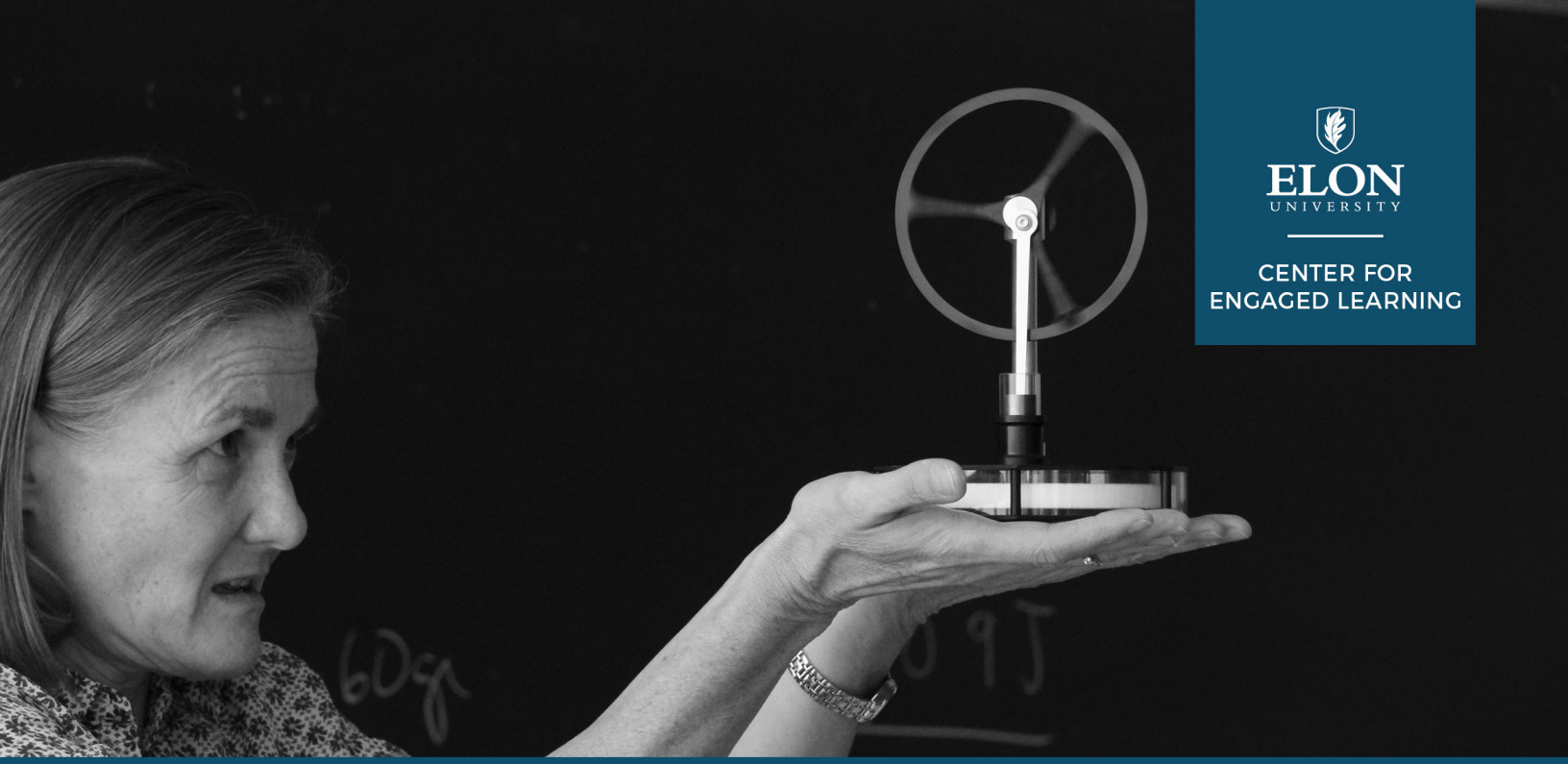

ELON UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR ENGAGED LEARNING

What Teaching Looks Like

Higher Education through Photographs

Cassandra Volpe Horii and Martin Springborg

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1.01
A faculty member in biology performs a dissection for students in an anatomy and physiology class at a mixed baccalaureate/ associate's institution.

CHAPTER 1

Classroom Interactions

The Heart of Teaching and Learning

Classroom teaching . . . is perhaps the most complex, most challenging, and most demanding, subtle, nuanced, and frightening activity that our species has ever invented.

—Lee Shulman (2004, 504)

If I were lying on my death bed, I would want to look at these pictures to know that I did some good teaching.

—humanities instructor and participant in The Teaching and Learning Project, baccalaureate institution

Toward a Shared Picture

Imagine this scenario, which describes the experience of one-third to one-half of incoming first-year college students in the early part of the 21st century in the United States: you are the first in your family to attend college and tomorrow is the first day of classes (NCES 2019b). You have skimmed the college's website and maybe you have been to campus for a tour and some orientation sessions. None of those visits included a real class. What do you expect your classes to be like? What picture is in your mind's eye?

It is likely that your image of a college classroom has been shaped by website and brochure photos, which are often staged or edited to portray an idealized archetype of a college experience (Willers 2019), or perhaps by iconic film scenes, more often than not involving a professor, a chalkboard, and mostly bored or passive students. But none of these visual narratives scratch the surface of today's postsecondary educational experiences.

Why don't we, collectively and publicly, have a more complete and nuanced sense of what actually happens in college classrooms? My work as an educational developer, having founded and directed centers that focus on "helping colleges and universities function effectively as teaching and learning communities" (Felten et al. 2007), gives me a special perspective on this question (first-person statements in this chapter are in reference to Cassandra Volpe Horii). I have observed hundreds of classes, discussed postsecondary educational experiences with students and their instructors in considerable depth, and collaborated on the creation of course materials like in-class activities and interactive digital elements for both in-person and online instruction. Yet until I saw images from *The Teaching and Learning Project* in 2011, at which time I had already spent twenty years in higher education as an undergraduate, graduate student, postdoctoral fellow, fac-

1.02
A faculty member in chemistry answers student questions after a chemistry class at a baccalaureate institution.

ulty member, administrator, and educational developer, I had never encountered an authentic photograph of a college-level class.

The long wait for meaningful visual representation of the work of colleges and universities still surprises me. After all, most students and instructors now carry a camera at all times, built into their mobile devices, and social media has turned making and sharing images into a near-constant activity. Is there something special about the college classroom that has kept it hidden from the ever-present eyes of digital photography? We think so, and will explain why

through the images themselves, with help from scholars of education and photography, and observations from instructors whose classes appear in the images of *The Teaching and Learning Project*. While we are grateful that classrooms have not been trivialized through abundant selfies, opening classrooms by way of images is crucial if higher education is to improve—for the benefit of every student wondering what their first day of college will be like, and ultimately, for the benefit the world in which they live.

As you encounter the next group of photographs, consider whether, and in what ways, they reinforce or counter the images of teaching and learning in postsecondary institutions that you had before arriving, and that students likely bring with them today.

1.03
A graduate student teaching assistant helps students in a chemistry class at a doctoral institution.

1.04
Students in a modern dance class take cues from their instructor, a faculty member in dance at a doctoral institution.

1.05
A faculty member in biology shows plant samples during a lecture in biology class at a mixed baccalaureate/ associate's institution.

1.06
A faculty member in physics uses a remote control during a general physics class at a doctoral institution.

1.07
Students engage in small group discussion during a comparative literature class at a baccalaureate institution.

College Classrooms and Photography

It is possible, but unlikely, that postsecondary classrooms have evaded photographic documentation because of a collective belief that the work of teaching and learning is too complex and meaningful. In the 1970s, well before photography's digital age, Susan Sontag proposed that taking photographs can be "a way of certifying experience, [and] also a way of refusing it—by limiting experience to a search for the photogenic, by converting experience into an image, a souvenir" (Sontag 1977, 9). Sontag's description is the antithesis of what many college educators hope and aim for in their classes, where deep thinking, grappling with complexity, and fully engaging in an educational experience are often the goals. We would prefer the explanation that classrooms have been infrequently photographed so as not "to interfere with, to invade, or to ignore whatever is going on" (Sontag 1977, 11) because the meaningful acts of teaching and learning going on there are too important to disturb or diminish.

Unfortunately, persistent undervaluing of the work of teaching offers a more realistic explanation for the scarcity of postsecondary classroom images. Higher education likes hierarchy, whether related to disciplinary status, educational work, or race; as Lindsey Malcom-Piqueux describes the origin of these systems in the US, "socially-constructed racial hierarchies, and the distribution of rights and opportunity on the basis of these hierarchies, were an organizing principle for American society including the higher education system" (2020, 3). While seventeenth and eighteenth century colonial colleges in the US focused on ethical and intellectual questions and drew upon Greek and Latin works to support their own "rationales for human hierarchy" (Kendi 2016, 17), the colonially-minded American projects of agricultural and industrial expansion became a priority for mid-nineteenth century institutions, also fraught with inequities and purposeful exclusion (Boyer 1990; Malcom-Piqueux 2020), and access to leading research

institutions in the US continues to be stratified by race and income to this day (Carnevale and Strohl 2013; Tough 2021, 19). Globally, the rise of neoliberal capitalism since the late 1970s has continued to reinforce stratification and inequity in higher education, driven by "near-global . . . competitive markets in public services such as education" (Kumar and Hill 2009, 1).

Such hierarchies affect access to education and the value of different forms of work within higher education. The top of the academic hierarchy tends to emphasize research, or as Ernest Boyer called it, the "Scholarship of Discovery" (Boyer 1990), rather than teaching. Ellen Condliffe Lagemann offers further insight into the lack of respect for the education part of higher education: "It is hardly a secret that people who study and practice education are engaged in low-status work. . . . In various ways, low status has undermined possibilities for developing a strong professional community and generative scholarly traditions" (Lagemann 2002, xii). Lagemann traced the low status of systematic educational study to gendered conceptions of work: "Associated with teaching, which came to be seen as 'women's work' relatively early in the nineteenth century, the very term educational research seemed to be an oxymoron to many notable university leaders" (Lagemann 2002, 232). In the US, institutions most focused on teaching are also disproportionately where racially minoritized students attend college (Carnevale and Strohl 2013; Astin 2016). The continued low status of teaching is further reflected in poorly developed systems for evaluating teaching effectiveness in higher education—something that those seeking to elevate its status are working to change (Weaver et al. 2020). Given these multiple contributors to and indicators of the low status of teaching, it is no wonder that we have had few systematic representations, including visual representations, of what happens in postsecondary classrooms.

Since the early 1990s, advocates like Boyer have advanced the vision of a more balanced and intentional valuing of teaching alongside research and other

scholarly activities (Boyer 1990). But without ways to share the work of teaching, creating a professional community has remained challenging. Also in the 1990s, Lee Shulman helped redefine what such community could be and do for teaching: "I now believe that the reason teaching is not more valued in the academy is because the way we treat teaching removes it from the community of scholars. . . . We celebrate those aspects of our lives and work that can become . . . 'community property.' And if we wish to see greater recognition and reward attached to teaching, we must change the status of teaching from private to community property" (1993, 6). Since then, movements such as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and Discipline-Based Educational Research (DBER) have emerged, allowing college and university educators to publish and discuss the work of teaching (Hutchings, Huber, and Ciccone 2011; Henderson et al. 2017). High-quality, authentic photographs are another powerful way to collectively share and value the work of teaching and learning in college classrooms, not only within the higher education community, but also with families, neighbors, taxpayers, policymakers, and other public stakeholders.

The early 2020s represent a particularly important time for the higher education community to reflect on how their work is portrayed within and outside of the academy, though top concerns are continuations of ongoing issues. Despite the well-documented potential for college-level educational attainment to contribute to lifetime fulfilment, civic engagement, and earnings, public funding for education in the US has declined precipitously in recent years (Trostel 2015; Tamborini, Kim, and Sakamoto 2015; Whitford 2020)—a trend mirrored globally by the "definitive retreat of the state as a provider of education" (Kumar and Hill 2009, 1). At the same time, colleges and universities have increasingly been held accountable for deficits in student learning and graduation rates, with teaching quality directly implicated in their shortcomings (Arum and Roksa 2011; Bok 2017). We find ourselves in a transition period when it is clear that

1.08
A faculty member in communications opens a public speaking class at an associate's institution with a relaxation exercise.

teaching should be better, but efforts to improve it remain largely unrewarded, with Lagemann's early millennial observation still ringing true: "In recent years, there has been wide complaint about poor teaching, and there have been efforts to place teaching on a par with research in assessing professorial achievement. . . . The status and affective maps of universities have discouraged interest in pedagogy among noneducationists and encouraged the priority they have placed on research over teaching" (Lagemann 2002, xv). While accreditation standards for US colleges and universities do encourage institutional leaders to pay greater attention to teaching now than they did several decades ago and initiatives are underway to incorporate teaching effectiveness into review, promotion, and tenure decisions for faculty, accompanying culture change has remained slow (NASEM 2020). It seems to require more than reports and meetings to make change happen.

Photographs give us a direct line and a visceral way of communicating that the work of postsecondary teaching already contains models and examples with the potential to achieve the changes that colleges and universities are called upon

to make. They provide powerful visual evidence of collaborative, authentic learning across disciplines and institutions, while also shining a light on the shortcomings and challenges; this form of documentation and communication has an important role to play in efforts to improve higher education.

1.09
A faculty member in statistics conducts a lecture in an introduction to statistics course at a doctoral institution.

1.10
Faculty and graduate teaching assistants in biology hold a meeting about teaching an introductory biology course at a doctoral institution. (Composite image of three photographs made in close sequence.) View a larger version of this photograph on the book website.

1.11
Students participate in a hospitality management class at a doctoral institution. View a larger version of this photograph on the book website.

Educators Encountering Their Classrooms

Shulman conjectured that "if teaching is going to be community property it must be made visible through artifacts that capture its richness and complexity. In the absence of such artifacts teaching is a bit like dry ice; it disappears at room temperature" (1993, 6). By artifacts, Shulman probably meant collections of items showcasing what teaching and learning leave behind: documents and texts, written by instructors and students, in the process of making and completing learning tasks like assignments and exams. He may also have been thinking of audio/visual items like slides, portfolios, or video clips. We do not know if Shulman had photographs in mind, but the images from *The Teaching and Learning Project* make teaching visible in ways that capture its richness and complexity—that same complexity that he found made teaching so very "challenging . . . demanding, subtle, nuanced, and frightening" (2004, 504)—a claim he made especially about primary and secondary teaching, but we find to be true, albeit in different ways, of postsecondary teaching. Here, we will explore how photographs accomplish this feat, in part through the reflections of participants in the project who, usually for the first time, encountered their own classrooms through photographs.

We interviewed college and university faculty who participated in *The Teaching and Learning Project*; their reflections offer important insights about the role of photographs in documenting, sharing, and ultimately improving classroom interactions. Each participating instructor agreed to have their classes photographed, as did the individual students appearing in the images. Some volunteered and others were invited by a campus organizer, such as a dean or director of a center for teaching and learning. In the book's online resources, you can find a "Sample Photograph Release Form," as well as "Sample Institutional Visit Schedules." The courses photographed spanned academic departments and disciplines, including professional fields like business, nursing, and education; humanities; social

sciences; and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The interviews were part of a formal research project that was reviewed and approved by the board overseeing research with human subjects at one of our institutions.

The instructors participating in the interviews each received a digital album of selected photographs from their class and had a chance to view them before the interview. Our discussions began with the simple question you encountered in the introduction, "what do you see?" along with several follow-up questions and topics. This process and the results of the research are documented in our 2016 article (Springborg and Horii 2016). This book's online resources include "Photography-Based Instructional Consultation Prompts," an interview guide that may be used to structure teaching consultations with instructors that incorporate photographs from their classes.

For some instructors, the act of having anyone visit, much less document and discuss their teaching, was novel, highlighting the sense of isolation and lack of community they normally experience. For example, an instructor in a technical/professional field at a baccalaureate institution commented: "Sometimes I feel private about what I do in the classroom. But in twenty-six years of teaching, only three (including you) have observed my classes." Unlike primary and secondary teachers, college educators do not necessarily receive training or pre-service practice in teaching. Now, through campus-based centers for teaching and learning, STEM education centers, disciplinary programs, and national programs in the US, more pre- and early-career college teachers are being trained for and practicing teaching together (Border 2011; NSEC 2020; Baker et al. 2014; Hill et al. 2019). Outside of the US, organized centers and educational development programs have also been increasing (Wright 2019) and having an increasing impact on teaching (Gibbs and Coffey 2004; Gibbs 2013). Photographs can contribute to the sense of community, reflection, and professional development

on teaching by enhancing early-career training efforts and facilitating discussion among later-career faculty, who may not have had those opportunities early on.

Once classroom doors are open to photographs, you might wonder whether and how still images "capture . . . the richness and complexity" of teaching and learning. A STEM instructor at a baccalaureate institution explained: "[Photography] captures moments in time that in the heat of the battle you don't usually pick up on. I've been very interested in looking at these [photographs]—it reinforces some things I'm trying to do; points out other things I'm not noticing . . . raising my awareness about what might be going on." This instructor's sense of the enhanced observational capacity afforded by still images aligns with what Susan Sontag theorized in the 1970s: that "photographs may be more memorable than moving images, because they are a neat slice of time, not a flow"; "the force of a photograph is that it keeps open to scrutiny instants which the normal flow of time immediately replaces" (Sontag 1977, 17, 111).

Whereas Sontag admonished this photographic trait as "insolent," warning that "truths that can be rendered in a dissociated moment, however significant or decisive, have a very narrow relation to the needs of understanding" (Sontag 1977, 112), we have found that educators often understand something new and impactful through photographs of classroom interactions. Some found an externalized, observable trace of the significant efforts they make to foster positive interactions and productive learning environments. For example, a STEM instructor from a baccalaureate institution observed:

> I really enjoyed a lot of the photos that were several in a series, so I could see— flash, flash, flash—a few photos in a row, almost like an animation. Looking at several, speaking with a group of students . . . [I can see] the group dynamic, the interaction with a student—smiling and talking about something, then in the next second, very focused on whatever the question was. That expression [referring

> to a particular image] was "keep my mouth shut and listen to the student . . ." Sometimes you have to stop and listen more.

Others found the slice of time left open to examination to be loaded with insight, allowing them to take note of and celebrate individual students' work, learning, and individuality. For example, a STEM instructor at a baccalaureate institution noticed, "My students are also doing their own hand gestures. [In one image], I put my [water] bottle and notes down so I could use BOTH hands. I also got a real kick out of [another image, where] my hand is flat, and on the other side of the room, my student's hand is flat like mine, using the same hand gesture to illustrate points to each other." A humanities instructor at an associate's institution reflected:

> It was really nice to be able to stop and look at a fixed facial expression. When in the middle of teaching, [I'm] reading body language quickly—I don't get to sit there and observe intently. For example, this student is super quiet in class, but does a lot in small groups and online discussion forums. . . . It's nice to see her smile and attentiveness. I don't get to look at [or] engage with her as much directly in class. . . . Some students come to class after working all night as a home health worker or other [jobs]. . . . No matter how interested, they may look tired. [There's] something amazing about students—they have a clear sense of what they want to do.

Besides holding moments open for thought about what happens in the classroom, these insights extend to their experiences beyond the frame.

Shulman noted that in order for teachers to learn from their experience, "the two most obvious requirements—knowing what you did and accurately identifying the consequences of what you did—can be hard to achieve" (Shulman 2004, 322). When employed to help educators encounter their own classrooms, the photographs of *The Teaching and Learning Project* elicited not only moments

of accurate perception, but a long enough pause to recognize the contexts, challenges, and circumstances that are inseparable from the learning process. In fact, in our research, we found a high rate of occurrence of what we called incidents of reflection—times when instructors were able to "surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice" (Schon 1983, 62) as well as to "come to a clearer understanding of what [they] do and who [they] are" (Brookfield 1995, 214). Such reflections are crucial for professional learning and change, and they provide compelling motivation for growth. Perhaps this is, in part, what higher education has been missing.

We also find in the above reflections a great deal of insight, kindness, dedication, and hope. Perhaps you will see that too, in the gestures, intensity, and engagement shown in the photographs of classroom interactions, here and throughout this volume.

1.12
A faculty member in biology prepares students for group work during a population biology class at a doctoral institution.

1.13
A faculty member in Spanish checks in on students as they work during a heritage Spanish speakers' course at a doctoral institution.

1.14
A student in a writing course at an associate's institution engages in one-on-one discussion with the instructor.

1.15
A faculty member in chemistry explains a concept to a student during a thermodynamics class at a baccalaureate institution.

1.16
A philosophy faculty member engages students in debate during an ethics class at an associate's institution.

1.17
Students complete a lab assignment during a physics class at a master's institution.

1.18–1.21
Sequence of four photographs: A faculty member in mathematics provides individual and group instruction during a calculus class at a doctoral institution.

1.22
An economics faculty member meets with a student after an economics class at a doctoral institution.

1.23
A faculty member and writing center director facilitates a discussion during a writing class at a doctoral institution.

1.24
A faculty member in English speaks to students during a comparative literature class at a baccalaureate institution.

1.25
Led by a faculty member in art and archaeology, classics, and English, students engage in dramatic reading during a communication and theatre class at a doctoral institution.

1.26
A faculty member in African American studies and English speaks to students during a literature class at a doctoral institution.

Strengths, Shortcomings, and Change

This volume invites you to build a new and more complex mental image of postsecondary teaching, and in doing so, become more intimate with its strengths, aware of its shortcomings, and committed to positive change. As you experience the text and images, we hope that you open up to a different form of thinking through photographs. We also hope that, rather than reproducing dogmatic arguments, this experience gives you a new angle entirely. As Anne Whiston Spirn explained while working with Dorothea Lange's 1930s photographs and field reports, "seeing is for me a way of knowing, photography a way of thinking" (Spirn 2008, xi). Colleges and universities need enhanced forms of knowing, thinking, and communication to build on what is good and address the serious challenges they face.

At this juncture, higher education has major, intertwined problems to solve, from managing sector-wide economic pressures, to making access and graduation rates better and more equitable, to incorporating more effective teaching methods. While our narrative here will not solve them, thinking with and through images can expand our collective capacity to hold onto the multiple truths and scales that postsecondary educators must grapple with in order to do so. As one humanities instructor at an associate's institution mused: "If all photos had that one student asleep, it would look really different. But to leave that student out, that would also not be good, that's real and informative. . . . It would be weird if every student looked completely engaged and attentive in every photo. There are those great moments, like in *Dead Poet's Society*, standing on desks, but it would be inauthentic if all photos showed that." This is exactly where we must begin—seeing the student who is asleep, the faculty member who is making do with limited time and resources, and the staff and administrators who set up the room and scheduled the class. When we do so, photographs can become, as

Sontag put it, "not just a record but an evaluation" (Sontag 1977, 88)—one that reveals the heart of higher education, in all its richness and complexity, in classrooms around the world.

Questions for Further Reflection

- Which of the photographs in this chapter capture the aspects of teaching that you find to be complex, challenging, demanding, subtle, or nuanced?
- What moments in your own teaching do you wish you could freeze and examine more closely through photographs? What do you think you would find in those images?
- If you had access to photographs of your teaching, how could they complement or contribute to the other ways you document and communicate about your work?
- How could you use authentic photographs of teaching and learning—either those in this chapter or images from your own institution—to prompt reflection on and changes in teaching practices more broadly?
- In what way do your institution's existing photographs value or devalue the work of teaching?
- Examining the photographs in this chapter, what do you notice about the work of faculty teaching? About the efforts of students learning? What surprises you?