How Do We Know They Know?
How Do We Know How They Learn?:
A Message From the Editors

Laurie Richlin    Gregg W. Wentzell
Executive Editor   Managing Editor

The articles contained in this issue demonstrate particularly creative ways that their authors devised to assess their students’ learning and facilitate the ways in which they are able to learn.

Four of the articles focus on unusual methods for encouraging and assessing learning.

Abdalkhani and Menon refine the use of writing in mathematics courses through specific recommendations for using journals to improve both attitudes towards mathematics and mathematical skills. Among other positive outcomes, students both gained confidence in their ability to solve math problems and became better able to “relate the math they learned in the course to its use outside of the course” (pp. 10-11).

Akister and Kim go beyond the usual written assignments used in their courses to include visual elements through student creation of posters that are presented and evaluated during a class session. The benefits gained included the opportunity for students to learn from each others’ work and for instructor and students to engage in a dialogue.

Allison utilizes student-led seminars to increase student learning through active participation in the teaching process. He confirms previous research showing that engaging students in learning leads to deeper understanding. The approach helps ensure that “students who are less capable or less inclined to participate also are supported in their learning” (p. 33).

Sandy takes his students outside the traditional classroom and, through service learning, enables them to make more meaningful con-
nections between classroom learning and the outside world. The experien-
tial projects that students undertake bring them into contact with
parents, the public schools, and professionals in various fields, allowing
them to gain insights that they can use when they become professionals
themselves.

Three articles explore pedagogical methods to understand and assist
students’ learning.

Cooney, Nelson, and Williams explore the use of storytelling and
acting as a learning tool and investigate direct observation as a means to
explore the effectiveness of this teaching strategy. Besides producing high
levels of student engagement and validating the use of direct observa-
tion as a data-collection strategy, the findings of the study influenced all
three authors to change their teaching.

Brown uses a social-cognitive model incorporating reflection and prob-
lem solving to encourage monocultured future teachers to develop
multicultural values and teaching strategies. Her model “demonstrates
that teacher educators can influence the ethical decision-making process
of future teachers by providing a safe, non-judgmental environment”
(pp. 93-94).

Quinn and Griffin analyze student needs for achievement, affilia-
tion, autonomy, and dominance in relation to course satisfaction and
course achievement to determine what types of students learn best in
cooperative-learning settings. Their findings shed light on how students’
personalities influence their ability to learn in various environments.

The editors invite you to reflect on and respond to the articles in this
issue. As they all demonstrate, effective teaching and learning results
from engaging students in the learning process. The strategies presented
here represent unusual and innovative ways to help involve students in
learning. We encourage you to modify them as appropriate, try them
out in your own classes, and report what you find.