CTLs in the Time of COVID:
A Message from the Editor-in-Chief

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I have to take myself back to 9/11 to find a match for a sustained national crisis even remotely similar to what the U.S. has experienced since the onset of COVID-19. One of my more dominant memories of that earlier catastrophe involves a writing course I taught that day, a class that started just after the second tower had fallen. For all we knew, we were at war; and assessing for myself the diversity of that particular room full of students, I began to solicit comments from as many class members as possible, trying to help students emerge as speaking subjects before any wartime narrative might vilify a group with which they aligned. In the midst of these awkward discussions (no one really knew what to say), one student shouted an expletive and slammed a paper folder onto his desk. "My paper," he said, with a tone of angry disappointment, "is about friendship." As I came to understand it, his distaste for his own project stemmed from a reckoning with relevance, a perspective forced from the urgency of world events. A hastily written paper on friendship, one of those papers a student hoped to be finished rather than actually be good, had no place on a world stage.

While I am aware of no center for teaching and learning (CTL) worker who wishes their programming to be anything less than good, the COVID pandemic has produced for us all a similar reckoning with relevance. As the pandemic reshaped higher education in 2020, it was more than ever "impossible," as Bass (2020) would say, not to "think about all of the practices in centers of teaching and learning, carried out by educators and educational developers, whose devotion to the advancement of learning unfolds in the context of local and world events, social discourse, and even the existential threats of coming decades" (p. 4). Without doubt, the threat of COVID represents an existential moment for CTLs. For many centers, the pandemic has underscored their vital role at their institutions, the degree to which the continuation of effective instruction has fallen "on our shoulders" (Bessette & McGowan, this volume). Called upon to this degree, many CTL staff leveraged partnerships already well established; while other centers now needed to forge ties quickly with IT, eCampus, and other offices and individuals across their insitutions. For some CTL workers, as Aebersold, Hooper, Berg,

Denaro, Mann, Ortquist-Ahrens, Sato, & Verma's survey of CTLs indicates (this volume), their schools' shifts to remote learning relied predominantly on entities other than teaching and learning centers, surfacing their CTLs' lack of status and resources. Whether CTLs found themselves at the margins or in the center of higher education's countless pivots, the shared crisis underscored the emotional labor and community building that educational developers must now undertake (Bessette & McGowan; Debelius & Mooney; Hyer, Landau, & Workman: all this volume), how virtual learning could radically shift the ways in which students perceived and engaged with one another, especially in schools where online instruction had had a minimal presence (Hosler & Napolitano, this volume), and the need to rethink programming in terms of the disparate levels of experience educators had already with learning technologies, not to mention with professional developers themselves (Horan & Kim, this volume). For many, then, professional development work during the pandemic has provided opportunities for CTL staff to not only re-examine the relevance of their work but also to introduce—at last—a wider range of faculty and administrators to that work.

As CTLs now interacted with faculty and departments and other offices more broadly, some already accustomed to, some new to CTL programming, centers could not help but consider ways in which not only teaching and learning but also professional development must now be re-imagined (Bose, Berry, Nyland, Saba, & Focarile, this volume). As institutions shifted from a survival mode and looked more closely at ways to enhance the virtual and hybrid platforms that now dominated their schools' offerings, CTLs generated innovative programming and repurposed existing programs to help faculty across the curriculum anticipate and transition to new normals (Bose et al.; Debelius & Mooney; Hodges, Harrison, Kephart, Swatski, & Williams; Horan & Kim; Hosler & Napolitano: all this volume). Our hope is that this issue of *JCTL* will help readers locate themselves and their CTLs in the stories unfolding here, deepen their appreciation for work they already do, and draw on the experiences recounted here to imagine new and sustainable futures for their centers.

The pandemic also necessitates a fresh look at *JCTL*. I would be remiss if I did not thank our editorial board members, who recognized the urgency of the situation for higher learning, who quickly and collaboratively crafted this special issue's call, and who reviewed submissions and the revised submissions more rapidly than we ever have before. In the same vein, I cannot express enough gratitude to our contributors, who responded in timely fashion to our call, remained open to shifting needs, and in many cases gathered

and analyzed data and reshaped their articles even as the page proofs were in process. This historical moment encouraged us to invite papers in forms and at stages often different than those submissions we might consider during a "normal" cycle. As a result, this issue's production highlights the various degrees of "now" in which CTLs persist—our work does not just exist in the culmination of lengthy studies, as some scholarship might have us believe, but often in our quick responses in a variety of forms to urgent needs, in our efforts to make our work known, and in the alliances we forge along the way. *JCTL* is committed to showcasing this labor, to deepening educators' understanding of that work, and to reimagining that labor and the places in which it occurs in ways that will sustain its contributions in the times to come, in whatever forms those times might take. Our work is not ever something merely to complete or even something that ever can be completed. The stakes are too high now to think or act otherwise; they always have been and always will be.

References

Bass, R. (2020). What's the problem now? *To Improve the Academy, 39*(1), 3-30.