help others in their teaching and learning, so as to improve the quality of teaching and learning in university classrooms. This indeed has been *AJSOTL*'s aim - to "improve the quality of teaching and learning, by encouraging fellow teachers to think about, and discuss issues in a scholarly way ([Chng, 2015, p. 134](#)). As a journal, our intent is to be a platform to initiate

and infuse new ideas and thought into enhancing teaching and learning, and we hope that the conception on engaged teaching does that. The articles featured in this issue are good examples of different forms of engaged teaching.

We begin this issue with a contribution called “Teaching to Learning: Leading Change at a Large Research- Intensive University” from the desk of Professor Adrian Lee, a former Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education & Quality Improvement) of the University of New South Wales (2002–2006). In this first of two parts, Lee describes the work he did in leading and managing change at the University of New South Wales in 2002. Lee shares with us his strategies, the approach he took to identify key areas to drive change, and how he engaged with faculty members in fostering change. The second part, to be published in the next issue, elaborates on the outcomes, developments and recommendations for shifting the teaching and learning culture. We hope that this article will enlighten readers about leading change in education; about teaching and learning in specific institutional contexts; and in promoting engaged teaching at the university level.

Next, we feature two reflection pieces, the first on “Teaching Philosophy Statements: How do I Develop them” by Wu Siew Mei who shares her knowledge on what a Teaching Philosophy Statement (TPS) is, its purposes, and how we could develop such statements using three different frameworks, with an illustration of how the framework is being used in a sample TPS. The TPS framework suggests that teachers may think about (1) how learning works, (2) how teaching works, (3) the intended outcomes of the teaching and learning activities, (4) ways to measure learning, and (5) one’s own teaching, as a means to develop a Teaching Philosophy Statement. In essence, this framework gets teachers to think about how to be an engaged teacher.

The second reflection on “Applying Wikis in Project-based Modules” comes directly out of the classroom engagement technique employed by Zhang Jianwen. Taking an investigative approach, Zhang examines the impact of wikis on teacher-student interaction from the students’ perspective. This report is useful as a first measure, and provides positive feedback from students that wikis increase their connectivity with their peers and the teacher. It also provides practical teaching strategies for managing multiple project groups of students using wikis. The positive results are encouraging and we look forward to an extended study on the use of wikis and its impact on teaching and learning processes and outcomes at a broader level. For instance, the use of wikis and social connectivity could have an impact on the extent to which students become more self-directed and intrinsically motivated, and this will be worth exploring systematically.

Next, we share an article by Lee Kooi Cheng, written in response to an earlier paper on living and learning programmes (LLPs) in America ([Inkelas, 2016](#)). In this article entitled “‘Good Practices in Living-learning Programmes’: Perspectives From An Asian Location”, Lee, whose direct experience is with residential living and learning in Singapore, argues that the motivation of LLPs could be contextual and extends beyond student engagement and learning outcomes to preparing the learners for the real world. This essentially means evolving the idea of universities as being a place of knowledge acquisition and creation to “educating” learners in a holistic manner, instilling not just the 21st century skills for the workplace but also addressing important educational values through the informal curriculum. This perspective resonates with the idea of engaged teaching as it broadens our perspective on SOTL, from being limited to classrooms to including the educational living and learning spaces in such a manner as to promote engaged teaching and learning beyond the conventional walls of a classroom.

Continuing on the same subject of LLPs, we have a quasi-experimental study describing the impact of Living and Learning Centres (LLCs) on STEM education in Korea by Su Youn Byoun. Byoun compares two Science and Technology universities – one with LLC and the other without, and examines the impact of LLC on student engagement and community building. This article is a good reminder that it is not just that the mere existence of LLCs that is going to make a difference, but it is the unique programmes of the LLCs that would have a significant impact on student engagement and community building.

The above articles on LLPs and LLCs surface another consideration. While these learning and living spaces may be useful, there are a number of limitations to incorporating LLCs/LLPs at the university level, especially if the university is catering to thousands of students. It is unlikely that LLCs/LLPs could serve the entire student population at universities. Therefore, it may be worth harnessing the power of the internet and technology to build on the virtual community as well. Moving forward, it would be interesting if all of us could also consider the role of technology in student engagement and community building in addition to LLCs/LLPs, and how this could also be woven into the concept of engaged teaching.

Along this line of thought, Misty Cook examines the use of a technology application called “Explain Everything”, in the article “Explain Everything: What Can Students Gain From Online Multimodal Feedback?” Cook documents the use of the application to provide multimodal feedback in a course on Academic Writing, and shares her students’ perspectives on their experiences with the multimodal feedback that was provided. She found that students

valued the multimodal feedback and that it had transformed consultations from being teacher-centric to student centric, thereby actively engaging the students in the feedback process. This study presents a possibility of harnessing the potential of technology in engaged teaching to promote better interaction with students so as to engage them in learning meaningfully.

The final article in this issue is on “Students’ Experience of a Simulation-based Assessment in Nursing” by Tan, Liaw and colleagues. Tan et al. use a refreshing approach to assessments - in terms of both the set-up and the measurements, which breaks away from the classical end-of-year written exams/practical exams that focus on acquisition of specific skills/content knowledge and moves towards an inclusive assessment of work-related competencies such as communication and critical thinking. The team’s approach to understanding students’ experience of this innovative assessment and their findings are also insightful. This study demonstrates that simulated assessment situations are useful in measuring student learning in a holistic manner. In addition, this mode of assessment provides constructive feedback to students on core competencies, which would have otherwise been missing in traditional examinations/practical tests. Given the potential of the innovative assessment method and tool to measure competencies, it would be useful to explore how such simulation-based assessments may be adapted in other settings, such as project-based learning or capstone projects. This study presents new directions to engaged teaching in terms of teaching method and assessments.

Collectively, the various commentaries and articles in this issue offer strategies and approaches to engaged teaching at an individual and institutional level. They also remind us to take a comprehensive view of teaching beyond the classroom to include the informal living and learning spaces that have gained much visibility in recent years. These SoTL work are indicative of engaged teaching and provide insights into enhancing the quality of teaching and learning.

We, at the *AJSOTL* editorial board, would like to thank every one of our contributors and supporters for their dedication and perseverance in our joint endeavor to engage in scholarly and engaged teaching and learning. We are also hopeful that our continued and collaborative efforts will create awareness of these efforts and thereby lead to new frontiers in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in higher education.

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