



Exploring Research-Based Teaching

Carolin Kreber, Editor *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*: Jossey-Bass, Fall 2006

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This volume from the *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* series investigates ways in which institutions can support and promote research-based teaching. Two perspectives of research-based teaching are explored. The first perspective focuses on students as generators of their own disciplinary knowledge through inquiry-based approaches. The second perspective addresses inquiry-based learning by teachers themselves into the process of teaching. While there are other publications covering such links between teaching and research, Kreber asserts that this volume is unique in that it brings together well-established colleagues from several countries to offer their perspectives. Administrators and educational developers who are interested in strengthening the link between research and teaching at their institutions will find this volume most useful. In addition, individual disciplinary faculty interested in taking a more research-based approach to their teaching will also find some gems, though some digging might be necessary.

The book is organized into three major sections. The first section offers an overview of the connection between teaching and research at the institutional level and suggestions for promoting teaching-research synergies: why developing these synergies is important (Chapter 1), how these links can be developed at the departmental and institutional level (Chapter 2), and how academic practice units can support academics in their professional development with regard to these links (Chapter 3). The second section covers developing the process perspective of research-based teaching, whereby students participate in a substantial amount of inquiry-based learning: how problem-based learning can contribute to effective teaching (Chapter 4), how stronger links between teaching and research can be built into undergraduate courses and programs (Chapter 5), and how the internet can be used to promote inquiry-based student learning (Chapter 6). The third part takes more of a pedagogical focus whereby faculty themselves are the participants in inquiry-based learning about teaching in their own disciplines: how disciplines can both contribute to and benefit from the relationship between inquiry-based learning about teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning (Chapter 7), how educational development units can promote inquiry-based learning about teaching (Chapter 8), what different methodological approaches can be taken (Chapter 9), and how an evidence-based approach to teaching could enhance practice (Chapter 10). Chapter 11 concludes the book with a discussion of themes that arose from the preceding chapters.

This book does an excellent job of summarizing the various interpretations of what research-based teaching is and how it may be manifested. There are many solid suggestions that both educational developers and individual disciplinary faculty will find useful. The questions that are asked are superb jumping off points for practitioners to begin critical re-

flection of their own teaching. A general theme that arises several times in the book is that because students demand more practical skills and less ivory tower theoretics in their educations today, traditional approaches useful for the students of yesterday are insufficient for students of today. Kreber (Chapter 1) refers to the AACU report *Greater Expectations*, which argues that students need to master intellectual and practical skills, different forms of inquiry in different disciplines, and personal responsibility to be successful in an increasingly complex world. While many faculty think that students are, or should be, at college to learn for the sake of learning, the reality is that learning takes second seat to what students think they need (the grade) to succeed later in life. Inquiry-based learning is offered as a promising approach that addresses the broadened expectations placed on both faculty and students today.

The book has two minor weaknesses. Though the book is not intended for disciplinary faculty, a brief glossary covering some of the educational jargon would have made the book more accessible to a broader range of potential readers. Several contributors specifically mentioned using “language they can understand” when referring to supporting disciplinary practitioners in their endeavors to integrate research-based teaching in their courses, and most of the chapters did explain terminology they used, but there was still some educational jargon that slipped through without clarification. Also, the index is not as detailed, and thus not as helpful, as it could be; only cited authors and general topics are included. Finding a section of interest to reread might require flipping through the book to locate it again because none of the relevant terms is in the index. Fortunately, the book is small enough that this process is not very time-consuming.

The book fulfills its main goals of illustrating the possibilities in interpreting and promoting research-teaching synergies and providing guidance to institutions in promoting both forms of research-based teaching (inquiry-based learning by students and disciplinary inquiry by teachers into the process of teaching). Research-based teaching is proposed as a way to respond to the challenges of teaching in the modern age of mass education where students need to be prepared for not only their vocational aims, but also their personal and civic lives as well. It is an excellent starting source for learning more about how to incorporate research-based teaching at one’s own institution, providing many suggestions applicable even to individual faculty hoping to improve their teaching. As Lewis Elton put so appropriately in Chapter 4, improving practice is not about “doing things better” but about “doing better things.”



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