

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning - Understandings and Applications

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Do a Goggle search on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and up pops 3.69 million hits; i.e., obviously a lot of people have a great deal to say about the topic. The difficult part for many instructors is that they consider what goes on in their classroom to be specific to that small part of the universe and of absolutely no interest to anyone else. Nothing could be farther from the truth!!

Every time I step into a classroom it is another adventure in the scholarship of teaching and learning for both my students and myself. I am just finishing up my thirty-first year of teaching chemistry at the post-secondary level and content preparation is no longer the problem. Coming up with new ways to approach the increasingly complex backgrounds/abilities/interests of my students is the biggest challenge that I face every in class.

My first teaching position was at Sir Wilfred Grenfell College in Corner Brook Newfoundland. As a newly minted Ph.D. from UBC, I began my teaching career in the fall of 1976 by spending many hours crafting each of my "lectures" to ensure that everything would be crystal clear to the students. What I soon discovered was that many of the students had never done any chemistry in high school and for those that had, many were being held back by less than stellar abilities in mathematics. Funny how the situation has not changed a great deal over the past 30 years!!

I soon realized that I would have to come up with different ways of presenting the material to try and emphasize the non-mathematical aspects of chemistry first, and then once a foundation of understanding was there, work on improving the mathematical abilities of the students. Having three other colleagues who were also very early on in their teaching careers helped, and we had some wonderful head-butting discussions over what was working, or not working, in our classrooms.

For me, this is what the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is all about, sharing/arguing/discussing/trying/attempting/succeeding/failing with new ideas/techniques/demonstrations/testing/questioning in the classroom and laboratory. I firmly believe that just as important as having a new idea is to quickly get rid of it by sharing it with someone else. We all have very different styles/techniques with our students both in and out of the classroom, but we can all benefit from discussions with colleagues, no matter what area they teach in or how many years they have been at it. The sharing can be done in a formal sense; i.e., during a conference or workshop presentation, in print by submission to a journal or newsletter, or simply over a cup of coffee between classes. So get out there and try it. I'm certain that you will like it.