

Chapter 4

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Promoting Publication or Encouraging Engagement?

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ABSTRACT

Ernest Boyer's (1990, 1996) writings attempted to reposition teaching as a legitimate and prioritized activity within the academy. He recognized teaching as having the same value as traditional research, presenting it as an endeavor with its own distinctive scholarship; however, in reality, teaching is quite different from research. This chapter provides a background for Boyer's reconsideration and considers the history of an emerging Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). In particular, it focuses on the double-edged sword presented by the requirement of publishing in SoTL. Publishing can either be orientated inwards, disseminating new knowledge in ways that consolidated the discipline's status, or orientated outwards, directed towards those concerned with improving the efficacy of their teaching. The chapter looks at the publication requirement, its impact on the vision and mission of SoTL, and the degree to which it has repositioned and reprioritized teaching in the academy. It provides suggestions on ways of furthering SoTL's impact and on new directions for research, practice, and publication.

INTRODUCTION

Faculty has been presented with multiple roles in the academy; roles that it has subsequently assumed. These roles are integral to the social structures, dramaturgical enactments, and cultural environment of higher education. They shape how faculty members perceive themselves, how they arrange their priorities, and how they are

evaluated and rewarded. For some, the primary role and responsibility is teaching: sharing knowledge and encouraging learners to reach levels of understanding that they could not have reached otherwise. For others, scholarly research is paramount and its primary purpose is to advance the boundaries of knowledge and to share this with the scholarly community. Faculty members may have role preferences, but they do not necessarily

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have choices; whether teaching or research predominates depends on the nature of the institution, its value and reward systems, and increasingly on the nature of funding.

Historically, the research function had been privileged and rewarded in the academy – particularly in large American research universities that have extensive postgraduate activity. Within this traditionally “narrow paradigm” of scholarly activity, teaching had been neglected or at least had been relegated to a low priority; however, teaching and research are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, it is clear that each makes a critical contribution to the growth of faculty, the reputation of the institution, and the success of its students. Although the symbiotic relationship between teaching and research seems clear, this does not mean that a balance between excellence in research and excellence in teaching is necessarily appreciated by faculty or achieved by the institution.

In his *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* Ernest Boyer (1990) radically moved the argument away from a putative trade-off between the faculty’s research and teaching efforts. Instead of presenting a zero-sum scenario, in which teaching activities necessarily detracted from research excellence, he advanced a win-win proposition that acknowledged the importance of both, their borderless fluidity, and their potential for synergistic enhancement. Twenty-five years later, some fear that this synergistic vision has been gradually forgotten, or steadily eroded. The erosion is not necessarily deliberate; rather, it is the inevitable outcome of focusing too keenly on the parts that occupy the foreground, while neglecting the background that gives those parts meaning. Of the four domains of scholarship that Boyer identified it would have seemed that the newest – the Scholarship of Teaching – had the greatest freshness and potential. Yet the fluidity between teaching, research, and publication in the Scholarship of Teaching has run into problems: it has gelled, the balance has been disturbed, and the

fragmented pieces have been privileged over the unified whole. In particular, it often seems that the focus of Scholarship of Teaching has moved away from what instructors do, and what learners experience in classrooms or online environments, to what scholars present and share in the pages of their publications.

This chapter examines the presumption of a publishing imperative in the scholarship associated with teaching. Although a number of variants of a scholarly approach to teaching have been proposed, the most robust has been the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). Since its origin, SoTL practitioners and scholars have been exhorted to publish their work – literally to make it public. This imperative, which has been used to define and promote SoTL, raises a number of questions: Has the publishing requirement contributed to a broader understanding of how teaching is done, or how the learning process is understood? To what extent has Boyer’s connection between research, publication, and teaching been realized? Has publication promoted the infusion of SoTL values and understandings in the academy? Has the preoccupation – some might even say the fixation – of demonstrating SoTL *scholarliness* through publication had the unanticipated consequence of separating it from promoting *teaching excellence* and advancing engagement with learners?

The first section of this chapter provides background by examining two of Ernest Boyer’s seminal works: *Scholarship Reconsidered* (published in 1990), and the lesser known *The Scholarship of Engagement*, which was published posthumously six years later. The earlier publication represents the beginning point for identifying the different domains of scholarship within the academy, including SoTL, but it does a great deal more. The later publication reiterated much of what had appeared in *Scholarship Reconsidered*, but it also integrated Boyer’s vision of teaching, research, and scholarship by linking them to a broader mission that he termed *engagement*.

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