Nooks and Crannies and Center Stages: Exploring the Role of the Teaching and Learning Center— A Message From the Executive Editor

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One of my most recent charges—in a non-Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) capacity, at least not officially—involved training my department's new graduate associates to teach the university's first-year writing sequence. During a weekly workshop devoted to this training, one of these new teachers informed her cohort she had been having a conflict with the instructor whose class followed hers. The dispute, she explained, involved the 10-minute transition between classes, that time in which her students were exiting the classroom and the other teacher's students had begun to enter. The GA was particularly shaken up over the attitude of this other teacher, who seemed annoyed that the GA still occupied the space that the other teacher now clearly saw as her own. "A lot of times students want to stay after class to talk to me, quick questions," the GA told our group, "or I have to gather my stuff together, log off the computer, and she's already at the desk, banging books around or breathing all heavy at the chalkboard."

Other GAs weighed in, suggesting clever comebacks or alternative means of interpreting the teacher's body language. After these brief exchanges, our workshop focused its attention on a broader question: Who, if anyone, "owns" that time between scheduled classes? This question and my polling of faculty members afterwards produced a rather predictable range of answers. Some people allotted the 10 minutes to the incoming instructor; some awarded the time to the teacher leaving the classroom; others insisted the time should be divided—the first five minutes for the teacher whose class had just concluded, the next five minutes belong to

the instructor whose class was about to begin; and still others suggested the two professionals act civilly enough to share the space for whatever amount of time was needed to accomplish whatever was needed to accomplish before the next class actually began.

As I sit down to draft this introduction to the inaugural issue of *JCTL: Journal for Centers of Teaching and Learning*, I regret not having steered discussion toward yet another question: How can that time between class sessions be used to improve the educational experience of students? I don't think this question dismisses or fails to overlap the previous questions we had generated in the teaching workshop; matters of decorum that shape the working lives of teachers certainly impact students' educational experiences. In fact, these matters of decorum could be considered one of the seemingly marginal components of postsecondary instruction that really is of defining significance and, as such, a worthy focus of CTLs. You might say the earlier questions about decorum represent a dynamic, one in which reflections on our working conditions might resonate against the question about effective teaching, just as the overarching question on improved teaching encourages us to look more closely at this everyday practice of one group of students leaving a classroom and a different group of students stepping in. In the midst of the everyday, teachers might not find the time or space to consider these interactions beyond what might allow them to encounter other instructors more civilly. But then again, as mundane as this feature of the everyday might at first seem, the discussion that ensued in our workshop afterwards indicates that such interactions do possess some gravity and that it might be worthwhile for someone to explore the possibilities of these short interactions.

Rather than composing clever comebacks or gathering our belongings as quickly and inconspicuously as possible, imagine teachers' using that 10-minute interval to exchange information about what they had just experienced or planned to present, to review together what the students leaving the class seemed most interested in today, and to look over each other's handouts, slides, and PowerPoints and explore ways their subject matters and their pedagogies might empower one another. Hopefully, this isn't much of a stretch: Many teachers many times do in fact interact with each other in this manner. The short interval between sessions doesn't allow for sustained discussion, but these exchanges can, nevertheless, serve as fodder for future discussions under conditions more conducive to dialogue, whether they take place in the faculty lounge, an office, or the mailroom. And, then again, opportunities for prolonged discussion might not present themselves at all, in which cases our glimpses into each other's classrooms remain just that, glimpses—ones that may provide us

with insights into our own work but, even then, insights that we effectively keep to ourselves, at least until the next teacher peeks over our shoulder as we erase the whiteboard.

While I'd be hard pressed to find colleagues who do not reflect deeply or often on their institutional lives, the depth and frequency of these ruminations does not erase the fact that it benefits postsecondary institutions to encourage these considerations, to respond to insights that emerge from them, and to provide the space and time for these insights to be shared and examined. Centers for Teaching and Learning (aka Centers for Teaching Excellence, Centers for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Centers for Advancement of Learning and Teaching, Centers for Professional Development, Faculty Centers, Academic Centers for Excellence, among other names) offer teachers, students, administrators, and staff this kind of time and space—a place in which to linger over and affirm value we find in all the nooks and crannies and center stages of our work and to resist, through innovation, any element of that work that disrupts learning. CTL work, for instance, can involve not only looking at ways to make our encounters with each other's teaching more intentional and more beneficial, but also to ensure we have opportunities to examine, in the form of learning communities, listservs, or brown bags, the entrenched attitudes and practices that curtail such useful dialogues to begin with: Was there, for instance, an ageist, sexist, elitist, or racist element at work in the one instructors' interaction with the GA in my teaching workshop; and if so, how might we energize the broader conversations necessary to counter such dynamics?

Working with a CTL has taught me the value of not leaving such dialogues to chance. I say this not to deride the insights and innovative work done by teachers who labor without the benefit of such agencies, but to highlight the role CTLs can play in developing and maintaining these insights and the innovations that arise from them. Our glimpses into one another's classrooms can and often do lead to additional conversations that play out over time in a variety of settings across any institution; CTLs can not only ensure the dialogue persists but also that it intersects with other key conversations, pertinent constituencies, and available resources. CTLs, in other words, act as the brief exchange between class sessions writ large, large enough to involve all persons who have a stake in teaching and learning throughout all of the points at which learning matters.

The *Journal on Centers for Teaching and Learning* represents a site through which CTL staff can continue these conversations, explore their relevance to their own institutional situations, and imagine new possibilities to take back to these institutions—not to mention new ways of looking at the

conversations already at work there. While multiple publications deal with pedagogical issues in specific fields and with issues addressed by CTLs more broadly, *JCTL* is designed to focus on the operations, achievements, and potentials of CTLs themselves. *JCTL* provides a space not only through which CTL workers can report on the ways such centers might, and have already, intervened in the nooks, crannies, and center stages of their institutions to improve the educational experiences of students, but also provide space for contributors and their readers to examine the many nooks, crannies, and stages of CTL work itself.

Among other operations, CTLs disseminate grant monies to support pedagogical initiatives, sponsor reading groups and other faculty learning communities, select teaching award winners to recognize achievement, and arrange for courses, workshops, and roundtables focused on teaching and learning concerns. They manage listservs that bring all campus constituencies into dialogues about education, interact with student organizations, collect data to impact institutional policies, publish newsletters, and edit journals. Just as CTLs help educators suspend and contemplate those moments between and during classes that might otherwise blur unexamined into everyday practice, *JCTL* invites students, staff, faculty, and administrators who work in and with teaching and learning centers to recognize and theorize the various practices that CTL work involves and the various roles it might serve.

JCTL invites CTL workers and those they encounter to take a critical look at what CTLs themselves do to improve the educational experience of students and teachers. In this issue, for instance, **Michele DiPietro** and **Therese Huston**, in "A Theory and Framework for Navigating Entangled Consultations: Using Case Studies to Find Common Ground," scrutinize the personal and institutional dynamics at work in their interactions with faculty who seek their services to enhance teaching. At the same time, DiPietro and Huston reflect upon the ethical issues involved in their use of case studies to cast their institutional narrative, raising important questions about ways CTL staff might represent their work to the public. Similarly, **Peter Felten**, **Jessie Moore**, and **Michael Strickland**, in "Faculty Writing Residencies: Supporting Scholarly Writing and Teaching," report on their school's efforts to formalize training in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), supporting teachers' scrutiny of their own inquiry processes in such a way that they make public the fruits of their CTL work as well as develop more sensitized approaches to their own students' research and writing practices. Helping faculty move out of the disciplinary modes to which they've become accustomed, the authors' CTL helps teachers think deeply about ways they can study and

represent classroom life and reflect on critical questions of "genre, voice, and expertise" that such cross-disciplinarity raises. In a similar vein, **Jeffrey Bernstein** and **Sarah Ginsberg**'s "Toward an Integrated Model of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and Faculty Development" looks at the ways the methodologies and cultures of SoTL can enhance not only classroom teaching but also CTLs. Their center's involvement with the development of their clients' SoTL projects begins a "learning circle," a continuous model of faculty development, in which faculty who have participated in their services continue to provide programming and mentoring for other faculty at the school.

The more the authors in this issue reflect on their CTLs' activities, the more centers emerge as sites that not only enhance the practices of those they work with but also act as a part of an ecology that intersects disciplinary expectations, various service units, and university missions. In "The Process of Progress: A Teaching and Learning Center Examines the Adaptation of Active Learning Across the Disciplines," for example, **Allison Boye** and **Suzanne Tapp** discuss ways their CTL's successful and less-than-successful attempts to spread active learning have alerted them to the disciplinary expectations that complicate what "active" means to the various teachers they counsel. Examining contextual factors that shape teachers' pedagogies, Boye and Tapp confront their own biases and discern better ways to assess their work with faculty across the disciplines. **Karen St. Clair**'s "Accountability for Educational Outcomes" reports on her academic development work with groups of faculty who teach for course clusters that have commonalities so that the goals, pedagogy, and learning outcomes for each cluster can be strengthened. St. Clair's CTL work involves teachers in a "course design journey" that incorporates her school's commitment to reaffirmation of accreditation requirements alongside its mission statement and educational goals. **Charlie Sweet**, **Hal Blythe**, and **Bill Phillips**, in "Financial Partnering and Other Strategies for Helping CTLs Thrive in Hard Times," consider the scope of CTL work in the context of budget shortfalls. Their report of their efforts suggests a model for implicating CTLs in campus culture through teaming with other institutional and post-institutional entities—alumni, technological services, visiting scholars, various programs, to name just a few. The extent of their outreach raises questions about the scope of CTL work, about the degrees to which they might not only impact classroom teaching but also such features of campus life as faculty governance and emergency response.

Highlighting features of CTL work and raising important questions as to what might facilitate or hinder efforts to improve faculty teaching

and student learning, *JCTL* is designed to help its readers reflect on and negotiate the contingencies of their campuses' locations and aims in light of the activities and missions of CTLs at other sites. In this light, we hope, this and future issues of *JCTL* will deepen our readers' considerations of their centers' identities as our contributors share stories and reflect on the deliberations that determined ways they, among other operations, allocate funds (What kinds of proposals and projects receive funding and how do CTLs determine which ones to fund in what contexts at what time?), shape learning communities and reading groups (How are themes and participants selected? What are the most effective ways of organizing these groups and disseminating the knowledge they construct?), select faculty achievements to recognize (Is this always a healthy form of competition? How does the selection process reflect the campus mission in general or of the CTL's values in particular?), or promote dialogues across campus (How do listservs function to energize discussions on teaching? How do CTLs design newsletters to impact their audiences in specific ways? How might the physical location of the CTL impact the focus and range of dialogues it can generate?). In short, *JCTL* provides space and time for those involved with teaching and learning centers to think deeply about their role and possible roles and to share and debate ideas on how best to develop and maintain pedagogical innovations at their respective campuses.

Our class is just now leaving the room, and someone else's is coming in. We have slides and test tubes spread about, equations on the board, a PowerPoint on the screen, students' journal entries in our hands. We are talking to one another.