Inside the Undergraduate Teaching Experience

Beyer, C. H., Taylor, E., & Gillmore, G. M. (2013). *Inside the undergraduate teaching experience: The University of Washington's growth in faculty teaching study.* SUNY: Albany, NY.

Summary: *Inside the Undergraduate Teaching Experience* reports findings from the University of Washington's Growth in Faculty Teaching Study (UW GIFTS). This qualitative study was conducted to determine if faculty seek opportunities to enhance/improve their teaching when there is little outside pressure to do so. The sample consisted of 55 faculty members (52.7% female and 47.3% male; 7.3% African American, 5.4% Asian American, and 87.3% Caucasian) at various ranks and in eight disciplinary areas; eight graduate students were also included via focus groups. The evidence presented suggests that faculty in this study were not only engaged in continuously changing their teaching, but were doing so in response to feedback from intentional assessment. These results offer an alternate portrait that challenges the myopic misperception that faculty at large, urban research intuitions are unconcerned with student success.

"These findings do not argue that the teachers in our study were excellent teachers, nor do they provide evidence that students learned what faculty members hoped they would learn. They speak to intentions rather than outcomes. As such, they are inconsistent with public narratives that portray college faculty as speechifying machines with little thought or concern about what their students are learning" (pg. 60).

Implications for Teaching:

1. Incorporating active learning strategies can be particularly useful when delivering or assessing learning outcomes.
2. An awareness of and focus on how students learn is an important first step to enhancing instruction.
3. Small changes can pay meaningful dividends (i.e., start by thinking about how you can teach and/or assess one course objective).
4. Growth as teacher requires a willingness to get it wrong sometimes. When getting started, remember that risk-taking is a far more important trait than knowing-it-all.
5. Assessing the effectiveness of the changes you make can take on many different forms, including your own personal observations. Be sure not to overlook or underestimate changes that affect classroom climate, which can yield tremendous gains in student learning.
6. Start with the end in mind. Ask yourself what really matters and than map a way to that destination that resonates with your personal and professional (disciplinary) experiences and knowledge.
7. Workshops, events, and even informal conversations with other faculty can provide inspiration, motivation, and an approach to take on the challenge of changing your teaching.