

What We Value about the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

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As originally delivered in the form of a panel of speakers, my presentation was scripted and yet simultaneously informal. It strikes me that the written component for Transformative Dialogues should engage in the same spirit -- one that embraces the informal personal narrative as part of the dialogue about the scholarship of teaching and learning. With that in mind . . .

First, I want to thank Alice Macpherson and Kwantlen University College for the invitation to be part of their annual workshop. I was honoured to be invited to engage with such an outstanding group of colleagues engaged in the scholarship of teaching and learning. I have to admit, however, that I was a bit hesitant to engage in the discussion.

I was hesitant to engage because I wasn't sure how to answer the topic provided us: "what we value about the scholarship of teaching and learning?"

In order to understand my hesitancy let me give you a bit of personal background. I provide this information because I believe that my experience shapes the way I view the world and indeed how I answer any question, including a question about the value of the scholarship of teaching and learning. As a scholar in my field of international studies is notes: "there is no view from no where" (Smith 2004, 503). So I see myself as addressing the question from multiple locations and consequently, this set of reflections is in some way, about my sense of disconnections.

First, I see myself as a developing educational developer. Second, until recently I was an acting Dean of Teaching, Learning and Technology at an institution that prides itself on being a small research intensive university, and I would say research dominates. While I am now the Acting Director of our Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology, I'm still in an administrative function and thus my observations in this instance, either as Dean or Director, still have an administrative flavour. Third, I am also a 3M winner and I have published on teaching and Canadian foreign policy (Smith H., 2007; 2004; 2003) but not without a battle, and not without being told I needed more Canadian foreign policy and less of that strange teaching and learning stuff that really said nothing about Canadian foreign policy. This said, I would not say that I am well

versed in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Finally, I am trained in political studies, my research is feminist and critical in its orientation, and I do most of my work in the area of Canadian Foreign policy. I am not mainstream by any sense of the imagination. Indeed, I think my 'scholarship' would be noted for its unusual writing style and emphasis on alternative voices in that are typically disregarded or silenced by disciplinary practices. And because I'm not mainstream, my status as a 'scholar' has been questioned by those in the mainstream even though I have a strong publication record.

So understanding these locations I can speak to the value of the scholarship of teaching and learning from each of these perspectives.

First, as the developing educational developer I gain so much from the community of folks who are both scholars and practitioners in a way that strikes me as unprecedented in my home discipline but I also struggle with the way educational development is becoming professionalized. I wonder if there will be a place for me in the future if I am not somehow judged a scholar.

Second, as a Dean or Director, the literature on scholarship of teaching and learning, and my ability to point to journals or provide resources, seems to legitimize some of the discussions around teaching in a way that if I said "because I think so" would not work. And in a research intensive small university they translate the scholarship of teaching of learning into peer review publications. I must admit that I have issues with that very simple equation and try to explain otherwise, but somehow the cache remains in publishing. I think this is a way of disciplining of teaching that legitimizes institutions and not teachers or students.

Third, when I won my 3M I think I had read one book on teaching. My teaching was almost all intuitive and all based on conversations with colleagues, personal experience and some ISW training. I dabbled in the scholarship of teaching and learning in my home discipline by accident. The vast body of literature now in SoTL is overwhelming and I struggle to build a bridge between SoTL and political studies -- and it's tricky because contrary to claims that SoTL is based on either an extensive understanding of the discipline or pedagogical literature -- I wonder if the SoTL would publish a piece that was short on pedagogy but heavy on Canadian foreign policy just like the editor of the foreign policy piece told me to dump some of the teaching stuff. I wonder if we underestimate the resilience of disciplines.

Fourth, from my critical feminist perspective I seriously question the value of SoTL -- not because the work isn't interesting or thoughtful or useful, but because there seems to be a movement to create a discipline like other scholarly communities, with norms and shared values and so forth. My experience is that disciplines discipline -- sometimes in ways where folks who are interested in quantitative work won't hire folks who do qualitative work; where questioning the absence of real humans leads to the rolling of eyes and so forth. Disciplines establish canons, rules, codes of conduct, hierarchies for publishing, and breed competition that is sometimes toxic. In conversation with a colleague the other day, we wondered if we become accepted as scholars of teaching and learning, what do we lose.

In conclusion, the questions asked above are really questions about identity. Who am I? Where do I fit? Where am I most genuine? Where do I feel authentic? These are questions I think we all have as teachers, administrators, scholars, and everyday people. For me, I think the answer is about being at ease with our own disconnections and to use those disconnections to build bridges and maybe even engage in "transformative dialogues".

Works Cited

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