

# Taking teaching and learning seriously: Approaching wicked consciousness through collaboration and partnership

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## Abstract

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has demanded large-scale collaboration within all organizations, including higher education, and taking teaching and learning seriously, in this moment, means leveraging partnerships to address the wicked (large, complex) problems cited by Bass (2020). These problems are not ours alone to solve; rather, we make the case for a “wicked consciousness,” an amalgam of perspectives, in educational development. Guided by intellectual humility, our success as educational developers ought to be measured by the quality of our collaborations as well as our ability to learn with others, form equitable partnerships, and lead others by our example.

**Keywords:** wicked consciousness, partnership, collaboration, interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary

## Introduction

That teaching and learning had its own claim to scholarship was a novel idea 30 years ago (Boyer, 1990). Many, including Randy Bass,

subsequently called for instructors to apply a data-driven mindset to student learning (Bass, 1999). Since then, educational development has matured into its own scholarly field (McDonald & Stockley, 2008), and educational developers have become key players in the organizational development of higher education institutions (Beach et al., 2016; Kelley et al., 2017). As eight educational developers working toward organizational change at a diverse group of institutions, we combined our experience and perspectives to answer the following question:

*“What does it mean to take teaching and learning seriously in this moment, in the current ecosystem of higher education?”*

In November 2019, this question inspired us to explore opportunities for leveraging the educational developer role to bridge boundaries and build an institutional culture focused on “learning from and with students” (Bass et al., 2019). We concur with the assertion of the New Learning Compact framework (Bass et al., 2019) that higher education is under-performing in whom it serves and how well it serves all learners and that for higher education to fulfill its promise, teaching and learning must be constantly re-centered at the core of institutional missions. With this in mind, we argue that taking teaching and learning seriously in this moment requires educational developers to pursue strong partnerships at multiple levels in and beyond our institutions to create meaningful change: to learn from and with one another.

### ***Pandemic-Induced Connections***

In the spring of 2020 when the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic transformed society, including higher education, many centers for teaching and learning (CTLs) found themselves suddenly playing a more central role and working with a host of new collaborators as they helped facilitate the rapid emergency-induced shift to remote instruction (Korsnack & Ortquist-Ahrens, 2021). The coronavirus pandemic emphasized the need for institutions to focus on learning as

a collaborative effort involving all stakeholders, not simply the thing that happens in the classroom. While the New Learning Compact (Bass et al., 2019) includes full-time and adjunct “faculty” in their definitions, we propose further expanding the concept of “instructor” to include anyone who helps students develop skills and dispositions for lifelong learning.

Acknowledging that institutions may continue to operate in siloed structures such as departments and units, educational developers must build bridges across these boundaries with the purpose of building a culture in which coaches, success/academic advisors, career development centers, and administrators all recognize student learning as central to their unit’s ability to support the institutional mission. Furthermore, they must do so in ways that provide equity of access and equity of experience in higher education (Winkelmes, 2015). Thus, from a learning perspective, student success can be defined as “academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, and [successful] post-college performance” (Kuh et al., 2006, p. 7).

This learning-focused definition of student success provides a different answer to the perennial question of higher education’s “return on investment” in an era when content knowledge is just a touch screen away. An instructor’s ability to encourage and guide students in making sense of information, integrating it across contexts, and using it creatively will be of even greater importance in the post-pandemic higher education landscape due to increased online coursework—a modality that is known to have lower retention and completion rates (Bawa, 2016). If “it takes a village to raise a child,” then we believe it takes a community to effectively nurture the passion for learning in our students through demonstrating and modeling this value both within and beyond the classroom. Various units across our institutions interface with students on a daily basis, working alongside them as they experience authentic problems. We acknowledge this complicates our

work in supporting teaching and learning by adding the requirement of effective relationship-building across institutional units.

### ***Supporting Skill Transfer***

A trend that exemplifies the increasing complexity of our mission is the call to support instructors in aligning course outcomes with employer-driven needs assessment data (e.g., National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE] survey data). Consistently, employers expect and require college graduates to demonstrate “adaptability, communication skills, creativity, critical thinking and reasoning, ethical decision-making, leadership, problem identification, problem-solving, and teamwork” (Taylor & Haras, 2020, p. 2). Education, especially a liberal arts education, does not often claim to train students for the workforce. But the needs and requests of employers do indeed align with the habits of mind that universities aim to develop in their students, as highlighted in the American Council on Education’s recent *Beyond Classroom Borders: Linking Learning and Work Through Career-Relevant Instruction* report (Taylor & Haras, 2020).

Leveraging connections across the institution from an educational developer perspective will help students connect the dots between classroom learning and workplace skills. Units ranging from the registrar’s office to information technology to health services play key roles in establishing safe, functional, and inclusive teaching spaces and learning experiences, but their contributions toward institutional learning goals could go further. For example, a registrar’s office representative on a general education committee will better understand institutional learning goals and thus better explain to students why they must take certain classes. Similarly, an information technology help desk that connects services such as file conversions or video editing to digital learning goals and/or workplace skills will help students understand the broader usefulness of specific course assignments. In addition, partnerships between social work or nursing faculty with health services staff would allow faculty to link classroom learning with health

practices students experience in their interactions with student health services. During the pandemic, almost every institutional unit has had to learn new online collaboration tools, increasing the opportunities for data capture and even learning analytics in non-academic units. The more tools, data, and people we engage, the more complex our work becomes. We thus challenge the educational developer to engage with this complexity, to focus on “connecting” our higher education ecosystem, and to become an organizational change agent (Grupp, 2014).

### ***Building a Culture of Collaboration***

This call for collaboration and convergence in higher education, “to work together to rejuvenate an antiquated system for our accelerating times” (Davidson, 2017), is not ours alone. To lead a culture of collaboration, we need to identify and develop latent relationships in our work. This means educational developers need to be mindful of the inclusion of all voices, including both instructors and students. It also requires that we find common ground across units with distinct but often complementary missions such as academic skills support services, learning management system (LMS) services, instructional technology, and more. Building on the idea of a CTL as a hub (Wright et al., 2018), strengthening our connections to the institutional community requires continuous addition of new spokes while maintaining the essential preexisting spokes. Both the quantity of the spokes and their quality (how supportive they are) should be continually assessed in providing an effective structure for our work. The building of relationships and the continued maintenance of preexisting partnerships are essential to the role of educational developers.

Partnerships within educational development are myriad and fall into multiple categories. Some partnerships are more common, such as with educational technology, disabilities services, libraries, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) units at our institutions. Other partnerships seem logical but may remain unrealized, such as academic advising, student affairs, and other student services. Finally,

many potential partnerships at our institutions involve expanding the definition of teaching and learning to embrace extracurricular and co-curricular elements of students' education: athletic departments, student organizations, and external stakeholders, such as employers, who assist with internships. What all of these partnerships have in common is that they widen the lens through which we view learning: who is involved and where it happens. By defining learning more holistically, we have an opportunity to redefine teaching too.

Again, the mission to take teaching and learning seriously is more expansive than a CTL can achieve on its own. We must productively collaborate with others within and beyond our institutions to realize these goals (and more). As the New Learning Compact (Bass et al., 2019) provides a method to assess and prioritize institutional needs, we extend this work by making the case that broadening a definition of learning and student success requires educational developers to expand the scope of their work, develop the mindset necessary to do that, and identify new metrics to assess the effectiveness. More specifically, we argue for the development of a "wicked consciousness" to recast collaborators in and beyond the institution as partners, as defined by the Students as Partners model, and to develop new ways to assess the efficacy and impact of this work.

## **The Need for Collaboration**

Calls for collaboration in educational development are not new. Chism (2004) argued that this meant leveraging and engaging the assistance of other stakeholders on campus. However, others have pointed out that potential partnerships are often unrealized (e.g., see Behling & Linder, 2017). The value of collaboration has never been so clear as during higher education's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, when failure to collaborate effectively resulted in barriers to student success. Indeed, "collaboration and exchange across difference spurs participants to rethink their assumptions" (Bass et al., 2019). While

the pandemic has likely resulted in some reactive or forced collaborations, a true test of what we have learned from these challenging times will be to proactively pursue a post-pandemic culture of collaboration within and outside of our institutions.

In pursuit of collaboration, Bass calls for us to broaden our scope and lead “all sectors of faculty as well as staff” to engage in educational outcomes (Bass et al., 2019). We agree with Bass (2020), who asserts that inter- and/or trans-disciplinarity “is not just about disciplines or academic expertise, but also about functional role, identity, and perspective” (p. 21). We concur with a definition of discipline that moves beyond the silos of academic disciplines to include our colleagues from across the institution: for example, seeing student affairs as a discipline (Patterson, 2019) with its own holistic, student-centered worldview. As our field continues to grow, including even more perspectives can widen our lens on student experience, expanding our definition of student learning to include co-curricular and extracurricular learning: “Everyone—diverse faculty, staff, advisors, students—should be regarded as learners, inquirers, researchers, and agents of change” (Bass, 2020, p. 21).

### ***Wicked Problems***

We believe this culture of collaboration must extend beyond the walls of our own institutions. There is much to gain from learning with and from outside partners such as potential employers, community organizations, and government. Why take this approach? We need all of these perspectives to address what Bass calls “wicked problems,” an idea from design:

*A wicked problem is a social or cultural problem that is difficult or impossible to solve for as many as four reasons: incomplete or contradictory knowledge, the number of people and opinions involved, the large economic burden, and the interconnected nature of these problems with other problems. (Kolko, 2012)*

The problems we see within higher education, such as low graduation or retention rates, inequalities of access, and questions about the endurance of student learning, become wicked when we grow our perspective to consider not only the role of actors within the institution but also the broader systemic, historical, and cultural influences at play. We need to consider how institutional and community stakeholders contribute to or hinder these efforts.

What happens if we fail to take this broad view? We may fail to understand the true scope of the problem, and our solutions may be inadequate, if not wholly inappropriate. As one example, Bass (2020) pushes against siloed views of learning and student success. He highlights the inherent incompleteness of approaching either in isolation, pointing out that “if one understands the problem of student success as a *tame* problem . . . it is likely we will focus *only* [emphasis added] on strategies intended to have direct impact on student learning, persistence, and completion” (Bass, 2020, p. 13). Using educational equity as another example, Bass notes that more collaboration ensures equity is not relegated to any one office but integrated within faculty’s work (Bass, 2020). Both examples demonstrate that solving tame problems can contribute to addressing wicked problems, but we must keep context in mind. In our increasingly corporate cultures of assessment and accountability, there is pressure to yield to a kind of short-termism, in which the need to generate returns (graduation and retention rates, greater diversity and selectivity of admissions) limits thinking to solutions that are tangible but perhaps short-sighted and therefore “tame.”

The scope of wicked problems asks for a perspective that places our strategic aims but also our expertise in a broader context. If, as Bass (2020) argues, “In a wicked problem frame, the optimization of educational practice is not the end game” (p. 28), then we need to reconsider how we define our expertise and how we ground our professional identities. If we place our identities in the context of addressing wicked problems through higher education, then we may need a new way to represent our work. Just as Barr and Tagg (1995) advanced

academic development from a teaching model to a learning one, educational developers may find themselves moving even further from a transmission model to a constructivist or even *emergent* model (Bass, 2020). Our effectiveness cannot lie solely in our knowledge of pedagogical best practices, just as instructors need more than their content knowledge. Whether it's the model of coach (Cruz & Rosemond, 2017) or the more general idea of "connector," our work asks more of us than selling our vision to others. We need to promote transdisciplinary collaborations that are co-equal, more power-neutral, and, at least in part, exploratory.

### ***Bridging Boundaries***

In the pursuit of more transdisciplinary collaboration, it's important to note that building bridges requires acknowledging the boundaries we cross in collaboration. Inequities and power dynamics exist within higher education: academic bullying occurs across roles (see Prevost & Hunt, 2018), faculty realignment (such as contingent faculty being reassigned to new academic professional tracks), and the continuing proliferation of an "adjunct underclass" (Childress, 2019) all highlight the need to develop trust across differences of position and power. One way to approach this is through introspection and self-assessment. We may need to ask ourselves questions such as the following: Do our advisory boards (if we have them) have representatives from all ranks of instructors, including adjunct instructors, and do we seek new perspectives with the addition of student or faculty affairs professionals and others? How can we involve students as partners, as well as those outside of our institutions in our teaching and learning mission? Finally, how do we maintain our already tenuous identities (see Rudenga & Gravett, 2019, 2020) in this expansive vision of educational development?

While we want to advocate for a teaching and learning perspective in the work of our collaborators, we may also need to integrate a student affairs lens, a faculty affairs lens, a campus life lens, an employer

or community partner lens, and others into our scope of teaching and learning. We need to be willing to ask the question of what constitutes learning in this context and get an answer that we don't anticipate, with a willingness to expand or adapt our definitions of learning. A culture of collaboration means that we are open to growth too. We build bridges not just to teach or spread our teaching and learning mission but also to allow ourselves to be changed by those with different views/perspectives within our institutions. The effort to build bridges asks us to assess honestly the extent of our contact with faculty/instructors, staff, and students: across career stages and across demographics.

These multiple perspectives, from both within and outside of our institutions, form the possibility of what Bass refers to as a convergence approach (Bass, 2020). Wicked problems ask us to discover and consider a broad range of evidence and experiences. As Bass (2020) notes, "By understanding the problem of learning as a wicked problem . . . the co-evolution of the field's problems and the tools it has to address them should radically expand our approaches toward improving education rather than narrow them" (p. 11). But how do we create a system that is likely to unearth what we don't know, known unknowns (such as the perspectives of others) and unknown unknowns (questions we haven't thought to ask, evidence we haven't thought to consider)? We argue for a wicked consciousness, a persistent amalgamation of perspectives achieved only through a culture of collaboration. Kolko (2012) concurs: "Due to the system [*sic*] qualities of these large problems, knowledge of science, economics, statistics, technology, medicine, politics, and more are necessary for effective change. This demands interdisciplinary collaboration, and most importantly, perseverance."

Framing all of this discussion, the COVID-19 pandemic and related social, global, and cultural challenges have been a stress test for the existing collaborative infrastructure of our institutions. In many cases, the crisis forced us to team up across units in response to immediate problems in need of solving. While it remains to be seen whether or not we go back to business as usual (functioning more independently and less collaboratively) post crisis, the pandemic has made real

how pressing it is for everyone to see how all stakeholders support—or become a barrier to—a wider definition of student success. The immensity and interrelatedness of wicked problems call upon a more collaborative and inclusive response, guided by complementary (even competing) perspectives working in concert. Approaching a wicked consciousness requires a shift from collaboration to partnership: the orientation to *learn from and with one another* is what animates this effort.

## **From Collaboration to Partnership**

Transdisciplinary collaboration asks for a willingness to recognize our collaborators, be they instructors, staff, students, or external stakeholders, in co-equal partnership. We may take this idea for granted in our relationships with colleagues while we may continue to see others through a lens of institutional hierarchy. The Students as Partners movement, embraced by numerous institutions across the United States and beyond, is an approach that invites students into collaborations with instructors, administrators, and educational developers. It is characterized by “a relationship in which all involved—students, academics, professional services staff, senior managers, students’ unions, and so on—are actively engaged in and stand to gain from the process of learning and working together” (Healey et al., 2014, p. 12). This perspective asks us to see students as equals, to honor their lived experience as learners, and we are challenged to “learn from and with” students (Bass et al., 2019). We believe that this can serve as a model for revisiting collaborations throughout our networks, intentionally recasting them in the spirit of partnership.

### ***Learning From and With Students***

The idea of learning *from* students is embedded into educational development. While our most common collaborators are the

instructors themselves, we often bring in the student perspective as a way to further discussions about teaching and learning (e.g., student feedback). In this sense, students are already indirect collaborators. Learning *with* students asks us to go further, asking what we can accomplish together. What differentiates this from collaboration is an evolving question (see Table 1 for comparison). The research on student partnerships is a growing body of scholarship focused on co-inquiry. This literature asks questions about power structures in higher education, and some believe it has the potential to disrupt traditional teaching and learning relationships (Cook-Sather et al., 2014).

**Table 1. A Partnership Model for Educational Developers**

Characteristic or opportunity	Proposed strategies
Common characteristics of wicked problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incomplete or contradictory knowledge</li> <li>• Number of people and opinions involved</li> <li>• Large economic burden</li> <li>• Interconnected nature of these problems with other problems (Kolko, 2012)</li> </ul>
Partnerships goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn from and with others</li> <li>• Form equitable and sustained partnerships</li> <li>• Lead others by example</li> </ul>
Potential partnerships	<p>Common</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational technology</li> <li>• Disabilities services</li> <li>• Libraries</li> <li>• DEI units</li> </ul> <p>May be unrealized</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic advising</li> <li>• Faculty affairs</li> <li>• Student affairs</li> <li>• Other student services, e.g., campus life, study abroad</li> </ul> <p>Through expanded definition of learning and student success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extracurricular and co-curricular elements of students' education: athletic departments, student organizations</li> <li>• External stakeholders who assist with internships, employers, community organizations</li> </ul>

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Characteristic or opportunity	Proposed strategies
Potential boundaries to bridge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disciplinary</li> <li>• Academic expertise</li> <li>• Institutional</li> <li>• Inequities and power dynamics that exist within higher education</li> <li>• Functional role</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Perspective</li> </ul>
Opportunities to cultivate trust, including across hierarchies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In and around classrooms</li> <li>• During committee meetings</li> <li>• Through governance structures</li> <li>• Via the cumulative effects of casual encounters</li> </ul>
Helpful frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The New Learning Compact (Bass et al., 2019)</li> <li>• Kolb's model of Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984; Kolb &amp; Kolb, 2005)</li> <li>• Students as Partners (Cook-Sather et al., 2014)</li> <li>• Hub Model of CTLs (Wright et al., 2018)</li> </ul>

As the rhetoric of disrupting teaching and learning through partnership can seem like heady stuff, the extent to which we can learn *from* and *with* students may be met with some skepticism, some of it reasonable and understandable. There is evidence that our students may not always be accurate judges of their learning (Carpenter et al., 2020; Deslauriers et al., 2019), and we may hesitate to yield so much ownership to students. Limits of students' perspectives may cause us to cast doubt on the value of seeking their input. Learning *with* students also requires a high degree of agency on the part of the students involved (Weimer, 2002). They may have little experience with directing their educational experiences, and their shift into the position of partner may require us to solicit dialogue to empower a great sense of agency. We need to establish trustworthiness to complement our expertise (Little & Green, 2021).

Skepticism notwithstanding, we also need to be critical of the state of existing partnerships, with a call to do more than adopt the appearance of partnership. A review of Students as Partners literature (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017) found that much of the scholarship was

instructor led and instructor authored; students were listed as the lead author on very few of the reviewed articles. In response, Morris (2019) calls for a shift from “students as co-enquirers” to “students as joint authors.” In turn, teachers and students “become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (Freire, 1993, pp. 79–80). We can learn from these areas of growth when cultivating our partnerships. This idea has roots in the literature of collaborative learning (e.g., Peters & Armstrong, 1998) but also ties back to the co-equal, constructivist approach to educational development that builds on Barr and Tagg (1995). In addition to informing our approaches, partners can guide them. We need to be willing to yield a hand from the wheel—to share the responsibility of steering change—giving partners a chance to co-determine the direction of our co-inquiry.

### ***Learning From and With Others***

If we adopt this stance of learning *from* and learning *with* in other collaborations, one could imagine educational development partnerships across the university. Student affairs as partners, faculty affairs as partners, and so on, as well as a renewed commitment to instructors as partners (rather than clients). Whether or not these become formalized initiatives, this mindset can inform our work with colleagues: empowering the expertise of others in collaboration. Just as a Students as Partners initiative benefits from the true inclusion of student voices, our work will benefit from the inclusion of voices from those outside of our ranks who could provide new insights, connections, and the critical mass to effect change as partners.

The co-inquiry of partnership asks us to acknowledge the limits to our perspectives. It requires cultivating trust across power and asks us “to go beyond listening to the student voice” (Healey et al., 2016). Matthews (2017) makes the case that Students as Partners is an open-ended strategy that asks us to let go of the need for specific outcomes. Intellectual humility (Whitcomb et al., 2017) is required to invite differences into our partnerships, into our scholarship, and into

our definitions of teaching and learning. We have made strides in this direction through the growth of discipline-based educational research (DBER) and disciplinary approaches in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). In seeking partnerships, we ought not to smooth over differences but to embrace them. In bringing different perspectives to light, partners have the chance to understand one another's intentions (Abbot & Cook-Sather, 2020).

### **Partnership in Action**

Maintaining effective relationships with staff, instructors, and students represents an opportunity to learn from one another and to collaborate within our institutions. In addition, educational developers are well positioned to encourage and promote constructive discussions about teaching and learning beyond the academy's boundaries. The understanding of teaching and learning theory and data could be better leveraged to help students transfer skills and knowledge developed in college classrooms to life beyond institutional walls. This is especially critical in the current ecosystem of higher education. Even before the recent COVID-19 pandemic, state appropriations for higher education were decreasing following a peak in 2001 (Tandberg & Laderman, 2018), and although most analyses confirmed the value of a college degree, some economists and policy-makers have questioned higher education's "return on investment" (Abel & Deitz, 2014; Carnevale et al., 2019).

In an era when higher education has been called upon to identify and implement "high impact practices" (Kuh, 2008) such as undergraduate research, civic and global engagement, and experiential learning, instructors have sought support and resources from CTLs. As a result, educational developers have been actively involved in creating opportunities for collaboration, connection, and problem-solving (Beach et al., 2016; Grupp & Little, 2019). The role of educational developers as leading from the middle to move campus-wide initiatives forward can be further explored in areas such as career discernment and

development. For example, CTLs may offer workshops that connect teaching approaches to appreciative advising, growth mindset, and theories of psycho-social development. Through collaboration and problem-solving, educational developers may better serve the institution by working with campus colleagues to integrate external stakeholders into their work, such as prospective employers, internship site coordinators, and local community leaders.

### ***Prospective Employers as Partners***

Educational developers traditionally focus on improving teaching and learning based on their knowledge of SoTL literature and their institutional knowledge of practices that are effective. However, in order to facilitate connections with potential employers and local businesses, it might be beneficial for educational developers to facilitate translations between SoTL and occupational skills language. For example, educational developers could introduce instructors to resources on occupational skills (e.g., Occupational Information Network, <https://www.onetonline.org>, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration). If instructors and students can translate between course and program learning goals and the occupational skills of interest to employers, students will be more effective at communicating their relevant skills to potential employers. Communication between these groups can improve cross-unit goal alignment by improving explanations from multiple stakeholders about how courses and programs relate to occupational skills. These connections are valuable for institutions that serve adult learners who are often already in the workforce, and they are important for students in institutions with a liberal arts focus as well (Gallagher, 2018, 2020).

### ***Internship Site Coordinators as Partners***

Educational developers and vibrant CTL communities also maximize the impact of out-of-classroom experiences by fostering an atmosphere in

which student experiences are connected back to course and program learning goals via a student-focused course design. For example, a neurobiology class that draws on out-of-classroom student experiences in day cares, hospitals, nursing homes, and cafés to enrich classroom discussions fulfills the promise of learning from and with students while also revealing to students the connections between classroom learning and areas of possible professional practice. Repetition of this experience over multiple years reinforces this reflective metacognitive practice as a way to fully develop a growth mindset approach to workplace experiences.

### ***Community Leaders as Partners***

One learning framework that can be effectively used by educational developers and instructors in partnership with students and career development, study abroad, or community relations offices is Kolb's 1984 model of Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005). This model's emphasis on interactive learning and information processing (McCarthy, 2016) complements more current research demonstrating the importance of metacognition (Ohtani & Hisasaka, 2018). Recent educational practice has acknowledged the benefits of internships, study abroad, and service learning, but these experiences are not always fully connected to course, program, or institution-level learning goals. For example, while study abroad inevitably involves active learning experiences, a recent study (Strange & Gibson, 2017) reports that students found "that the most influential parts of their programs were the field trips, self-reflection, community interaction, and writing aspects" and concludes that these components relate closely to Experiential Learning Theory components. While further research is needed to determine how best to optimize the learning opportunities inherent in experiential settings (study abroad, internships, field work), there is a role for educational developers in these conversations. Helping instructors and partners (study abroad offices, community partners) find ways to integrate student learning gains

with the rest of their education is key in supporting students' post-graduate pursuits.

An explicit focus on student learning with respect to personal and professional goals can also be beneficial for students who participate in shadowing or internship experiences. These types of career preparation or volunteer experiences rarely link planned activities to desired learning outcomes. In the best-case scenario, students can create their own experiential learning "syllabus" that must be approved by both the instructor advisor and the experience supervisor. Journaling ensures that students engage in reflective observation and abstract conceptualization as their experience progresses. This linkage between classroom practice and, most commonly, career-related out-of-classroom experiences joins the student, instructor advisor, staff member, and internship or workplace supervisor in a shared endeavor to maximize the student's learning from the experience. This network of relationships may work most effectively when guided or curated by an educational developer.

## **Re-Assessing Our Work**

We have said that it takes a community to effectively nurture the passion for learning in our students. Moving this effort forward (by modeling the value of learning within and beyond the classroom) will require more collaborators, more voices, and more partners, so that it becomes a community effort rather than a fragmented response (see Table 1). We also need tools to get started. Bass et al.'s (2019) *New Learning Compact* offers strategies for effecting change across all levels of our institutions. Though its scope and purpose are much larger, we are excited by its potential to be used as a "how-to" or aspirational inventory for educational developers working to be more "active, imaginative, and capable 'principal investigators' of the asymmetry between the classroom and the world" (Bass, 2020, p. 19). Finally, in addition to partners and tools, we need a way of assessing this community effort.

### ***Investigating Primary AND Secondary Impacts***

CTLs build programming and engagement opportunities designed to have positive effects on the instructors and broader academic community (i.e., students, staff, and administrators). We call the outcomes of these programs, services, and events the *primary* impacts of the center. Many instruments exist to assess this work, notably Hines's (2017) Field-Tested Model, the Defining What Matters framework (Collins-Brown, Brown et al., 2018), and the Center for Teaching and Learning Matrix (Collins-Brown, Haras et al., 2018). However, the *secondary* effects (or emergent outcomes) of educational development can take many forms, including those that come about as a result of spontaneous or serendipitous interactions—those that are not planned and therefore not assessed, or not assessable, by traditional measures. These unplanned interactions can lead to deeper connections as they happen organically, rely on common interests or needs, and are maintained because they have mutual impact. But how do we measure them?

In the absence of specific data that can tell us exactly how effective we are in our role as “connector,” we must find other means to assess and improve in this aspect of our role. The New Learning Compact offers strategies and principles to guide this work. And we see patterns in the New Learning Compact framework that echo Bass's earlier call to action in “The Scholarship of Teaching: What's the Problem?” Specifically, he calls for teachers to forgo a mindset wherein problems are seen as a need for remediation (i.e., an outcomes-oriented approach) and instead approach them as investigators (i.e., a process-oriented approach): “Changing the status of the problem in teaching from terminal remediation to ongoing investigation is precisely what the movement for a scholarship of teaching is all about” (Bass, 1999).

In efforts to reassess our work, we may need to advocate even more for the value of qualitative data in our work. While we can solicit instructor feedback and undertake needs assessments, we might also be more careful observers of casual, or backstage,

conversations that can have surprising power (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009). These interactions build our campus network; expand our understanding of individual instructors and their needs and interests; and give us more specialized knowledge of groups, disciplines, resources, and the history of the institution and its people. These *ripples*, often unseen, have the power to shape a culture of teaching and learning at our institutions. Participants in a course design academy share their experience with colleagues, a workshop on retrieval leads to discussions about how to help students study more effectively, and CTLs take a lead role in shaping the implementation of peer review of teaching on their campuses. We might understand the relationship of primary and secondary impacts as a cycle: we seek to impact, we are impacted by others, and we hope to have greater impact.

While our effectiveness in the role of educational developer is typically assessed through measurable impacts (attendance, diversity of attendees, instructor learning, and instructor change of attitudes), our secondary impacts are those that come about as a result of our role as “connectors.” We believe these impacts are *correlated* with the quantity and quality of our network, relationships, and connections across the institution and with external stakeholders; however, what comes out of these connections is where the real value of the educational developer is revealed. Measuring such impacts is a worthy goal. The challenge is not unlike the challenges of measuring student learning—we can assess whether a student has achieved specific learning outcomes, but it’s not always possible to claim that the teaching was the reason for this success. Indeed, ascribing a cause-and-effect relationship is challenging when it comes to the secondary impacts of educational development. This shift is a prerequisite to a much larger shift: the shift from evaluating our work within the context of our institution to evaluating our work within the context of addressing larger, more *wicked* problems.

## Conclusion

Bass (2020) challenges us to see learning as a wicked problem: “the long-term problem of reimagining and enacting education so that it plays a meaningful role in creating a more just society and fostering a sustainable human future” (p. 10). Throughout this article, we have argued for a culture of collaboration, more specifically a culture of partnership. We have declared that our impact will depend on our ability to listen effectively to others and to bring others into the core of a university’s mission: teaching and learning. We believe that reconsidering our work in terms of partnership asks us to reassess our work in terms of our relationships. Returning to the Hub Model of CTLs (Wright et al., 2018), we have claimed the importance of both developing new spokes and maintaining the thickness of preexisting spokes as a way to strengthen our connection to the institutional community. We aim to assess our work through both the quantity and quality of relationships. Yet while we may be able to demonstrate relationships built, how do we know if we’re making progress on our wicked problems?

### *Pandemic Reflections*

In late fall 2019, we first imagined “taking teaching and learning seriously, in this moment” in terms of the growth and maintenance of the partnerships, both formal and informal, we were developing with campus instructors, staff, and students. As we moved forward from spring 2020 into the continuing uncertainties of subsequent semesters, the concept of collaboration narrowed to essential questions of assisting instructors and other campus stakeholders to deliver their services with greater flexibility. Goals became constrained to that which was needed to preserve the institution’s core mission—education. Anecdotally, our response to the pandemic was driven by collaborative and creative problem-solving rather than by ready-made, evidence-based solutions, as this moment was unlike any other experience we could draw on. In a larger context, a tension developed between immediate

problem-solving and initiating collaborations, bridge-building, and developing partnerships in sustainable ways. There was no time to consider future sustainability; the conditions required immediate actions. As Bass reflected on the porous barriers between higher education and the outside world, COVID-19, an accompanying economic crisis, and protests against systemic racism have required that educational developers and CTLs deal with these immediate and real challenges of teaching and learning in an uncertain, unprecedented environment.

As we negotiated the summer of 2020 with its demands and challenges of preparing for an ambiguous fall semester, we experienced a tension between negotiating the immediate needs and taking teaching and learning, writ large, seriously. We focused on internet access, how to navigate social distancing in classrooms, and how to hold up our educational ideals in a time when so much felt compromised. Simultaneously, the recognition of disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on persons of color in the United States combined with continuing police killings of black men and women spurred a summer of protests that placed a persistent reality for many into the public consciousness. Many of us struggled with not only our workload but also our sense of purpose. Yet “solutions to wicked problems can be only good or bad, not true or false. There is no idealized end state to arrive at, and so approaches to wicked problems should be tractable ways to *improve* a situation rather than solve it” (Kolko, 2012). Thus, the shift toward wicked consciousness asks only to begin: to inform ourselves, to ask better questions, all in the service of beginning again.

### ***Looking Forward With Wicked Consciousness***

Broadening the current scope of educational development and moving forward into the future are not incompatible. The idea of taking teaching and learning seriously needs to be serious minded as well as open minded. Bass (2020) makes this clear: “In a wicked problem stance, some learning design research (pedagogical and curricular) should be carried out solely for the purpose of discovering the ‘adjacent

possible' [citing Stuart Kauffman]" (p. 23). As we embrace the idea that the pivot from the spring of 2020 has become a protracted change in the face of unprecedented circumstances, our answer to Bass's question of "What's the problem now?" is evolving. Thus, our response to the idea of taking teaching and learning seriously can evolve while we don't lose sight of existing ideas, research, and potential solutions. Efforts to study the efficacy of online teaching and learning predate our current circumstances, and ideas about engagement online can find a place alongside our present, ongoing concerns about mental health, burnout, and managing the changes we've asked of instructors and students alike (and educational developers too).

Finally, taking teaching and learning seriously *in this moment* may mean that our educational development takes on more of a moral dimension. It's a choice to value an approach that focuses our efforts on wicked problems. Evidence can inform our decisions, but it can't make our decisions for us. The wicked problems of climate change, racial injustice, and all forms of cultural instability have become even more pressing in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and ask us to help students integrate their learning into a wider context. We know from decades of research on learning transfer that learners may not make active connections between what they learn in our institutions and the outside world unless they are prompted to do so in multiple contexts (Barnett & Ceci, 2002). In our roles, we can create opportunities for instructors to consider how to connect their teaching (and student learning) to solve the big problems in society, and we must.

The question of what it means to take teaching and learning seriously in this moment is indeed a wicked one. Yet we have probed questions that can guide our response. What does it mean to take ourselves and our partners seriously as teachers? As learners? Is it to expand the idea of discipline to include partners within and outside of our institutions, to expand the label of instructor to include all who are responsible for the teaching mission of our institutions, and to embrace the label of learner as something we have in common with our students? When we consider the possibility of wicked consciousness, we believe

it can come only from deconstructing the barriers and silos we've put between departments, between teachers and learners, between external and academic stakeholders, and between academia and the outside world. Bass would argue that these boundaries are porous, if illusory, and in this moment, it is critical that educational developers create meaningful and lasting partnerships that not only solve problems "but also restlessly and authentically open up the questions of learning and higher education as if our human future depended on it" (Bass, 2020, p. 28). That, to us, would be the very definition of taking teaching and learning seriously in this moment.

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