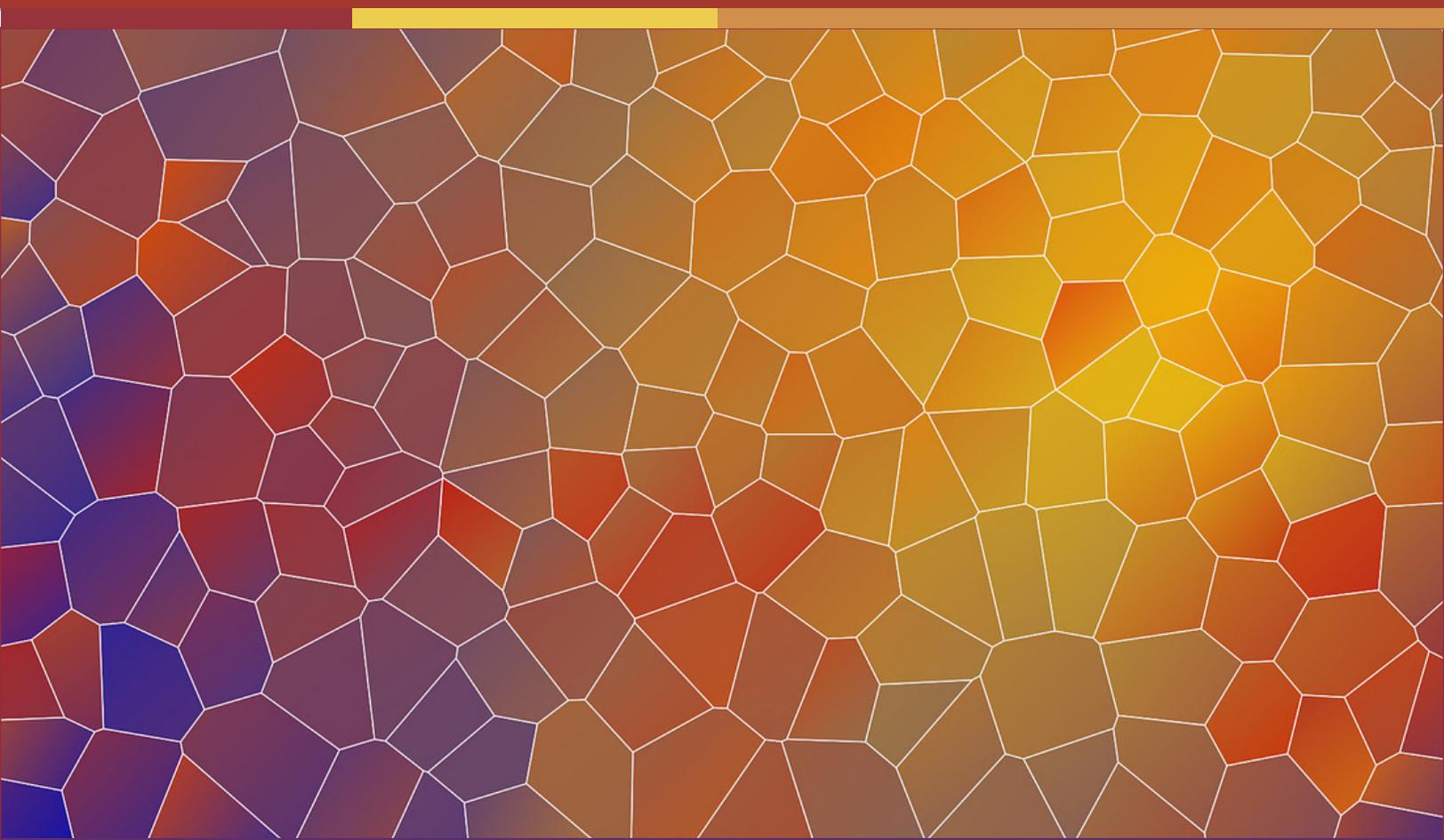


# Currents

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## EDITORIAL

## The Ways We Think About Teaching and Learning

—Benjamin D. Jee

Dear readers of *Currents in Teaching and Learning*,

I'm happy to introduce this latest edition of *Currents*. As always, one of the goals of the journal is to facilitate conversations across disciplinary lines. These exchanges foster new insights and open our eyes to the limitations and implicit assumptions of our own field. When entrenched in a single domain, we may fail to notice that we are taking a perspective, one among many.

Similarly, as instructors we may adopt a particular framework for teaching and learning without explicitly acknowledging or evaluating the alternatives. When teachers are asked to describe their pedagogy, several kinds of ideas emerge, often taking the form of distinct *metaphors* (Alger, 2009; Badley & Hollabaugh, 2012). These metaphors provide more than colorful descriptions of different teaching styles, they influence how we think and behave at a deeper level (Hofstadter & Sander, 2013; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). It is worth a moment to consider the implications of these different metaphors and how they might inform your teaching philosophy and practice.

Consider first the once-popular metaphor that depicts teaching and learning as a *transmission* process, with the teacher broadcasting ideas to students in their classroom—the “sage on the stage.” It is not a coincidence that a conventional name for a student is a pupil, the part of the eye that lets in light. While this way of thinking has not disappeared—for instance, most classrooms are still organized such that the instructor stands at the front of the class and the students face toward them in the same direction—contemporary teachers are more likely to express student-centered metaphors of their practice.

One common metaphor is the idea of a teacher as a *guide*. This suggests that the teacher's role is to help students navigate their learning journey, rather than to simply transmit knowledge. As a guide, the teacher

recognizes the importance of slowing down or changing course when needed, taking cues from students' comprehension and interest.

Other teachers express the metaphor of the teacher as a *coach*. In this framework, the teacher's role is to help students reach their full potential. Whereas a guide takes students down the same path, a coach recognizes that students may seek different destinations. The teacher aims to help students develop the knowledge and skills they need to reach their goals. The coach metaphor emphasizes the importance of building strong relationships with students and providing personalized support.

Another widespread metaphor is the idea of a teacher as a *gardener* (a metaphor that has also been applied to parenting; Gopnik, 2016). In this framework, the teacher is responsible for tending to the classroom “garden” and nurturing the growth of each individual student. Whereas the guide and coach metaphors highlight the teacher's role as a provider of knowledge, the gardener metaphor emphasizes the teacher's role in cultivating of a supportive learning environment for students, in addition to providing patience and ongoing care.

As these examples make clear, metaphors involve a *system* of interrelated ideas that allow us to make sense and draw inferences. The metaphor of a teacher as a guide goes hand-in-hand with the idea of learning as a journey. In this framework, we are invited to view learning as an ongoing process that involves exploration, discovery, and growth. Likewise, students are encouraged to see learning as an exciting and rewarding endeavor. Of course, no metaphor is perfect. Nor is any single metaphor the best for all occasions. Metaphors bring to mind certain aspects of an object or situation, but tend to hide other qualities. The ‘a teacher is a guide’ metaphor may neglect the importance of developing students' leadership abilities and other important skills.

## The Ways We Think About Teaching *continued*

Like our own disciplinary lenses, metaphors influence how we think and behave, what we expect, and how we respond in our role as instructors. Indeed, we are likely to encounter and use many different frameworks in our professional lives. Thinking of students as customers, for example, can be useful for illuminating the incentive structures and financial relationships that affect higher education. Thinking of an instructor as a gatekeeper highlights the importance of enforcing standards. Thinking of a class as a learning community emphasizes teamwork, cooperation, and trust. By becoming aware of the metaphors that permeate our teaching lives, we may not only understand ourselves better, but also appreciate the perspectives of colleagues, administrators, and students themselves. As you explore this latest issue of *Currents*, I hope you are inspired to reflect on your own approach to teaching and learning, including the metaphors that shape your practice.

The first article in the present issue is “An Examination of College Students with Disabilities’ Perceptions of Instruction During Remote Learning Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic” by Michael Faggella-Luby, Lyman L. Dukes III., Emily Tarconish, Ashley Taconet, Nicholas Gelbar, and Joseph W. Madaus. The authors surveyed 216 college students with self-identified disabilities in order to assess their experiences with the pandemic-induced shift to remote instruction in spring 2020. Their results identify some noteworthy advantages of remote instruction, such as self-paced learning and accessibility of course materials. As colleges and universities return to more in-person instruction, the findings of Faggella-Luby and colleagues show how certain pandemic-era practices may be worth holding on to in order to support students with disabilities.

In “Has the Pandemic Affected Student and Faculty’s Use and Perception of Universal Design for Learning?” Lynne N. Kennette, Kathleen Flynn, and Morgan Chapman explore student and faculty perceptions of the use and usefulness of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles before and during the pandemic. Their work provides an interesting glimpse into the UDL practices that were perceived to be effective by students and faculty, and how perceptions differed before vs. during the pandemic, when instruction was mostly online. While there were many points of agreement between student and faculty ratings, and between the

two time points, there were also interesting differences. For example, students ranked the opportunity to practice course content as the most useful application of UDL, whereas faculty considered it far less important. These mismatches represent ways that faculty might improve how they prioritize and implement UDL principles in their classes.

Continuing the theme of lessons learned from pandemic-era instruction, Suzanne Grossman and Danielle DeRise explore how historical depictions of a past pandemic can inform students’ understanding of the COVID-19 era. Their paper, “Using the Past to Inform the Future: An Interdisciplinary Collaboration to Address Undergraduate Pandemic Concerns” reports students’ impressions of disease and its consequences as portrayed in the novella, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*. Students completed course assignments that prompted them to evaluate the events described in the book, and to reflect on the connections to the present day. The authors discuss how the reading of historical texts can help students process contemporary matters, including traumatic events.

During the pandemic, hands-on learning experiences were few and far between. In their paper, “Hands On Workshops for Real World Experience: Scaffolded Assignments and Archival Objects in the Historian’s Craft,” Abigail P. Dowling, Kristen Bailey, Kathryn Wright, and Adam Griggs explore what students learn through hands-on activities in the context of a history course. The researchers designed a series of scaffolded assignments in which students worked with archival objects (coins, figurines, beads, etc.), exploring how and why the objects were created by a particular society. Though digital archives abound in this day and age, the authors argue for the importance of engaging with physical artifacts, and provide evidence that students appreciated the value and utility of the hands-on workshops.

The final article in the present issue is “Instructor Perspectives on Failure and Its Role in Learning in Higher Education” by Jennifer N. Ross, Dan Guadagnolo, Abigail Eastman, Matthew Petrei, Angela Bakaj, Laura Crupi, Shirley Liu, Nicole Laliberte, Fiona Rawle. Given that failure is an integral part of the learning process, it is worthwhile to examine how instructors view the role of

## The Ways We Think About Teaching *continued*

failure in their teaching. Ross and colleagues conducted interviews with instructors from a range of disciplines at their home institution. They report several ways in which failure was perceived by instructors, including an appreciation of its dual nature as a teaching tool and a risk for student retainment and advancement. The authors present ideas about how to navigate these complex issues, including pedagogical methods that could help students learn from their inevitable encounters with failure.

As editor of *Currents*, I hope that you find the present issue interesting and informative. I am grateful to the authors for submitting their work to the journal, and for their diligent and thoughtful efforts throughout the review process. To the reviewers, copyeditors, and members of the *Currents* advisory board, I offer a

heartfelt thanks for generously contributing your time and expertise to the journal. These individuals are acknowledged in the back section of the issue. I also appreciate Henry Theriault's many contributions as the executive director of *Currents*, including his behind-the-scenes efforts to ensure that the journal continues to thrive. Finally, I am thankful to Jonathan Tegg for his excellent work on the assistance *Currents* website. It has been a pleasure working with you all.

Until next time,

Benjamin D. Jee

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