

What does the scholarship of teaching and learning mean to me?

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To me, the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) is a dynamic process of learning and unlearning, ongoing self-criticism and renewal, and sharing the resulting accumulated experiences between the teacher, students and the teaching community. SoTL revolves around three axes. It involves the production and transmission of theoretical and experiential knowledge. As well, it acts as a forum for self and collective actualization and growth, while reinforcing the link between the classroom and the real world.

What this means is that SoTL provides the educator a unique opportunity to learn to reflect upon the lessons both learned and unlearned in the classroom setting and the real world, conceptualize and theorize, and then plow them back into his/her teaching as well as share them with the teaching community. The cross-pollination of teaching, learning and scholarship creates a vital opportunity for praxis - the marriage of theory and practice about which bell hooks writes so eloquently. In her book *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, (2003) notes that education must be holistic, taking place everywhere and anytime. Holistic education requires educators to jettison "binaries that create rigid divisions separating what we see as school and home, teacher and student, or even education and the "real world" work" (Velez, 2004).

SoTL bears a unique transformative power for both educators and students as it affords them the opportunity to link the lived experiences to the classroom. It is this transformative power in SoTL that impelled hooks (2003) to observe optimistically that:

"My hope emerges from those places of struggle where I witness individuals positively transforming their lives and the world around them. Educating is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness. As teachers we believe that learning is possible, that nothing can keep an open mind from seeking after knowledge and finding a way to know." (p.xiv)

Teaching for the sake of teaching is an aimless waste of time, just as scholarship for the sake of scholarship is idle Ivory Towerism. Thus, the scholarship of teaching and learning must first be informed by Freireian pedagogical principles, which see education as problem-posing, an instrument for personal emancipation and personal empowerment.

In addition, what I will call sustainable and praxis-oriented education must offer a viable feedback loop through scholarship between the classroom, the lifeworlds of learners and teachers, and the real world. In other words, this mode of education must facilitate an ongoing interaction between the lifeworlds of the educator, students, community of scholars and members of the world outside of academia. Sustainable and praxis oriented pedagogy must aim to help students, among other things,

- translate theoretical knowledge into action

- incorporate classroom knowledge into their lifeworlds
- constantly challenge themselves to "practice what they learned"
- uncover mechanisms that perpetuate systems of oppression, be they 'racial,' ethnic, gender, class, or national and empower them to seek to dismantle these systems of oppression (hooks, 2003)

For educators, sustainable and praxis-oriented education must challenge them to both criticize as well as defend their own pedagogy. In addition, sustainable and praxis-oriented education must facilitate the mobilization of educators and learners to work toward building socially just communities (hooks, 2003). SoTL must provide the conduit through which this type of pedagogy is transmitted back and forth between the classroom, the teaching community and the real world. The fusion of theory and practice or the blending of ideas and action should be the philosophical linchpin of sustainable and praxis-oriented education. As Kwame Nkrumah (1964) so beautifully put it, thought without practice is blind, and practice without thought is empty. Karl Marx (1852) had earlier on underscored the importance of praxis with his revolutionary clarion call: "Various philosophers of the past have merely interpreted the world in different ways the point is to change it."

SoTL provides the best tool for praxis and transformative education. It serves as a conduit through which theory and practice, the ideas and action of educators, learners and members of the "educating" community, are transformed through ongoing negotiation, critique, individual and collective self-criticisms, and then transmitted and shared in the classroom, through scholarship and in the real world. In this dialectical and dynamic process, it is not only students and educators who are transformed, the whole process of teaching, learning and scholarship are also continually changed and improved. SoTL pushes the teaching and learning process away from the traditional mode, which is nothing more than lateral transmission of knowledge. It transcends the publication of volumes of "how-to-teach and how-to-learn" recipes and strategies; it is also transformative, empowering and praxis-oriented.

As Paulo Freire (1970) has observed, "[People] as uncompleted beings, must be conscious of their incompleteness and attempt to be more fully human." Along with my students, I constantly learn and re-learn the complexities and the enormity of anti-racism pedagogy. As I read riveting accounts of my students' socialization and inter-ethnic/'racial' experiences, I remind myself of the constant need to upgrade my own knowledge about the subject I teach, in order to be able to answer students' questions better in the future.

As an instructor of more than 15 years experience, I have engaged in SoTL without even knowing it. As I introduce concepts such as "debunking," "bracketing," "the sociological imagination," and encouraged my students to incorporate them into their lived experiences, I find myself encouraged to do the same. Each class poses new challenges and new prospects, exacting emotional and intellectual contradictions and tensions, but also excitement and optimism. Each semester and each course, I never tire of reminding myself and my students of the importance of Peter Berger's advice (1963): what you see in the real world is not always what you get; the first wisdom is that the obvious is but the first step to deeper understanding and knowledge. For me, as

an instructor, Marx's timeless admonishment that "the educator must be educated" is my prized mantra.

I have encouraged my students to write the best term papers for publication in my community-oriented quarterly news magazine, The Sankofa News. Many of my students whose papers were published have used them as launching pads to go to journalism schools or graduate schools, or to gain employment in the working world. This, to me, is SoTL.

References

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