

Faith-based or Evidence-based Teaching: Are you a Zealot, Infidel or Gnostic?

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Teaching practices in Higher Education go through fads and phases. Authors and speakers often present their perspectives and interpretation of results as unequivocal and absolute—thus often constraining, rather than liberating, effective teaching. This tendency can force some very effective teachers whose style is currently not “in-fashion” to be driven underground and/or rated less favorably by pedagogical zealots, and/or branded as infidels for not conforming to current characterizations of effective teaching. At the same time, teachers who are actually less effective but “look” like the currently “right” kind of teachers enjoy elevated status. For example, empirical support for “active” learning over lecture is spotty, yet it is common for measurably effective lecturers to be viewed negatively. Further, the strategies based upon science of learning research (including “small” teaching suggestions) are branded as “best practices,” despite a dearth of evidence for their effectiveness in typical classroom settings. This presentation will focus on the personal bias, on which teachers select teaching strategies and will argue for a broader and more inclusive culture of high quality teaching and SoTL research.