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Abstract

Excerpt: Most academic disciplines throughout the world have been in the higher education curriculum for hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of years. Teaching itself has certainly been around as long as the earliest of any given discipline. After all, without teaching no profession is possible. How else would a core set of knowledge be taught to those interested in the theoretical constructs, conceptual frameworks, and the successes/failures of those who have worked previously in the discipline? Unfortunately, the concept of consistently teaching from a base of scholarly activity is relatively new. What happens, then, when the very concept of how to teach disciplinary knowledge at the university level is questioned for the lack of having a scholarly basis? There is certainly a professional discipline of "Education," but much of that literature is not consulted by those teaching at the university level, perhaps based on an assumption that the bulk of the scholarly work is predominantly on instruction at the primary grades. The issue I raise here is how are we to convince faculty members, both new and experienced, that our work as higher education educators within the framework of teaching should be based solidly on a professional body of scholarly work. It would seem to me imperative that all faculty members should anchor every instructional and curricular aspects of their work on some form of scholarship.

Keywords

Scholarship of teaching and learning

Scholarly Teaching: Suggestions for a Road More Traveled

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Most academic disciplines throughout the world have been in the higher education curriculum for hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of years. Teaching itself has certainly been around as long as the earliest of any given discipline. After all, without teaching no profession is possible. How else would a core set of knowledge be taught to those interested in the theoretical constructs, conceptual frameworks, and the successes/failures of those who have worked previously in the discipline? Unfortunately, the concept of consistently teaching from a base of scholarly activity is relatively new. What happens, then, when the very concept of how to teach disciplinary knowledge at the university level is questioned for the lack of having a scholarly basis? There is certainly a professional discipline of "Education," but much of that literature is not consulted by those teaching at the university level, perhaps based on an assumption that the bulk of the scholarly work is predominantly on instruction at the primary grades. The issue I raise here is how are we to convince faculty members, both new and experienced, that our work as higher education educators within the framework of teaching should be based solidly on a professional body of scholarly work. It would seem to me imperative that all faculty members should anchor every instructional and curricular aspects of their work on some form of scholarship.

Recently, after more than a decade in faculty development, I began a new job as a faculty developer in a school of medicine. Many colleagues indicated that it would be very difficult to convince faculty in the school of medicine to change the way they teach. Actually, I have found just the opposite to be the case. Essentially everyone with whom I have had the opportunity to work has been very receptive to change, *provided there is solid evidence behind my suggestions*. It may be the relatively recent push toward "evidence-based medicine" (Sackett, 1997), but faculty in the school of medicine who are now practicing of medicine from an evidentiary basis are beginning to expect the same of teaching. As a result, new approaches to teaching and learning are typically accepted, provided evidence supports the proposed course of action. So, when I first mentioned the relative value of engaged learning over lectures to a small group of teaching physicians, someone quickly asked if there was a good empirical article I could send to him supporting my position. He wasn't calling me a liar or refusing to consider my suggestion; he simply wanted to see the evidence on which I was basing my suggestion. I sent him an article by Hake (1998) on the benefit of engaged learning determined by surveying 6,000 students. In another session, I explained that the concept of learning styles is being totally reconsidered. I was quickly met again with a request for a good study and had the citation of Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, and Bjork, (2009) in hand.

It occurred to me that this is the way it should be all the time. If someone collected stones, amassed a respectable collection, and then started to group and name the stones based on her own perceptions and intuitions, others should certainly point out a bit of classification work in the field of geology has already been completed. So, why not with teaching? Why

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does a collection of good teaching strategies and implicit assumptions about how they best work go unquestioned? We should continuously question essentially everything we do in the classroom. If someone notes that group work encourages students to come to class prepared, a question should follow asking for the research. A faculty member noting that discussion of peer reviews is producing better overall papers. Someone should ask how that finding aligns with past work in peer review.

Many would likely note at this point that this form of background reading and inquiry is already being done. I agree it is being done – to some extent. I am asking that we consider it all the time. Excellent journals (e.g., IJSOTL, Journal on Excellence in College Teaching, and Innovative Higher Education) should be known by all faculty members and regularly consulted for relevant findings. That does not seem to be the case at present. At least it certainly has not been my experience. I was surprised a few years ago while facilitating a workshop on engaged learning when getting ready to quickly review Chickering and Gamson's (1991) "Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education?" I had assumed most everyone in the room had read or heard about these long-referenced principles. Certainly almost every faculty developer that I know is familiar with this work, and many can even produce the seven principles from memory. My suspicion is that many of the readers of the IJSOTL would respond similarly. However, on this occasion, before reviewing the Seven Principles I decided to ask the group how many have seen this work to get a sense of the extent of their knowledge because, well, research suggests establishing prior knowledge is important in learning (Dochy, Segers, & Buehl, 1999). The response caught me totally off guard. In a room of approximately 100 faculty members five raised their hands. I clarified and asked again. The number of responses was similar. I have since asked that same question at dozens of colleges, universities, and conference workshop sessions over the past few years. Positive responses typically range in the area of two to five percent, although some institutions have been as high as ten percent. Recently, in one case involving a group of approximately 70 faculty members the question resulted in six faculty indicating they had read the study. Somewhat frustrated, the faculty development director who had asked me to deliver a campus address hastily added that she had given everyone a copy of the publication at the faculty orientation session just a few months prior. Although we could quibble about the numbers a bit, the findings have been very consistent: most faculty members have not read the "Seven Principles."

My point is not about the value of Chickering and Gamson's "Seven Principles." It is not to argue that this is THE best thing written or that everyone should read it. My point is not about the exact percentages of faculty who have read this specific piece of work. What amazed me in my informal survey was the finding that very few faculty members have read a very common piece of work that most faculty developers have seen or read multiple times. As a side note, many more (but certainly not a majority) faculty have heard about Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, et al., 1956), and still fewer can list the levels or Anderson's reconceptualization of the work (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Additionally, very few faculty members have seen or read any scholarly work related to very new findings related to teaching and learning in areas such as learning styles, flipped classrooms, metacognition, or backward design. Many short, easily accessible foundational articles about teaching and learning that everyone associated with the scholarship of teaching and learning takes as a given are relatively unknown by active faculty members. This has been true of faculty I have worked with from regional comprehensive universities, research extensive universities, community colleges, technical colleges, and also true of faculty members from Scotland, Austria, Brunei, Jamaica, Canada, Australia, and the United States. So, recently I began

asking a new question. How many faculty members have read a scholarly based article or a book directly addressing any aspect of teaching and learning? The numbers have been a bit stronger, but still extremely discouraging.

Maybe I am just being impatient, but I think we should expect more of ourselves and our colleagues in higher education. The scholarship of teaching and learning was formally introduced and then advocated heavily in the 1990s (e.g., Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997; Shulman, 1999; & Taylor, 1993). Boyer (1990) is often cited as a rally cry for advocating that faculty members be allowed to conduct and get credit for scholarly work in the area of teaching and learning, particularly when conducted by those outside the specific traditional discipline of "education." From 2000 through 2010 there appeared many solid publications illustrating good examples of the scholarship of teaching and learning (Cross & Steadman, 1996; Huber & Hutchings, 2007; Martin, Benjamin, Prosser, & Trigwell, 1999; & Weimer, 2006).

Over the past two decades a great number of disciplinary journals have either reserved a section for SoTL work or created entirely new journals devoted to the scholarship of teaching and learning (for a comprehensive list see: http://www.kennesaw.edu/cetl/resources/journals.html). For over twenty years, there has been a strong SoTL push, but we still struggle to change the expectations and support for faculty members in this area.

The primary question in my mind is how to get faculty to read the literature in the area of the scholarship of teaching and learning and to live the life of a scholarly teacher (Richlin, 2001). Overall, I am less concerned right now as to how to get faculty to engage in pedagogical and curricular research and publishing as I am in getting faculty to consult the literature regarding key aspects pertaining to how she or he is teaching a course. I sincerely believe the process of formulating an hypothesis or research question, reading the relevant literature, collecting data, and publishing the results will certainly follow. For now, the critical component is to get all faculty members to read published work related to whatever direction they are considering. Essentially, if I may borrow from my home discipline of industrial/organizational psychology, there is currently no tolerance for someone who might suggest a new mechanism by which we would motivate employees at work, no recommendation to shift to a new performance appraisal system, or the proposition of a new approach to job training without first consulting the literature in the given areas of study. That is, there is a fundamental understanding that the first step in advancing any field is to immediately consult what has already been published or posted in any area of consideration.

In my twenty-five years of teaching, seeing the concept of consulting the literature when considering changes or justifying current practices within teaching and learning has been rare. Although teaching has been around for thousands of years, it has been relatively recently that we have suggested a scholarly base to that which we do to help students to learn. Now seems the time to demand it. Again, not everyone needs to be pushed into publishing in the scholarship of teaching, but we should certainly expect one to read even the most basic of the growing published work prior to teaching for the first time, and in the same light expect our colleagues to read published findings before embarking on a new pedagogical strategy. A faculty member stating "I am going to try engaged learning next semester," should be encouraged, and then asked, "Which model are you going to follow?" or perhaps, "Who have you read on the topic?" Promotion and tenure decisions should

continue to expand (as they have in many institutions) to include a statement of a teaching philosophy, which should include specific references to scholarly work being implemented, expanded on, or augmented in some way.

I believe it is up to us, those who regularly read scholarly work on teaching and learning, to reach out to our colleagues. Following are a few suggestions for starting our colleagues down the road of taking a more scholarly approach to teaching and learning. The areas I am suggesting are based on my experience over many years of doing faculty development work in which I have found faculty are primarily interested. These are also very accessible works and as such relatively easy for faculty from any discipline to read. I am not advocating that any one article will change the way a person teaches, or that the information I am suggesting is the best thing to read. The point is simply to get faculty to regularly ask themselves the question, "What can I read to help me better understand that which I am thinking about changing in my course?"

Before I begin with any given article or topic, my first suggestion to any faculty member who has not consulted the literature on teaching and learning is to attend a solid interdisciplinary teaching conference (e.g., Lilly Conference on College and University Teaching, SoTL Commons, International Higher Education Teaching Learning Conference, Conference on Higher Education Pedagogy). These conferences allow a faculty member to attend a plethora of sessions all anchored in solid scholarly activity. It also shows quickly that many faculty members are already taking this approach and that they come from a wide variety of disciplines.

There are so many great pieces of scholarly work it is difficult to know where to suggest one begin. My approach is to keep it applied and as simple as possible. One good starting point for many faculty members is to read Hake's (1998) work on the power of engaging students in the learning process. This is a great starting point as the data set is quite large and the findings are very strong. For those who wish to start using more active learning and engaged learning strategies, think-pair-share (Lyman, 1981) and concept tests (Mazur, 2009) work well as they take very little class time and have great results right away.

Personally, I really like the work coming out of Bjork's Learning and Forgetting Lab (http://bjorklab.psych.ucla.edu/research.html#itemII). Bjork is amassing easy to read research demonstrating a number of counterintuitive findings about student learning (and forgetting). Another valuable area both for learning and reducing required time is the topic of grading rubrics (Wolf & Stevens, 2007). The entire area of grading papers and class presentations is rich with ideas. Not surprising, although often not consulted, it turns out faculty members in the areas of Writing and in Speech Communication have excellent work on grading written and oral material. Reading some of this material was the first time in my teaching career I started to really understand some of the false dichotomies in teaching, such as "time and extent/quality of feedback." I had been told, and accepted, that as a faculty member I could give relatively little feedback to my students as I had many papers and a limited time in which to grade them. Through rubrics, peer evaluation, and better structured assignments I learned I could give more, and better, feedback than ever before….and in less time.

For a huge wake-up call in terms of how our actions impact student success, read just about anything pertaining to stereotype threat (e.g., Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006). Actually, there are many directions this can take, including findings that requiring students

to participate and complete interactive work in the classroom reduces discrepancies often found with respect to success rates for various race and ethnic groups (e.g., Hogan, Reubans, & Henshaw, 2011).

The few areas noted above are based on what I have found faculty to be particularly helpful and interesting to a wide variety of faculty members. For your colleagues, and on your campus, the issues may well be very different. The process and outcome, however, is very similar. Find an article that you feel is interesting, easy to read, and relatively easy to implement in just about any course. Share the article with your colleagues, or even start a journal club whereby you read one article every two weeks. It has been amazing for me to watch the transformation of some faculty. Several individuals who had never even realized literature exists in these areas quickly became experts on finding relevant literature for new topics.

Unfortunately, there are obstacles in taking a more scholarly teaching approach. In speaking with faculty about scholarly teaching, some concerns regularly emerge. The primary discussion revolves around time. Many argue that given their schedules there is simply not enough time to read about effective teaching and learning. My suggestion is simply to not be overwhelmed by the literature. Focus on one specific area of interest, do a quick online search, and read just a few articles specifically on that topic. In reading this information make notes of which articles seem to be of the most interest and those that are both informative and well designed. Once a few journals are identified that meet current needs, read those publications when published. One option is to form a journal group for a specific journal. When the journal is published each person reads one of the articles and then the group meets for one hour (perhaps over lunch) whereby each article is quickly summarized.

Faculty members also have concerns regarding knowing how to find the best source of information. If one is not trained in pedagogy, how does one find the best journals to read for the challenges or issues at hand? If there is a faculty development center or effort on campus, check with the person in charge of that effort. Another method is to look at acceptance rates for the journals that most interest you. Look at who is citing whom. Citation indices can also be helpful. For most people, the best place to start is to find one or two journals that publish in teaching and pedagogy articles in your discipline and then one or two that are more cross disciplinary. (For a comprehensive list of journals related to the scholarship of teaching and learning see: http://www.kennesaw.edu/cetl/resources/journals.html.)

Finally, how does one go about finding articles on specific issues related to teaching, learning, curriculum, and assessment? This is relatively easy and getting easier all the time. Search engines that are used to find disciplinary articles can also be used for teaching and learning. For example, a quick search for using student response systems (clickers) in schools of medicine produced a fabulous list maintained by Derek Bruff at Vanderbuilt: http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/docs/classroom-response-system-clickers-bibliography/#medicine. The most important consideration here is to set a timer and do a quick web search of journal articles and then read one or two that look relevant and interesting. The best way to become a scholarly teacher is simply to read a bit of scholarly work.

Of course, I would be remiss if I did not in some way address the issue of getting credit for taking a scholarly approach to teaching and finding time to engage in this "extra" work.

This is an argument that has concerned me for nearly three decades. Some argue that if there is no added pay, promotion, or other direct benefit for teaching from a scholarly approach then why take the time and energy to put in this extra effort. The answer, I believe, is because it will make us better at what we do and, as a result, greatly benefit our students. Yes, hard work should come with better fiscal compensation, but without the power to directly order administrators to pay faculty more for the great work they are doing to improve their own teaching and learning, I have often thought, at least I am being "compensated" by knowing I am doing a better job. Sometimes, as with grading rubrics and peer reviews, I have noted a reduction in work (which I usually substituted with other work). Mostly, I think being a solid scholarly teacher is my responsibility. Although I have pathological levels of optimism, I also believe that as we engage in more scholarly work relative to teaching and learning the expectations, benefits, and outcomes will dramatically change to benefit our position.

Teaching is difficult work. Getting our colleagues to better understand and recognize the existence of scholarly work in the area of teaching and learning, and then consulting that work regularly is vital to moving our field forward. If we regularly make pedagogical and curricular decisions based on published literature and begin to produce even better scholarly work ourselves, we are capable of dramatically changing teaching and learning for the better. Overall, each time we think of effective teaching and learning we should immediately be hit with the curiosity of what scholarly work may exist in that same area.

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