

The Scholarship of Teaching as Transformative Learning: Perspectives, Experiences and Opportunities

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The ensuing rich exploration, discussion, and debate in the literature sparked by Boyer's (1990) seminal monograph *Scholarship Reconsidered*, has led to the generally-accepted adoption of the term "Scholarship of Teaching" to describe systematic and structured inquiry into teaching issues using accepted standards of scholarship to understand and change current practice. It is an evidence-based process that enables faculty members to use a variety of research strategies to investigate the link between teaching and learning in their own practice (Cross & Steadman, 1996). An inquiry often starts with the fundamental issue, opportunity, or problem related to teaching practice that a faculty member will transform into a researchable question.

One of the more subtle yet significant developments has been the addition of "and Learning" to the scholarship of teaching and learning to reinforce the foundational viewpoint that there are tight and profound linkages between teaching and learning that cannot be explored separately (Hutchings and Shulman, 1999; Shulman, 1999; Healey, 2000). Nevertheless, there is an equally compelling reason for the existence of the "L" in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL). It reminds us that one of the primary benefits of engaging in systematic, structured, and scholarly inquiry into teaching practices is the opportunity to enhance one's own professional learning through the process of experiencing significant shifts in perspectives, in relationships, and in professional practices. Writing an article for a journal named *Transformative Dialogue* provides me with a timely opportunity to reflect on the theory of transformative learning and how it provides both a lens and an explanatory framework for understanding these shifts.

Transformative learning theory focuses on the inter-relationship between personal change and learning. It seeks to explain how people can experience deep, dramatic shifts in perspectives, feelings, behaviours or actions in the process of learning. As Clark (1993, p.47) indicates: "Transformational learning shapes people: they are different afterward, in ways both they and others can recognize". Mezirow (2000; 1997) suggests that the process of transformative learning involves changing frames of reference, habits of mind, and established patterns of behaviour through critical reflection, using discourse to scrutinize beliefs, taking action based on reflective insight, and critically assessing the outcomes.

Although conceptualizations of the theory of transformational learning have evolved over the last twenty-seven years (Cranton & King, 2003; Baumgartner, 2001), many of the core concepts persist. We come to understand ourselves by making meaning of our experiences. In everyday life, we habitually reinforce and extend this meaning through the exercise of our values, assumptions, beliefs, and practices. Sometimes, we experience circumstances that cause us to question these perspectives and beliefs.

Transformative learning happens when we are able to act differently as a result of the shift in perspective, questioning of assumptions, or re-examination of beliefs.

Over a span of seventeen years, I have had the good fortune of having two distinct but inter-related vantage points to observe the effect that SOTL has had on process of teaching and learning. When I take stock of my own engagement in systematic and scholarly inquiry into my teaching practices (Hamilton & Zaretsky, 1996; Hamilton & Greer, 2005; Hamilton, 2006) as well as my 17 years of experience as a faculty developer in helping teachers in both post-secondary and K-12 educational environments engage in similar activities, I am struck by some of the transformative aspects of practice and perspective that this engagement evokes.

From these vantage points, what are the kinds of changes have I seen that can be considered transformational? Here is a very brief summary of the areas of professional growth I have observed in others as well in my own practice:

Improved self-understanding through reflection - Pursuing a key issue related to teaching practice, determining how to investigate it, and then, interpreting the findings that will lead to effective action has provided both a structure and a process to facilitate reflection. Colleagues carrying out their own studies of teaching practices have indicated that the process of structured inquiry demands active and critical reflection that otherwise might not have happened in a busy academic's professional life. On a personal level, my involvement in scholarship of teaching and learning studies has broadened and deepened the kinds of reflective activities in which I have engaged. And without the rigour associated with this form of scholarship, I am convinced that the quality of my own learning and its impact on my practice would not have been as enduring.

Enhanced efficacy - Faculty members engaged in the scholarship of teaching and learning have expressed to me that they now know how to manage particular teaching and learning-related dilemmas and issues better because they have experience in pursuing evidence-based solutions that help to ameliorate the conditions that have created the dilemmas. In my own practice, I have noticed that I as a result of my engagement in studying my own teaching practices, I feel less constrained by previous experience and more willing to consider new innovations in teaching.

Better appreciation of the role of inquiry in the teaching process - SOTL scholars have practised the posing of really good and incisive questions about teaching and learning that have been enhanced by collegial scrutiny. On a personal level, creating these questions and helping others create these questions has led me to explore how questions can better stimulate my own reflective thinking and how I can better integrate question-based strategies into my own teaching practice so that my learners can benefit as well.

More openness to learning - Examining the challenging aspects of one's own teaching practice and then holding this up for critical analysis via presentations and publications demands a certain willingness to being both vulnerable and malleable to the views of others. We know that teaching can be an isolating endeavour if we let it be so. Nevertheless, I have observed that the process of going public with one's own

issues of wonderment and concern through structured inquiry has been one of the most perspective-changing aspects of the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Increased collaboration between teachers and learners in the co-creation of the learning experience - For many of the scholars of teaching and learning with whom I have worked, collaboration with learners in investigating an important teaching and learning issue was not an original goal but a serendipitous or unanticipated outcome of the process facilitated by the act of going public with the inquiry. Many of these scholars have been surprised by the common interest shown by learners in understanding and improving the learning and teaching process. Others have used the opportunity to systematically investigate their teaching to experiment with engaging students as partners in classroom inquiry. In both cases, I have observed changes in the ways that faculty members have extended the collaboration from co-engagement in research to co-engagement in creating a more learner-centered environment for teaching. Personally, this has changed the way that I view the teaching process immensely; I am more concerned and attuned to the means of creating the right environment for the shared responsibility of learning to flourish. Additionally, I have been more declarative in my classes about the value I personally place on being able to learn from my students.

Increased collegial identification and collaboration - As scholars of teaching and learning, we often view ourselves as pioneers who are breaking down barriers in our own institutions that limit how we are engaged in improving practice, how we frame our inquiries, how we conduct our research, and how we are recognized and rewarded for our forays into these newer forms of scholarship. Personally, my own SOTL experience has enabled me to seek out faculty members on campus who share an interest in the subject and are willing to consider various ways of collaborating and working together to enhance and sustain this critical form of scholarship.

Confidence building through writing - Regardless of recent calls for more creative ways to share and discuss the results of SOTL-related inquiries (Wickens, 2006), there is often nothing more gratifying, liberating, and cathartic than to complete a final report on a SOTL study. Although the personal benefits to our practice have often already been realized before the report has been written, the act of writing often creates new opportunities for disciplined reflection, introspection, and critical analysis. What originally appears as daunting, frustrating, and perhaps, less satisfying compared to the act of inquiry itself often becomes one of the key transformative elements in the scholarship process.

Profound expressions of academic leadership - The scholarship of teaching and learning is viewed not only as means of personal change but as an avenue for promoting disciplinary or systems-level change as well (Huber & Hutchings, 2005; Hutchings and Schulman, 1999). My observations and experience suggest that this is not often an original goal of most faculty members engaged in scholarship of teaching and learning. Nevertheless, raising questions about one's practice and having the courage to examine these under a critical light often leads faculty members to start examining the broader philosophical, pedagogical, and disciplinary contexts in which these practices reside and how these can be modified and improved. Furthermore, I am amazed at the number of faculty members whose forays into studying the impact of

their teaching have led them to assume both informal and formal leadership positions in which they have more opportunity to affect the kinds of changes described above.

As I reflect on these changes, I see some acute synergies between the fundamental tenets of transformational learning and how these can be reinforced through the scholarship of teaching and learning. The process of problematizing a teaching and learning issue, discussing this quandary with colleagues, seeking out evidence that informs the resolution of the problem or issue, reflecting, and acting on selective improvement strategies, and then sharing this in a broader academic community can be considered an highly-elucidating and transformative journey of personal and professional discovery. Cranton and King (2003) suggest that this transformative process should be the goal of professional development:

If we do not consciously think about and reflect on our practice, we become nothing more than automatons following a dubious set of rules or principles - rules or principles that are unlikely to be relevant in the ever-changing, complex context of teaching and learning (p.32).

So now that I have made some fundamental links between transformative learning and SOTL, where does this leave us? I have construed the research literature related to the scholarship of teaching and learning as having several dimensions that are consistent with a new and emerging field of study. The first dimension, in-situ, focuses on the products of the scholarship of teaching and learning; the individual inquiries that help to inform disciplinary practice. A second dimension, inter, probes into the relationships between different SOTL studies and what we can learn from studying themes, patterns, and issues that cut across individual studies. A third dimension, infra, examines the structures and conditions, especially those at a departmental, institutional, or organizational level that support engagement in SOTL. A fourth dimension, supra, explores the maturation of the field - its evolution as well as the key issues and challenges that create opportunities for deepening, broadening, and enriching debate and dialogue about the notion of scholarship in teaching and learning itself. Finally, there is a fifth dimension, intra, that explores the impact of engaging in SOTL on the scholars themselves.

Looking more closely at the links between SOTL, transformational learning, and professional growth provides one significant way of contributing to this last dimension. Although publications exist, such as Huber's (2004) *Balancing Acts* or Hatch's (2005) *Going Public with Our Teaching*, that have chronicled the experiences of faculty members who have integrated the scholarship of teaching and learning into their academic careers, there has been very limited study to date of the actual changes academic undergo as they engaged in SOTL. The observations of these impacts that I have shared in this paper are anecdotal and limited in scope and detail. Sharing these experiences does, however, create an opportunity to pose questions such as the following about the effects of engaging in the scholarship of teaching and learning: In what ways have SOTL scholars been transformed? What does it take to be transformed? What supports help in the transformative process? How does SOTL create opportunities for sustained professional growth as a result of transformational learning?

I sincerely hope that pursuing answers to these questions will help us to understand and further support SOTL as a professionally-enriching and, sometimes, life-altering activity.

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