

Not a Perfect Science

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Anyone who believes teaching is or ever can be a perfect science is either woefully inexperienced or just hasn't been listening. At the recent Georgia Conference on College and University Teaching, March 18-19, it was astounding to observe the variety of philosophy, style, presentation mode, technological skill, and divergent opinion about teaching. Not that the dialogue was unfriendly, it was anything but. However, one could not help but marvel at the pedagogical diversity advocated by these dedicated, enthusiastic, successful colleagues.

There was a time when college professors didn't want to talk much about these things. Teaching methods were for elementary teachers, we thought. When, through trial and error or emulation of our favorite professors, we stumbled upon a successful teaching style, then the tendency was to guard it closely as though it were our own ("I don't know how I do it; I guess I'm just a natural.").

Thankfully, that day has passed. A growing number of college and university professors are honing their teaching skills purposefully and seriously. They are talking about, writing about, and studying the art and science of teaching in a scholarly, professional manner. Will we ever find the answer? Never! Teaching is not that kind of enterprise.

There are too many variables, too many personal differences, too many learning styles, and too many discipline-specific requirements. What we are discovering is a treasury of different solutions to the mysteries of teaching.

The authors represented in this publication grapple with the important questions about teaching and learning. More importantly, they seek new questions. They do not always agree with one another, nor will the reader embrace everything printed herein. But what a marvelous quest!

Several articles, both in this issue and the next, are based upon presentations made at the 1999 Georgia Conference on College and University Teaching. Authors represent a wide range of disciplines, including English, business, chemistry, education, computer science/information technology, mathematics, speech, public administration, and more. Many articles have broad, interdisciplinary application. All are thoughtful and scholarly, without being arcane. Chances are you will find something with which you can identify; maybe you'll even encounter an idea that will move your teaching in a new direction. Hopefully, you will be moved to share with our readers your own thoughts, discoveries, and explorations.