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Scholarship as a Source of Innovation/Inspiration

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BOOK REVIEWS

Scholarship as a Source of Innovation/Inspiration

Curt Porter

Our call for book reviews this year emphasized the intellectual work involved in the everyday lives of teacher-scholars. We were seeking out personal accounts of how scholarship becomes (or fails to become) relevant in the material, institutional, and ideological realities staring us in the face each time we walk into a classroom. Looking back on roughly ten years since I accepted a tenure track position at a large public university, it's clear that the challenges of my workplace continue to evolve and continue to surprise me. I often find myself in need of new sources of innovation and inspiration. Institutional constraints chalked up to budgetary 'realities' and demands for documented (*read: statistical*) results are fixtures in my work as a teacher. Meanwhile, students come to my first-year writing courses with aspirations, skills, needs, and even language that I sometimes struggle to understand. In this setting, constant innovation can seem like a basic survival skill necessary just to maintain a sense of meaning and professional purpose.

The two reviews included in this issue respond to uncertainties familiar to anyone who strives to innovate in diverse teaching/learning environments. They illustrate a familiar contrast in the ways that scholarship can impact college writing instruction. In our first review, Iwona emphasizes the concept of *becoming* with its potential to foster a social justice curriculum and to resist "business-like" sensibilities in educational settings. We get a sense of the value and the hope that comes with encountering new conceptual toolkits or radical shifts in philosophical perspective. The second review invokes Willa's passion for gaming and explains how the concept of *gamification* can extend to unexpected aspects of a writing course. She demonstrates that sometimes practical or technological 'know-how' is the key to bringing big ideas to life. Together, these pieces offer a reminder that we can turn to scholarly work for different kinds of support, as innovation and inspiration can hit suddenly through new ways of thinking, just as they can be cultivated through a close examination of our daily teaching plans and practices.