Embracing Tension in the Classroom (August-September 2016)

As instructors, we strive to generate thoughtful and engaging classroom discussion while maintaining a collegial and inclusive environment. In doing so, we may be tempted to avoid topics that can ultimately add to students’ learning. Hot moments in the classroom refer to discussions that become contentious, acrimonious, or even disrespectful. None of us wants to promote a toxic classroom environment, and when such moments happen, we work diligently to diffuse them. However, when done strategically, creating what I call positive tension can help students better understand ideas central to a course while learning to engage in productive debate in the classroom and beyond.

Continuous and Rapid Testing (CaRT): A Simple Tool for Assessment and Communication (August-September 2015)

Most conventional assessment strategies provide limited opportunities for instructors to realign teaching methods and revisit topics that students have not understood well. Teachers can communicate with students individually, but time constraints may prevent multiple individual conversations. Some students in the classroom are reluctant to ask questions and admit confusion.

What a Few Faculty with a Shared Interest Can Accomplish (August-September 2014)
https://www.magnapubs.com/newsletter/the-teaching-professor/105/what_a_few_faculty_with_a_shared_interest_can_accomplish-8069-1.html

Five faculty, all belonging to the same interdisciplinary sociology department, decided that collectively they could improve student writing skills better than they could individually. “Our approach emphasizes that a collective effort need not be a department-wide, institutionalized one. Indeed, faculty can still collaborate and students can still feel the impact of a concerted effort even if only a subgroup of like-minded faculty members participate.” (p. 131) The article tells the story of how they managed to pull this off.

Creative Assignments: Where Do They Belong? (August-September 2013)
https://www.magnapubs.com/newsletter/the-teaching-professor/95/creative_assignments_where_do_they_belong-7991-1.html

Can you teach students to be creative? Most of us would say no. It’s more like trying to teach for it—encouraging it, promoting it, acknowledging when it happens, and rewarding it. Despite the difficulties associated with teaching creativity, teachers shouldn’t be excused from trying to cultivate its development. Is there a profession where creative thinking isn’t needed? Is there a problem that wouldn’t benefit from a creative solution? The authors of the article referenced below ask the follow-up question relevant to those of us in higher education: “Where will students get the opportunity to learn and practice creative thinking if it is not embedded throughout the curriculum?” (p. 51)