

Foreword: Community-Organizing for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

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The scholarship of teaching and learning is now a recognized form of faculty development, but it is a special form – an intersection of teaching and scholarly inquiry in which faculty design, teach, and assess their courses and programs in ways that make it possible to learn from and improve their students' experience. Although it is primarily the responsibility of faculty, this doesn't mean that professors should be acting alone. Indeed, according to the leaders of scholarship of teaching and learning initiatives at the nine institutions represented in this illuminating collection of essays, the work is best done in community on campus and across institutions as well. And forming these communities requires some very savvy organizing indeed.

The Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL)'s Institutional Leadership Program (2006-2009), to which the contributors to this special issue of *Transformative Dialogue* belonged as "affiliates," was designed as a framework for cross-campus community and exchange. As readers will gather from reading the introduction and conclusion, the affiliates group benefited greatly from the organizational expertise and enthusiasm of its leader, Jacqueline Dewar, professor of mathematics at Loyola Marymount University. Although the CASTL Affiliates were initially asked only to strengthen and support the scholarship of teaching and learning in their own settings, once Loyola Marymount University was selected as coordinating institution, Dewar began the hard work of helping the members find common intellectual ground in their local efforts, encouraged participation in the CASTL program's activities and other public forums, and devised new ways for the affiliated leaders to stay in touch and learn from each other. Now, thanks to them all and to *Transformative Dialogues*, their experience is available for an even larger group of educators to learn from.

One of the most striking changes in higher education over the past couple of decades has been the growth of a public sphere for pedagogy, or "teaching commons" for pedagogical collaboration and exchange (Huber and Hutchings, 2005). Looking at the essays collected here, one is reminded of the increasing number of campus offices and organizers who are playing crucial roles as brokers in this burgeoning trade--

helping faculty find resources and support for classroom innovation, building networks, and encouraging both supply and demand for sophisticated, in-depth, local knowledge of what's happening, what's promising, and what's possible for learning. They are also connecting the work to initiatives organized by educational leaders off campus, like the various science education programs funded by the National Science Foundation and the liberal education efforts sponsored by the Association for American Colleges and Universities, which have also played this mediating role. The point, of course, is that these new trading zones—and the larger teaching commons they draw on and feed—do not just happen by themselves. They require “community organizers” to bring faculty together for scholarly work related to pedagogy, curricula, and assessment. This is as important for strengthening the scholarship of teaching and learning as it is for improving other aspects of the learning environment.

What this means in practice, of course, is that each institution puts its own inflection on the challenges of bringing the scholarship of teaching and learning into its local mix of reform initiatives. It's important everywhere to connect the work to campus priorities, but these will differ. It's important everywhere to design initiatives strategically, but the specifics will depend on what is happening locally and where there are points of overlap to strengthen or important gaps to fill. The common needs to support faculty creatively as they engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning and to recognize and reward them for their work will present different challenges depending on institutional mission, history, and resources. From this perspective, the diversity of institutions represented in this collection is especially revealing.

At Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT), for example, interest in the scholarship of teaching and learning originated in a review of their system of student evaluations of teaching, and concern that end-of-term feedback came too late for purposes of improvement, thus spurring a series of innovations to promote career-long faculty development, faculty learning communities, and support for scholarly teaching as a step to the scholarship of teaching and learning. For faculty at this institution, which has only recently embraced “research” as part of the faculty role:

The model of SoTL...is not about SoTL work as peer-review published work but involves systematic inquiry that is disseminated to improve instruction within faculty's own teaching practice and possibly within wider institutional practices. SoTL is conceptualized as a spiral process where the findings of systematic inquiry are shared with colleagues and, at the same time, feed back into faculty's own teaching practice (Hoekstra, Dushenko, and Frandsen).

Elsewhere, of course, the story is different.

Purdue University's leadership team reports that “teaching scholarship” there began with concern for teacher development, and provides a helpful timeline of initiatives from 1980 when its Center for Instructional Services began with a small instructional development team, and continued with efforts to support the training of graduate student teaching assistants, the formation of a teaching academy bringing together teaching award winners from across campus, and the creation in 1998 of a Center for Instructional Excellence. Since then, the scholarship of teaching and learning has been supported at Purdue as part of general teacher development for graduate students and

faculty, but also as part of special efforts to strengthen service learning and, more recently, entry-level courses in the sciences. Leaders at Purdue, a research university, have found that they need to make special efforts to get recognition in accomplishments for teaching, and have found that “highlighting...[the research] process at the core of SoTL seems to be a potential draw for those who are trained to conduct and support solid research in their home disciplines” (Plikuhn, Helgesen, and Velasquez).

The stories of the other CASTL Affiliates in this collection provide instructive variations on such themes. Thompson Rivers University and Park University, both (like NAIT) adjusting to a new expectations for research, have seen in the scholarship of teaching and learning a form of scholarly activity that is consistent with their histories as primarily undergraduate teaching institutions. At Maryville University, seminars to develop faculty expertise in pedagogical literature and practitioner research on classroom learning have been so successful that leaders have had to counter the misperception on the part of some participants that “SoTL studies are unfairly favored over research in the disciplines.” As the author notes, “in an academic world where SoTL studies are generally viewed as ‘soft’ and ‘lacking in rigor,’ this current view of SoTL work as privileged or required is truly an ironic development” (Cohn).

Connections to institutional goals can be clearly seen at Viterbo University, which like Thompson Rivers and Park has embraced the broad view of scholarship advocated in *Scholarship Reconsidered* (Boyer, 1990). Leaders there have encouraged instructors to focus their inquiry on the learning that takes place in collaborative faculty-student research projects—often in work consistent with the institution’s interest in helping meet community needs. Similarly, at Loyola Marymount, connections have been sought with larger initiatives on core curriculum development, community-based learning, assessment, and in promoting interest and success in science. The essay from the pedagogical reform group, Science Education for New Civic Engagements and Responsibilities (SENCER) highlights efforts to encourage its members to incorporate the scholarship of teaching and learning into innovative science courses that “develop civic engagement by teaching ‘to’ basic, canonical science and mathematics ‘through’ complex, capacious, often unsolved issues of civic consequence” (Fisher).

Yet the SENCER essay also underlines the challenges for faculty who undertake the scholarship of teaching and learning without the support of a local scholarly community on campus: when participants return to their home campuses to undertake their projects, too many find themselves isolated, their innovations and inquiries neither understood nor appreciated by colleagues. The essay by leaders at Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne should give hope to pedagogical innovators at such places, by showing how a few enterprising faculty have been able to work towards integrating reflective practice and the scholarship of teaching and learning into their academic culture. “Our hope,” the authors say, “is that others will recognize themselves as ‘fellow travelers’ and be encouraged by what can be accomplished with fairly modest resources and by becoming members of a larger scholarly community” (Rathbun, Bendele, Zubovic, Stumph, Lolkus, and Goodsun).

Finally, a word about that “larger scholarly community”. Many of the authors here express gratitude to the Carnegie Foundation for its support of the scholarship of teaching and learning over the past twenty years, and especially for the framework for

cross-institutional collaboration provided by CASTL. Of course, there is concern about how to orchestrate such relationships in the future. But as these essays suggest, many organizations dedicated to providing forums for the scholarship of teaching and learning have sprung up and many others (campus associations, professional societies, and pedagogical groups like those for service-learning or undergraduate research) are open to advocates who can make the case for greater air-, column-, and virtual space for this work. Further, growing recognition across the world that pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment in higher education are relevant to public policy goals, such as graduating larger numbers of students from college with high quality education, creates special opportunities to move the scholarship of teaching and learning from the wings of higher education discourse to center stage.

The challenges are many, but so too are the benefits of a broadened teaching culture where pedagogical innovation and inquiry go hand in hand. Indeed, in this issue of *Transformative Dialogues*, the CASTL Institutional Leadership Program Affiliates suggest promising ways to keep the academic profession vital in the anxious times higher education is likely to face for some time to come. The strength of the scholarship of teaching and learning movement has been its “ownership” by faculty members as an activity that meets their own commitments and interests as scholars and teachers and through which to express their professionalism and develop their expertise. What’s most exciting about the movement’s trajectory now is its growing engagement with important institutional priorities. There will probably always be some tension between faculty interests and institutional purposes, but if that tension can be kept productive—as the authors of these essays are trying to do—then the work will gain wider support on campus and in the larger academic world. Everyone stands to gain from faculty engagement in the scholarship of teaching and learning—especially the students. They know when their learning is taken seriously on campus, and by taking cues from that attitude, may take their learning more seriously themselves.

References

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