STORIES OF HOPE

REIMAGINING EDUCATION

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5. Creating hope through T-shaped values

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Abstract

This chapter explores the concept of a "T-shaped community" in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), advocating for an intentional shift towards student-centred education in Higher Education. It argues that fostering learner ownership and problem-solving mindsets is essential for preparing students not only academically but also for life beyond university. Inspired by strong collegial support, the authors outline key values for embracing a more humanistic approach to teaching and learning, including context, valuing diverse experiences, an ethic of care, student collaboration, and research integration. Ultimately, the chapter envisions a hopeful and transformative future for Higher Education that transcends disciplinary and institutional boundaries.

Keywords: T-shaped students; values; hope; Higher Education; Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

Introduction

Education is constantly evolving and ever-changing, never more so than during and since the global pandemic. Moving from face-to-face, to online, to hybrid applications, and back again, the role of educators in this dynamic landscape extends far beyond the confines of traditional teaching.

At the heart of this evolving educational philosophy lies the recognition of the ever-changing needs and aspirations of learners. Our work involves thinking about the T-shaped student, a concept that highlights the integration of deep discipline-specific knowledge (the vertical stroke in the "T") and essential non-academic life skills (the horizontal bar), such as problem-solving, communication, and global citizenship (Eady et al., 2021). Influencing the T-shaped student is the equally important T-shaped educator, who not only possesses expertise in their subject area but also embodies the broader set of skills necessary to foster critical thinking, teamwork, and adaptability in students, creating a learning environment that nurtures both academic and personal growth (Eady et al., 2021). The T-shaped educator is not solely a teacher but integrates the principles of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) into their practice. SoTL involves a systematic and evidence-based inquiry into teaching and learning practices, aiming to improve student learning outcomes and enhance the overall effectiveness of educational approaches (Trigwell, 2013). By incorporating SoTL principles, the T-shaped educator ensures that their pedagogical decisions are grounded in research, leading to a continuous improvement in their teaching methods (Eady et al., 2021). Embracing context as a foundational element, these hopeful educators leverage their roles in various settings to drive positive change in learning and teaching practices. Their aim is to challenge conventions and celebrate diversity, creating inclusive spaces where students from different contexts and cultures can learn with and from one another.

Central to the T-shaped educator's approach is a profound appreciation for the experiences and perspectives that each student brings to the learning environment. By valuing and integrating students' diverse stories, educators actively question whose narratives are being represented. In doing so, they promote a critical approach

to education that fosters inclusivity and equity (Cook-Sather et al., 2021). The T-shaped educator operates with an ethic of care, viewing students not merely as recipients of knowledge but as individuals on a transformative journey of empowerment and social responsibility. These educators transcend disciplinary boundaries, imparting not only subject matter content but also metacognitive skills, critical thinking abilities, and global awareness (Eady et al., 2021). By nurturing a student-centred ecosystem of learning, they provide fertile ground for students to explore, question, and grow.

This chapter delves into the core principles of the T-shaped educator, shedding light on how these educators prioritise students' wellbeing, incorporate diverse perspectives, and integrate research with teaching. Through an exploration of their values, the cultivation of hope, and their dedication to inclusivity, the T-shaped educator emerges as a beacon of positive change, empowering students to become lifelong learners and contributors to a brighter and more interconnected future.

We, an international, interdisciplinary group of researchers, share our interpretations and reflections of how we embody the core principles of the T-shaped educator.

Context (reflection by Earle)

Context is not only central to the T-shaped educator's values but equally to the principles of SoTL as elucidated by Peter Felten (2013). Accordingly, SoTL inquiry is grounded in context, and it is this context that defines, differentiates, and determines future questions and methodologies. For me personally, context matters as I work in different roles, academic environments, and communities of practice. My current role—as a learning and teaching specialist in a large widening participation UK university—enables me to observe and influence learning and teaching practice across contexts and cultures. One of the greatest challenges for SoTL and the T-shaped educator is to consider how context provides a platform for challenging conventions and embracing diversity.

Pat Hutchings and Lee Shulman (1999) imply in their description of SoTL as an act of "going meta" that the lens of SoTL operates in a theoretical context. Their taxonomy of SoTL inquiries has become a touchstone for the field, organising the work of SoTL by the questions

it asks: "what works" questions "seeking evidence about the relative effectiveness of different approaches"; "what is" questions "describing what it looks like"; and "visions of the possible" questions framing learning experiences in new or different ways to change or enhance practice (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999, p. 13). This taxonomy of questions is central to T-shaped education in that it connects the challenges and principles of doing SoTL in context. T-shaped educators seek not to differentiate but rather to diversify how they impact colleagues, students, and stakeholders from different contexts, communities, and cultures by creating an inclusive environment for learning with and from one another.

Valuing peoples' experiences and perspectives (reflection by Lisa)

The T-shaped educator centres learners' previous experiences and knowledge, seeing these as valuable contributions to current learning. In addition to asking, "What do my students need to know?" the T-shaped educator also asks, "What experiences and thus perspectives do my students bring to our context, and how can that contribute to our current conversation?" When we integrate students' stories and view them as assets, we are actively questioning whose stories are being told. This promotes a critical approach to our work, which promotes inclusivity.

A Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-racist (DEIA) frame needs to permeate all that we do. Wondering first what assumptions, and thus, perspectives, people bring to the learning situation, which have been moulded by their experiences, creates a basis for such a frame. This is where I start when working with faculty as the director of the Teaching and Learning Center at Oregon Health & Science University, an academic health centre in the Pacific Northwest, United States.

Once I learn about these perspectives, we then can talk about what resources may be available and scaffolded to meet their goals. For example, our centre's larger umbrella unit houses FREE (Foster Respectful and Equitable Education, n.d.), which partners closely with schools and programmes to provide a variety of workshops and training for inclusive teaching. Our centre is co-hosting a monthly book club this year to discuss *Reframing Assessment to Center Equity: Theories,*

Models, and Practices (Henning et al., 2022). This is grounding our work not only with classroom assessment but also with annual programme assessment, which is needed for institutional accreditation. Lastly, we are proud of our digital Accessibility Resource Center (2023), which provides faculty with directions for creating a digitally inclusive environment. Digitally accessible documents and environments have been especially foregrounded since we all went remote in 2020, though certainly this has always been needed. Rather than a reactive approach to digital accessibility, we promote the principles of Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2023).

These and other resources are valuable; however, they are not nearly as meaningful unless we first pause and ask where our learner is and how their experiences can inform and be informed by them.

Ethic of care (reflection by Nina)

T-shaped educators focus on "educating for empowerment, emancipation, and social responsibility" (Kreber, 2005, p. 402), which necessitates transformative-based teaching and a deep ethic of care. We transcend disciplinary boundaries and teach transferrable skills and competencies—metacognitive skills, deep critical thinking skills, and global learning, to name a few. We attend to the holistic development of learners, and leverage evidence-based, effective pedagogies to allow them to apply and integrate their learning, in and out of the classroom. We view and approach our students as "humans in development", and therefore the process of learning and growing is paramount.

For me, an encompassing ethic of care towards my students is always rooted in a profound acknowledgement and gratitude of the utter privilege that it is to guide and witness learners' development. I am shaping future travellers on the journey of life-long learning, which is a joy, but I also recognise the great responsibility inherent in such a privilege. If I am truly to educate for empowerment, emancipation, and social responsibility then I must effectively foster and structure deep, transformative learning opportunities. To do so, I treat each one of my courses as full immersion into an ecosystem of learning that simultaneously challenges and supports learners.

If my students are to engage with difference, grapple with ideas that challenge their beliefs, understand underlying causes, question the status quo, elucidate their own and cultural value systems, view their role in the success of the whole (group), and build bridges with others, then the classroom experience must be truly student-centred. At the heart of this ecosystem is constructing a polyvocal, democratic community where knowledge, skills, and competencies are co-created and practised in an environment that fosters curiosity and intellectual risk-taking.

Collaborative learning projects build a sense of responsibility towards one's own and others' learning. Constant critical reflective writing enables students to explore the influence of identity on their own (and others') learning processes. Close reading and detailed observations build attention skills, while student-led discussion activities build leadership skills. Integrative learning portfolios and non-traditional grading practices allow students to provide evidence-based explanations of their growth. All this is a demanding task each and every day—while I provide the boundaries on the map, so to speak, I don't dictate the paths students take, which requires me to relinquish control, be fully present, and provide formative feedback to constantly push students' learning further. It is worth it because the ecosystem of immersive, holistic, collective learning helps build the transferable skills necessary for students to live engaged, relationship-rich, growth- and change-oriented lives. By immersing myself in the "messiness" and challenge of non-linear paths so that students become their best selves, I, too, fuel the process of my own growth, as a pedagogue and person.

Students as contributors: Co-learning and reciprocal learning (reflection by Mayi)

The T-shaped educator recognises the essential role played by students as partners in their own learning, acting as collaborators with their instructor and their peers in understanding the material to be able to apply newly gleaned meaning in novel situations. Designing one's course to incorporate group work provides a learning environment that fosters the collaborative construction of knowledge.

Incorporating group work can promote authentic learning as it provides tasks and environments that simulate how learning is used and applied in the real world. Since 2011, I have been involved in the mentorship and supervision of students on the University of Calgary iGEM (international Genetically Engineered Machines) team. Over a ten-month period, undergraduate students from faculties across campus work together to develop and execute a project that addresses a real-world problem using the tools and approaches of synthetic biology. The students then present their project in competition against teams from around the world.

To support these multi-disciplinary teams, I've developed courses to address their needs: to learn the subject matter content of synthetic biology and their applications in different contexts (constituting the vertical bar of the T-shaped learner), and to learn vital skills of communication, collaboration, and leadership (the horizontal bar). The participation of students as co-creators and co-developers has always been an underlying design principle for these courses, where students from previous years return to mentor and teach the new team. Thus, these "returners" develop and deliver lectures, design learning activities and assignments, and even give feedback on student work. Through a process of critical reflection, we assess and reassess how we offer these courses, gaining insights not only from our own observations, but also from the students' reflections.

Research as integral, not extra (reflection by Corinne)

A T-shaped SoTL educator takes a researcher mentality to their teaching, thinking critically about the "big" questions such as "the larger curriculum goals and purposes of college and university undergraduate education... What students learn, and why" (Kreber, 2005, p. 402). These educators refuse to perpetuate what John Warner (2020, p. 207) calls "teaching 'folklore', the practices handed down instructor to instructor ... doing what had been done unto me, no matter whether I thought it was effective". Instead, they draw upon others' SoTL findings and consider how these can be translated into their context and combined with their own observations to enable evidence-based decisions.

In my previous role as a teacher educator (at an Australian university), I explored some of these big questions and teaching folklore in my own practices through SoTL research projects. For example, in one of the teacher education courses that Michelle and I taught, we noticed that students were not interacting with the online materials provided and that attendance for the in-person weekly lectures was low. Working with colleagues with expertise in learning analytics and educational design, we restructured the course around fortnightly online modules consisting of slow-release hurdle tasks requiring students to interact with readings, short video lectures, and quizzes. By exploring the academic literature on using learning analytics to inform learning design and analysing data from our student cohorts, we used SoTL research to enhance the teaching and learning experiences for our students (Eady et al., 2022).

My current role as an academic developer (at a different Australian university) has provided new opportunities to come alongside educators from across the university and help them to see the possibilities for integrating "research and teaching [with] both viewed as activities where individuals and groups negotiate meanings, building knowledge within a social context" (Brew, 2012, p. 109). My task in this space is frequently to be a critical friend, prompting educators with questions like those asked by Dan Bernstein and Randy Bass (2005, p. 39): "How did they know that their students were learning? Did the students' learning promise to last? What did teachers really know about the processes of their students' learning?". Exploring these questions with curiosity is an exciting invitation for educators to research their own teaching and strive to be intentional with their teaching practices.

Conclusion

The concept of the T-shaped educator represents a hopeful and powerful paradigm shift, embodying a holistic approach that transcends traditional pedagogy. Throughout this chapter, we have explored the key principles and values that define the T-shaped educator and their transformative impact on the learning landscape. As an agent of change, the T-shaped educator embraces this reality, acknowledging the importance of adapting to diverse contexts and student populations. Central to the ethos of the T-shaped educator is a genuine appreciation for the rich tapestry of experiences and perspectives that students bring to their educational journey.

This means that at the core of the T-shaped educator's approach

lies an unwavering ethic of care. Recognising students as "humans in development", these educators prioritise the holistic growth and empowerment of their learners. By transcending disciplinary boundaries and imparting transferable skills, such as critical thinking, metacognition, and global awareness, they equip students with the tools they need to thrive in an ever-changing world. Recognising and fostering students as partners in their education, involved in the co-creation of curricula and even delivery, emphasises the importance of agency in one's formation.

Furthermore, the T-shaped educator integrates research and teaching, viewing both as interconnected pursuits that enrich and inform one another. By adopting evidence-based practices and continuously refining their teaching methods, these educators demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning and a dedication to providing the best educational experience for their students.

As we reflect on the profound impact of T-shaped educators, we recognise the vital role they play in shaping the future of Higher Education. By instilling values, nurturing hope, and fostering inclusivity, they inspire students to become active contributors to a more interconnected, compassionate and hopeful world. It is through their unwavering dedication that the T-shaped educator enriches the lives of countless learners, leaving an indelible mark on the landscape of Higher Education and the future of our society. T-shaped educators' guidance moves us closer to a future where education is a powerful force driving positive change, empowerment, and hope.

Steps toward hope

- Encourage interdisciplinary collaboration and holistic student development—promote a T-shaped education community.

- Shift towards a more humanistic and humane perspective in Higher Education.

- Balance academic preparation with life skills development.

- Create opportunities for students to take ownership of their learning.

- Embrace curiosity about what you, and your learners, are doing and explore why.

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