EDITORIAL

Enabling SoTL via Critical Reflections

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The June 2021 issue of AJSoTL is a distinctive read because it features an exclusive compilation of six Reflections on Practice, which left me pondering upon this question—What are the different roles of reflection on teaching and learning for educators, particularly in relation to the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL)? I came up with three conclusions. Firstly, collections of educators' reflections on their teaching practices, students' reflections on personal learning experiences, or any other relevant stakeholders' reflections have the potential to serve as data or evidence that can be further examined by educators to derive meaningful teaching and learning insights via content, discourse, or text analysis. To date, we are seeing an ample amount of SoTL work that utilises written, and even visual, reflections as a data source in addition to data from surveys, interviews, pre-/post-tests, observations, course assignments/portfolio/assessments, think-aloud activities, and so forth.

My second point will highlight educators' critical reflection as a methodology of making meaning from their uniquely individual teaching experiences and disciplinary backgrounds, from their students' learning experiences, from the experiences and expertise of colleagues and/or from other related scholarly explorations. Critically reflective educators are inquisitive about their teaching assumptions, attentively observe their own teaching practices (sometimes in partnership with other colleagues and/or students) to cross-check with their assumptions or theoretical understandings, and may involve themselves in scholarly activities to share practices they find contextually relatable and relevant, that might also be interesting to others. Although critically reflective educators may not necessarily engage in SoTL, such initial reflection practice often inspires the design of further SoTL undertakings.

A critically reflective educator who engages in SoTL will act upon his or her initial observation and analysis (referring to the second role of reflection as described above) by systematically obtaining various other evidence to explain their practices that either support or contradict their assumptions. Drawing on the conclusion derived from the analyses of the collected evidence and how they relate to existing, relevant scholarly sources, the critically reflective educator, who is now a SoTL practitioner, will deeply and carefully delve into the strengths of the current practice and possibilities of future enhanced practice. I regard this meticulous, informed consideration as the third critical role of reflection in any SoTL work.

The Article featured in this issue provides an exemplary showcase of the third role of reflection in SoTL. All the Reflections on Practice in this issue provide commendable evidence on how critical reflections, as described in the second role of reflection, bring forth scholarly activities that benefit the academic community as well as strategies to build up dossiers for academic career advancement. A couple of the Reflection pieces also utilised reflections as their source of data to reveal useful insights.

I eagerly devoured each featured piece in this issue as soon as I received them. Now, after the exciting read, I am delighted to be able to share a brief description of each piece with all of you. I note two major categories of contributions. Four pieces bring refreshing insights into pedagogical practices while another three primarily focus on assessments. I would like to start by highlighting the only full-length Article in this issue. **Mukhopadhyay, Chang-Koh, and Tang** employed a qualitative approach to critically analyse the implementation of a university-community partnerships (UCPs) model, which was practised within an informal undergraduate curriculum in a Residential College to promote holistic learning through community engagement. By analysing students' and community partners' perspectives, the investigators reveal that collaboration and reciprocity can build positive outcomes for both partners. Students learned to build relationships with community partners, nurture deeper empathy towards marginalised communities, develop their organisation and communication competencies while the community partners and their beneficiaries gained a sense of

acknowledgement through such engagement. This study provides evidence on the feasibility of the UCPs model employed to afford the community engagement pedagogy and positive outcomes that can be derived through its implementation. It serves as a significant reference to educators who would like to employ UCP programmes.

Empowering students involves giving students greater control and choice over their own learning. Teachers create environments that help to build students' capabilities and confidence to accomplish the work that has to be done. **Lim, Hilmy, Yuen, Ng and Koh** provide a good showcase of how maker-centred learning pedagogy was adopted to empower students in their Internet-of-Things (IoT) group projects. The classroom was equipped with IoT-related equipment that students could freely access and the physical learning space was designed to afford collaboration and facilitation. Lim et al. posit that the open and adaptive nature of the pedagogy gave students a sense of ownership towards their work, and the diversity of disciplinary backgrounds among students enabled diverse perspectives and knowledge to be integrated into their group projects. The authors have also put forward some challenges that may be further examined by educators who adopt similar pedagogy.

Reflective writing is a widely employed pedagogical tool to encourage deep and active learning. Based on the collection of reflections by a group of teachers of a Residential College, **Toh, Tambyah, and Chang-Koh** explore the extent to which teachers utilise reflective writing in their classes, including the best practices as well as challenges encountered. The team's analysis reveals that reflective writing is widely used to achieve different learning outcomes and as a form of formative assessment although the implementation can be challenging. The authors propose the need to have clear guidelines, guiding questions, and exemplars to facilitate higher levels of reflection, and to adopt a developmental approach in rubric construction to facilitate the grading of reflective writing.

I classify the Reflection piece by **Huijser, Reis, Soo, Tan, Walker, and Wu** as also contributing to the pedagogical aspect although it does not focus on classroom pedagogy. The authors provide fresh insights into the potential of transferring pedagogies that are used in a specific discipline to other disciplines. The authors reflected on their experience in exploring the use of the framework by Miller-Young and Yeo (2015) to facilitate the identification and discussion on the appropriate theoretical frameworks and methodologies for five SoTL projects of diverse disciplines. The conceptualisation of each SoTL project was initially based on disciplinary boundaries. The feedback from colleagues of different disciplinary backgrounds subsequently created an interdisciplinary context during the conceptualisation phase of each project. This Reflection depicts a commendable initiative to foster interdisciplinary collaborations to enrich SoTL projects. I hope this initiative will inspire more educators to undertake a similar endeavour, which I foresee will incite many other exciting explorations on interdisciplinary SoTL collaborations.

Next, I will briefly share the three remaining Reflections on Practice that I categorise as contributing towards assessment practices. In line with the concept of peeragogy (Corneli et al., 2016), peer learning has been ubiquitously employed to enable deep learning. However, creating meaningful participation can be challenging for many educators. **Arnold** employed an anonymous summative peer assessment as a mechanism to gauge meaningful participation in his course that aimed to improve students' teamwork and interpersonal skills. In such assessment, students were required to assess their peers based on a given rubric and provided written feedback on peers' strengths as well as areas to improve. Arnold highlights three benefits of combining summative peer assessment with team-based learning, which was the peer learning pedagogy used in the course. These benefits include increased quality of student participation and depth of learning, peer assessment being perceived by students as being a source of empowerment, as well as students' higher commitment to their respective teams leading to increased motivation to participate.

With the proliferation of online assessments during the current COVID-19 pandemic, I find **Ho's** Reflection particularly relevant and useful. The conceptual framework for mitigating cheating behaviours in online assessments serves as a handy guide to decide on the appropriate assessment tasks. Ho adopts the well-established hazard management framework to categorise different control measures against cheating in online assessments. In addition, this Reflection provides an excellent example of how an educator uses disciplinary area methodologies to create innovation in teaching and learning.

The final Reflection on Practice by **Tan** is not about student assessments but I classify it as a kind of self-assessment guide for a pre-tenure Assistant Professor to become an effective educator. Based on the author's own experience of having gone through the process of conducting research, teaching and serving the Department before obtaining tenure and currently serving on his university's promotion and tenure committees, Tan posits that an effective educator has to be passionate in teaching, always be well prepared before teaching, and ensure clarity in his or her teaching delivery. Tan has also provided some practical tips for tenure-track faculty colleagues to be effective teachers more efficiently. These include recommending the use of well-established textbooks, setting consultation hours to teach students, providing various forms of assessments for learning, amalgamating research and teaching to expose students to the state-of-the-art, seeking out opportunities to teach different courses at different levels as well as obtaining mentoring from experienced tenure-track colleagues.

It is indeed an honour writing the Editorial for this exhilarating issue of AJSoTL that covers various dimensions, ranging from classroom pedagogies, transferring pedagogies between disciplines for interdisciplinary SoTL endeavours to assessment guides for student learning, as well as practical strategies for building up faculty colleagues' dossiers. It was a delightful and fruitful read, and I am convinced that you will have a similarly positive reading experience. On behalf of the Editorial Board, I sincerely express my gratitude to all authors for their valuable contributions to our journal and all reviewers for providing their constructive feedback.

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