Letter from the Editor-in-Chief: Scholarship and Teaching

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There has been a long history of how faculty balance teaching, scholarship, and service and how faculty are evaluated in these areas. As Schulman (2011) noted, some committees operated under “the premise that teaching was the central function of university faculty members” while in the review of “faculty for promotion and tenure, the teaching work of faculty members was always subordinated to their published record as scholars in their discipline or profession.” This discussion has been occurring at colleges and universities for decades (Feldman, 1987). Most likely this is because annual evaluations and the tenure and promotion process are personal issues for faculty.

The debate of teaching vs research seemed to have culminated in some circles with Boyer’s (1990) book, Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate. Boyer (1990) argued that there are four categories of the work of the professoriate. He listed these separate, but overlapping, categories of scholarship. These are: the scholarship of discovery; the scholarship of integration; the scholarship of application; and the scholarship of teaching” (p. 16). These areas are shown in Figure 1.

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The scholarship of discovery entails what traditionally is original research which advances knowledge. In the scholarship of integration, one integrates knowledge across disciplinary areas. The scholarship of application has become the scholarship of engagement. The scholarship of teaching has since become the scholarship of teaching and learning. It is the latter category that we hope the articles in The Journal of Effective Teaching can address.

Figure 2. A Word cloud based on The Journal of Effective Teaching article titles, abstracts, and keywords in the RSS Feed http://www.uncw.edu/jet/articles/JETrss.xml.

As one looks at Figure 2, one sees what is called a word cloud, or a tag cloud. The relative font size in some way gives importance to some words over others. This particular list was generated from the frequency of key words used in the article titles, abstracts, and keywords from this journal over the past decade. The list may indicate some of the key topics covered so far, or suggest areas that need more discussion. However, does it show what is behind the article content and the interconnections of these words?

The Journal of Effective Teaching is devoted to the discussion of teaching excellence in colleges and universities. Many of the topics are seen in Figure 1, but the process of “discussion” is not so clear. It may seem that the discussion is one way, the authors speaking...
to the readers. But, the readers can take this a step further and introduce it to their students and colleagues. Eventually, readers can bring back the discussion by disseminating their own experiences. These constitute two differing approaches to as to how to change teaching practices in higher education. These are sometimes referred to as Scholarly Teaching and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL).

There are differing approaches to how one brings scholarship into one’s teaching as noted in select discussions at the Vanderbilt site. Let’s say that you are trying to implement group projects into your class, but you have no idea as to how to effectively do so. You could be informed by observation and experience, talking to your colleagues and looking at what is known. You might review the literature and find that there have been studies which indicate some best practices or suggestions as to how to reduce social loafing. You learn about what seems to work, or not, and try it out in your class. This is a form of Scholarly Teaching. You implement new teaching practices based on informed, evidence-based teaching. You may even find that for your particular groups of students, you need to tweak the best practices or make choices about how to separate out the individual and group contributions for student assessment. However, whatever you learn for your own class, you may not contribute to the knowledge base for others.

This is different from the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. SoTL is “scholarly inquiry into student learning which advances the practice of teaching by making research findings public.” In this case, you pick up from where Scholarly Teaching leaves off. You not only ask, “What has been done previously?” you also look to see what can be added and how can it be used. You look across courses and disciplines. You observe what takes place in the classroom and aim to build on work of others. These can take the form of interviews, observation, survey, or experiment. The classroom is a lab for SoTL. Finally, you disseminate your findings, contributing to community through conferences, journals, etc.

Over the last quarter century SoTL has grown from discipline-specific studies of pedagogy and trying to find out how students learn, to more interdisciplinary approaches and has become international in scope. However, it still seems that as much as SoTL has grown, as indicated by the literature (Hutchings, Bjork, & Babb, 2002) and many sites like The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning at Illinois State University and Vanderbilt’s Center for Teaching and journals like this one, the same discussions occur within academic departments. However, how does this translate to the local level? It depends on the goals. Are we really interested in how students learn and how do research on student learning? The typical professional would like this endeavor to count towards their professional duties. But with all the discussion over the last several decades, it is still difficult to get disciplinary colleagues to acknowledge that this type of research ranks with discipline-specific research.
References


