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Reflections on Teaching and Scholarship

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In *The Idea of a University*, Newman asserted that "to discover and to teach are distinct functions; they are also distinct gifts, and are not commonly found united in the same person. He, too, who spends his day in dispensing his existing knowledge to all comers is unlikely to have either leisure or energy to acquire new [knowledge]" (1853, p. 10).

The extent to which teaching and scholarship co-occur has been at issue for some time, and beliefs have varied widely. At one end of the spectrum are those who hold that there is a positive or synergistic relationship. At the other end are those who argue that the two activities actively interfere with each other. Hattie and Marsh (1996) published a meta-analysis of the relationship between teaching and research. Their review and discussion are quite comprehensive; their analyses carefully attempted to tease out a host of contributing factors. Nonetheless, they chose to answer directly the big question on everyone's mind in the second sentence of the abstract. Bluntly, the "meta-analysis of 58 studies demonstrates that the relationship is zero" (p. 507). One may quibble over the more molecular findings of their analysis (e.g., in the social sciences the relationship is described as greater than zero, as it reaches about .10), but the molar picture is quite clear and not inconsistent with other investigations. Even when statistical significance can be demonstrated, it would be irresponsible to view these low-order relationships as terribly meaningful.

Newman's words, coupled with the findings of Hattie and Marsh and others, suggest that teaching and research (traditionally conceived as the scholarship of discovery) are not obvious bedfellows. With respect to research about teaching itself, Weimer (1993) observed that among the 50 or so discipline-specific journals on pedagogy, most are regarded as "weak siblings of the favored and prestigious research journals" (p. 44) and that publications in these journals have been largely disregarded when it comes to evaluating scholarship. Over the last few years, however, several writers opined that teaching has grown in its reputation as a bona fide field of inquiry (e.g., Halpern et al., 1998; Hutchings & Shulman, 1999; McKeachie, 1999). We find ourselves, perhaps, in the midst of a paradigm shift.

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In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer described his entry into his third decade of teaching, which began with his approaching his class that day “grateful for another chance to teach.” Later, he returned home, “convinced once again that I will never master this baffling vocation,” believing that he “must be very boring to anesthetize, so quickly, these young people who only moments earlier had been alive with hallway chatter” (1999, p. 9). Teaching is hard, and does not seem to get much easier even after many years of practice. Self-doubts seem to run rampant among teachers, even those recognized and lauded as experts. By our own construction of events, then, imperfect teaching abounds.

Ironically, for those engaged in the scholarship of pedagogy, the existence of teaching imperfections or “problems” is essential. If not actually good things, problems are a necessity for scholars. Persons interested in the scholarship of teaching would lose the grist in their collective mill if teaching problems were absent or completely and permanently surmountable, as problems form the basis of scholarship and research (Bass as cited in Hutchings & Shulman, 1999). Of course we should strive to gain the upper hand with respect to understanding teaching and learning problems, but we certainly should not expect to eradicate teaching imperfections altogether.

Many components of teaching contain problems that lend themselves to systematic inquiry. However, elements of teaching that might lend themselves to scientific investigations do not comprise scholarship in and of themselves. Allowing that “good teaching involves much scholarly activity” (McKeachie, 1999, p. 5) does not suggest to me that the two are synonymous. Truly excellent teaching is more apt to be viewed as, or confused with, scholarship, because excellent teaching reflects current information, regularly involves or invokes scholarly works, often is accompanied by creative instructional materials or activities, typically is delivered with verve, and invariably produces student learning. Similar features characterize scholarship.

I echo Hutchings and Shulman (1999) in asserting that excellent teaching and a scholarship of teaching are not the same thing. “A scholarship of teaching . . . requires a kind of ‘going meta,’ in which faculty frame and systematically investigate questions related to student learning . . . with an eye not only to improving their own classroom but to advancing practice beyond it” (p. 13). In my opinion, this transcendence is central for teaching-related acts to be regarded as scholarship, as it demonstrates the kind of “reaching beyond” that characterizes our traditional understanding of scholarship.

Among the features of scholarship promoted by Diamond and Adams (1995), peer review is considered essential. In the case of teaching, teaching portfolios, peer visitation, and team teaching may provide vehicles through which critical reviews may occur (Halpern et al., 1998). The idea that one’s work “can be” reviewed by one’s peers or is “available for peer review and commentary” (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999, p. 13), however, seems to fall short of expectations for scholarly works. Many expect that scholarly works necessarily will be scrutinized by peers with expertise in the area, prior to a more complete public airing. Assembling a teaching portfolio, replete with syllabi, tests, student papers and so forth does not, de facto, become scholarship simply by virtue of its being assembled and made accessible to one’s colleagues. Peer review consists of more than passive observation of materials, whether the materials are pages from a manuscript or documents contained in a teaching portfolio. It involves truly critical evaluation of another’s work followed by formative and, sometimes, summative feedback. This process ensures that the revised work is meritorious and accomplishes the other things scholarly work encompasses (e.g., breaks new ground, is appropriately documented, is replicable, and so on). These same standards should apply to all forms of scholarship.

Hattie and Marsh (1996) concluded that teaching and research are loosely coupled, at best, and attempted to address the seeming intractability of the myth that they are more strongly related than that. They suggested as one reason for the perpetuation of this belief that we faculty would like it to be so. Even in the face of their clear findings, however, Hattie and Marsh were careful to note that it “would be folly to conclude that teaching . . . should not be based on research,” but equally fallacious would be the notion that “only those who partake in research can be effective communicators of this research” (p. 533). So, it seems reasonable to purport that good teachers depend on scholarship to stay on top—they either do it, or incorporate it into their pedagogical activities, or both.

Webster’s (1970) dictionary defines pedagogy as “the profession . . . of a teacher.” A second meaning is “the art or science of teaching.” Webster’s defines scholarship as “systematized knowledge . . . exhibiting accuracy, critical ability, and thoroughness.” Within academic contexts, the terms may have additional meanings to those embodied in the lay definitions—additional but not contradictory.

Cautious optimism would hold that systematizing knowledge about the art and/or science of teaching in a way that is accurate, robust, and thorough is being recognized and valued as scholarship and that teaching is more often believed to be an appropriate subject matter for empirical inquiry. Some are more forcefully optimistic in asserting that “[t]here are, in short, now faculty—lots of them—who are eager to engage in sustained inquiry into their teaching practice and their students’ learning and who are well positioned to do so in ways that contribute to practice beyond their own classrooms” (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999, p. 12).

As time passes, it will become easier to assess whether this time truly represents the early stages of a paradigm shift as far as our views on teaching and scholarship. Indeed we may have turned a corner, but just barely.

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