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On Pedagogy and the Human Sciences

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Editorial: On pedagogy and the human sciences

Michael F. Mascolo¹, Christina Hardway² & Deborah Margolis³

This constitutes the first volume of *Pedagogy and the Human Sciences (PHS)*. *PHS* is an online, interactive, peer-reviewed journal devoted to the scholarly analysis of teaching and learning in the social sciences and humanities. The disciplinary “home base” of the journal is psychology. However, the journal was founded upon a belief in the need for multi-disciplinary, interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches to studying how teaching and learning occurs and can occur in the disciplines that are usually considered to make up the liberal arts.

It is for this reason that we speak of the *human sciences*. In launching *PHS*, our goal is to stimulate theory, practice, research and reflection on the process of teaching and learning in disciplines that address the question of what it means to be human. In so doing, we cast our net broadly to include not only psychology and the traditional social sciences, but also disciplines that are often considered to be part of the humanities – philosophy, literary studies, religious studies, history and related fields. We embrace the full range of different modes of inquiry, including philosophical reflection and analysis, quantitative and qualitative empirical research, action research, ethnography, hermeneutic and discursive analysis, and other modes of expression and analysis.

In the age of globalization and the global economy, questions about what it means to teach and learn abound and take increasingly novel forms. With the rise of the global economy and shifting patterns of world competition and cooperation, the goals of education are changing at a rapid pace. In what may be a paradox of contemporary life, colleges and universities are preparing students for careers that do not yet exist. How can we meet the challenges of assisting our students to position themselves in societies that are changing faster than has ever been the case in human history? How do we meet the challenges of reinventing ourselves to function in a changing world? What is the role of the liberal arts in such a changing world? Is a classical education a relic of an earlier time? Or are the traditional skills and understandings bestowed by a liberal arts education even more important in the face of shifting social, political, cultural and economic realities?

With the rise of the internet, learning technologies and online learning, modes of teaching and learning are being transformed. How are teaching and learning practices changing as a product of technological and social change? What principles should guide these technologically-driven changes in teaching and learning? Over the past quarter to half century, pedagogy in the academy has broadened to encompass a wide variety of different forms of teaching. These include student-centered learning, active learning, participant learning, self-designed learning, experiential learning, collaborative and cooperative learning, and related approaches. Within the academy, these modes of learning occur along side of traditional approaches based on direct

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instruction and lecture. Are these novel modes of teaching and learning effective? Toward what ends? Why is it that traditional modes of teaching and learning have prevailed despite the proliferation of alternatives?

As professors and scholars within higher education, we often find ourselves functioning within our own disciplinary and even sub-disciplinary silos. Unless we are teaching at a small college – perhaps at a very small college – we often do not get the benefit of exposure to pedagogical practices and principles that have their origins in other disciplines. As a result, it becomes easy to lose sight of the broader educational goals that inform our disciplinary (and interdisciplinary) practices. In this way, our disciplines often come to fix the boundaries of our approaches to pedagogy. Many teach in ways that are similar to the ways that they were taught as undergraduates or as graduate students. This in and of itself is not necessarily a problem; perhaps there is merit in our received ways of teaching and learning. From our point of view, however, the question is not whether or not we adopt this or that mode of teaching and learning in a given context; instead, it is whether or not we do so *reflectively*, with an awareness of *what* we are doing and *why* we are doing so.

Regardless of the methods of inquiry that is represented in any given piece of scholarship published in PHS, first and foremost, our goals are to prompt reflection on pedagogical theory and practice. We seek scholarship directed toward addressing fundamental issues surrounding the questions of *what it means to teach and learn*. In so doing, we call for papers that reflect upon first principles as they relate to teaching and learning. Our hope is to identify, reflect upon and reconsider if necessary basic assumptions about what it means to teach and learn in the academy. Such first principles necessarily precede empirical research into the efficacy of any given mode of teaching and learning. Research on the effectiveness of any given mode of teaching and learning presupposes some conception, however implicit, of what we are trying to accomplish and why. These issues necessarily raise questions of the *values* that inform our practice. Empirical research on teaching and learning does not and cannot take place in a socio-moral vacuum. For this reason, *PHS* solicits manuscripts that address first principles in the study of learning processes in higher education, empirical studies that proceed from the clear articulation of the value-laded conceptual systems upon which they are founded, and imaginative approaches to scholarship related to teaching and learning processes, broadly considered.