Reflections on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Pat Hutchings, *The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching*

In more than 40 years of studying change in higher education, Pat Cross (2001) wrote in a recent *Change* magazine article, "I cannot recall a time when attention and action have been more focused and potentially productive" (p.37). One aspect of this "attention and action" is what some of us are calling the scholarship of teaching and learning.

I say "what some of us are calling the scholarship of teaching and learning" because the phrase has accrued various meanings since it first appeared in *Scholarship Reconsidered* (Boyer, 1990) over a decade ago. In this essay I reflect on key elements of the scholarship of teaching and learning as they have emerged through a national program I've been directing for the past five years, the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL). My emphasis is on three elements that best explain this work's contribution to the change that Cross noted.

Viewing Teaching as Intellectual Work Often our conversations about teaching are about methods and technique, which matter a lot, as do enthusiasm and good organization. But the scholarship of teaching and learning is founded on a view of teaching as *intellectual* work. Most faculty, I believe, resonate to this view. They know that designing a powerful course or constructing an appropriate assessment is--like other forms of scholarly work--an act of intellectual invention, with its genesis in one's sense of what it means

to know the field deeply. Teaching is intellectual work, as well, in that it calls on faculty to examine "the transactional relation" between teaching and learning and to be problem solvers and active investigators of what works and how and why it does so (Bernstein, 1998, p. 77).

One of my favorite statements of this view comes from Randy Bass (1999), a faculty member in English and American Studies at Georgetown University--and a Carnegie Scholar with the CASTL program. "One telling measure of how differently teaching is regarded from traditional scholarship or research," Bass wrote, "is what a difference it makes to have a 'problem' in one versus the other." In traditional research you *want* to have a problem; problems fuel the investigative process. But in teaching, a problem is an embarrassment, something to be fixed or concealed. "Changing the status of the problem in teaching from terminal remediation to ongoing investigation is precisely what the movement for a scholarship of teaching is all about" (p. 1).

The power of this focus on questions and inquiry is also suggested by Bill Cerbin, a Carnegie Scholar in psychology from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. In a case study describing his scholarship of teaching and learning, Cerbin (2000) notes, "The wrong reason to do the scholarship of teaching is because it's now listed in the criteria for promotion and tenure; that's a formula for turning important work into just a job." Rather, "the scholarship of teaching has to be motivated, finally, by personal commitments. . . aspects of teaching and learning that pique your curiosity" (p. 19). The scholarship of teaching and learning is a movement to bring to the faculty's work as teachers the habits of inquiry and intellectual engagement that characterize other scholarly work. As such, it's an approach that helps both to raise the esteem in which teaching is held and to improve its quality.

Building the Profession and Practice of Teaching The guidelines for Carnegie's program invite faculty to identify and investigate a question about their teaching and their students' learning in ways that can contribute to thought and practice beyond their own classrooms. This ambition--to contribute to something larger--is one that we take for granted in other forms of scholarly work; our

research projects and professional outreach are not undertaken simply for our own professional development. But looking beyond individual improvement is not a goal that comes easily in teaching.

It's a challenge, first, because work on teaching is almost by definition highly contextual. What the Carnegie Scholars uncover about the learning of their students requires careful distillation and translation to be meaningful in other settings. And this process is complicated by the fact that different fields have quite different expectations about the conditions and rules of evidence needed for such translation.

Looking beyond individual improvement is a challenge, too, because teaching has traditionally been an individual, even private enterprise. Carnegie Foundation President Lee Shulman talks about discovering, as a young faculty member, what he calls "pedagogical solitude," the fact that teaching, which one might expect to be the most social of work, done in community with others, is in fact much less so than research. Indeed, teaching is lonely work for many faculty, work with a very underdeveloped set of habits and infrastructure for sharing what we learn with colleagues. This is especially distressing today, when so many faculty are doing innovative things in their teaching. The profession can't afford not to learn from the innovations and experiments by teachers who are trying new things.

Building the profession and practice of teaching--which means building the mechanisms for doing so--is a long-term agenda. But one important sign of progress is the sense of intellectual community growing up around the scholarship of teaching and learning. Many of the 200 campuses participating in CASTL (the Campus Program coordinated by the American Association for Higher Education) have begun by framing a conception of the scholarship of teaching and learning that emphasizes collaboration *across* fields. SUNY Buffalo State College, for instance, is using the scholarship of teaching and learning to counteract strategies that "promote a personal, individualistic view of teaching" (2001).

It may well be that at least in this first phase of activity the most important outcome of the scholarship of teaching and learning will

not be any single "finding" but the sense of scholarly community growing up around the intellectual work of teaching and learning. To put it differently, the scholarship of teaching and learning may best be thought of not as discrete projects and investigations, but as a set of principles and practices that bring people together and energize their collective work: a commitment to making teaching and learning public, to rigorous and constructive peer review, and to building the field.

Integrating Diverse Efforts Not only does the scholarship of teaching and learning promote collaboration across disciplines. It also brings together and draws upon a variety of traditions and lines of work, past and present.

One important tributary is assessment, with its emphasis on evidence of student learning. Another is action research by teachers in K-12 settings, a reminder of the value of collaboration and learning across that great divide. The scholarship of teaching and learning also overlaps with the work of the educational research community and with many initiatives undertaken by centers for teaching and learning, which are, on many campuses, taking a central role in advancing the scholarship of teaching and learning. Several recent efforts to promote the peer review of teaching are directly relevant as well. In short, the scholarship of teaching and learning has its own history, but it is not new. One of its strengths lies in drawing on diverse lines of work and communities of practice.

This is an insight many campuses are seizing upon, seeing the scholarship of teaching and learning not as a self-standing new initiative but as a way to shape and integrate diverse efforts. Indeed, one of the reasons to be hopeful about the scholarship of teaching and learning is that there are now many efforts moving in similar directions, not only on individual campuses but in consortia of campuses, through accrediting agencies, and at the national level. For instance, CASTL is a "cousin" to many of the projects in the Pew Forum on Undergraduate Learning.

Teaching has traditionally been a practice faculty learn by the seat of their pants. The promise of the scholarship of teaching and learning and related efforts is that teaching might be more like other scholarly

work, where we learn from colleagues and from those who go before, standing (as Sir Isaac Newton famously said) on the shoulders of giants.

Pat Hutchings (Ph.D, University of Iowa), is Senior Scholar at The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

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Useful Web Addresses:

http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/CASTL/highered/index.htm

www.pewundergradforum.org