Preface

Each author of this volume traveled a different path on the road to experiential learning. We share our stories and our hope that this volume on experiential exercises in the classroom will provide the reader with guidance on how to use this method in the classroom and helpful information about the pedagogical background of the method.

“As a twenty-something, I dreamed of being a college professor as I strolled around the campus of a small liberal arts college in central Florida. I went on to spend more than 25 years working in business, earning an MBA along the way. As mid-life approached, I re-examined the dream of my twenties: Did I still want to be a college professor? What would it take to make that happen? I decided to pursue my dream and started looking at doctoral programs. I was surprised that most doctoral program descriptions did not mention anything about teaching me how to be an effective educator. I approached my new career as I had approached my business career. I wanted to be effective, to leverage the experience and expertise of others, and to use best practices. I did not want to ‘reinvent the wheel’ and make all the ‘rookie mistakes.’ So, I selected a doctoral program that allowed me to learn about the scholarship of teaching and learning, and I have been devoted to actively becoming a better educator, a better designer and creator of effective learning experiences, and a part of the active community of teaching and learning scholars.”

Mary K. Foster

“Before beginning my career as a full-time academic, I worked in management development and was schooled in the idea that effective training needed to be interactive, hands-on, relevant, and tied to experience. The training process required as much attention as the curriculum development and developing content also meant addressing how participants would apply new learning and practice new skills. Trainees were expected to acquire knowledge and learn new skills and behaviors that would carry over to their jobs. To accomplish these objectives, I created

learner-center content, worked to identify and build upon learners' existing knowledge and strengths, applied the material directly to their work, facilitated small and large group discussions and above all provided opportunities for practice and reflection. With this background, I entered academia and found that in higher education, content often took priority over the learning process. I quickly found myself connecting with other educators interested in creating learning experiences rather than lecturing, and this peer group proved invaluable as I developed my teaching skills."

Vicki Fairbanks Taylor

"Experiential learning is an intuitive part of my work as a professor and professional trainer, because I was a scuba diving instructor for 12 years. Most of the concepts and skills discussed in the scuba classroom must be physically practiced and then evaluated in both the swimming pool and open water for successful certification. The training is highly experiential: even in the classroom, students work through scenarios. Scuba instruction taught me that student engagement in learning activities is vital in developing the kind of trust and attention that is needed to develop safe, capable, and happy divers. While the curriculum I facilitate in corporations and universities today is different, I still find experiential learning to be of great value in engaging participants and providing rich learning opportunities. Experiential learning activities have a certain spark to them that ignites learning."

Jennie L. Walker