The Evolution of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the Academic Community

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Abstract

The scholarship of teaching was first introduced by Ernest Boyer when he published Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate in 1990. Since that time many scholars had attempted to define the scholarship of teaching especially as it relates to teaching excellence. Boyer’s work really took hold on college campuses around the United States due to the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) in the late 90’s, when the scholarship of teaching started to become known as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). The article provides a review of the literature concerning SoTL and how it has become institutionalized on and off college campuses.

Keywords

Scholarship of teaching; Scholarship of teaching and learning; Teaching excellence; Boyer

Introduction

It is important to visit the literature that shaped the concept and practice of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) to appreciate the nature of the articles to be found in this special issue of Journal of Tourism Research and Hospitality. The concept of teaching as a form of scholarship equal to that of traditional research was first proposed by Ernest Boyer [1] when he published a report on the professorate to document how the academy had evolved over the years. In the report, he called for the 1990s “to be the decade of SoTL”. According to Smith [2]:

“…there is a very logical reason for the morphing of this term over time. In the phrase the scholarship of teaching, the emphasis is on the teacher, which implies what the teacher does is the more important part of the equation between faculty and student. However, although what faculty does can certainly affect how much students learn, faculty behavior is not the “magic bullet” that can bring about student learning regardless of what students do. Rather, the truly important behavior in the equation is how much students learn and how they perform”.

When all is said and done, McKinney [3] gets it right when she says that “the most important function of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is to enhance student learning”. What follows is a review of the literature that shaped what we call SoTL today.

Review of the Literature

In his 1990 publication, Boyer documented the evolution of scholarship at America’s colleges and universities beginning with the colonial college, which primarily focused on building the character of students. The colonial college model gave way to the notion of higher education serving the needs of the agricultural and mechanical revolution through the Morrill Act of 1862 (also known as Land Grant College Act) and the Hatch Act of 1887 that ultimately brought learning to the farming community and academic pursuits aimed at building our nation. By the late 19th century the focus of student development under the colonial college model began to give way to that of graduate education and research common to the European university tradition. Over time, the focus on research led to the expectation that professors conduct research and publish it. Research productivity soon became the basis upon which promotion and tenure decisions were made. The pressure to publish soon became the measure by which all colleges were judged, even those who did not have a research mission. Boyer made it clear that “at many of the nation’s four-year institutions, the focus had moved from the student to the professorate, from general to specialized education, and from loyalty to the campus to the profession” which he did not see as a trend in the right direction.

As a result, Boyer [1] argued that scholarship should be defined as more than research and publication and not a matter of “research versus teaching” – it should be thought of as having four separate, overlapping functions referred to as the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, and the scholarship of application and the scholarship of teaching. The following excerpts from Boyer [1] define the different forms of scholarship:

“The scholarship of discovery, comes closest to what is meant when academics speak of ‘research’…no tenets in the academy are held in higher regard than the commitment to knowledge for its own sake…central to the work of higher learning…and contributes not only to the stock of human knowledge but also to the intellectual climate of college or university”.

“The scholarship of integration underscores the need for scholars who give meaning to isolated facts…making connections across disciplines, placing the specialties in larger context, illuminating data in a revealing way…serious, disciplined work that seeks to interpret, draw together, and bring new insight to bear on original research…fitting one’s research – or the research of others – into larger intellectual patterns”.

“The scholarship of application moves toward engagement…reflecting the Zeitgeist of the nineteenth and early twentieth century
that...land grant colleges...were founded on the principle that higher education must serve the interests of the larger community...to one's special field of knowledge and relate to, and flow directly out of, this professional activity...requiring the vigor - and the accountability - traditionally associated with research activities”.

“Finally, we come to the scholarship of teaching...as a scholarly enterprise, teaching begins with what the teacher knows...those who teach must, above all, be well informed, and steeped in the knowledge of their fields...teaching is also a dynamic endeavor involving all analogies, metaphors, and images that build bridges between the teacher’s understanding and the student’s learning...yet, today teaching is often viewed as a routine function, tacked on, something almost anyone can do...defined as scholarship, however, teaching both educates and entices future scholars...and keeps the flame of scholarship alive”.

Simultaneous to the work being done by Boyer, Weaver [4] argued that scholarly engagement and teaching quality are essentially independent phenomena except that both compete equally for faculty time and energy. So why not combine the two to make it worthwhile for faculty to publish on their teaching. Similar to Boyer’s notion of there being many forms of scholarship, Weaver [4] gets to the heart of the scholarship of teaching when he writes “If faculty, as teachers, were more actively to present their ideas about the substance of their teaching in formal and public ways, it could encourage greater attention to the very real and vital intellectual dimensions of teaching, create opportunities for faculty to engage in a manner fully compatible with their teaching responsibilities, and thereby make curricula more educational and rewarding for teachers”. This would result in better college and university teaching.

In 1991, Boyer once more argued that the definition of “scholar” be redefined because knowledge is acquired through research, synthesis, practice, and by teaching. Therefore, Boyer [5] called upon research universities to aggressively support teaching to provide a quality education to the undergraduate student population, and to do that he urged “the nation’s ranking universities to extend special status and salary incentives to those professors who devote most of their time to teaching and are particularly effective in the classroom...such recognition will signify that the campus regards teaching excellence as a hallmark of professional success”.

Cross [6] echoed Boyer’s sentiment when she maintained that assessing student performance is important but it does not get at “how” or “why” the students performed the way they did which could be accomplished through classroom research via the scholarship of teaching because:

“Few college teachers know much about the learning process. For the most part, they have only their experience as learners to guide them...If we in higher education are serious about taking responsibility for maximizing student learning, then teachers are going to have to know more about how the students in their classroom learn. And one way to do that is to carefully and systematically observe their own students in the process of learning the particular subject matter that the teacher is trying to teach”.

The benefit of faculty conducting research on their teaching is the ability to read the published research findings of their peers as well as publish the research findings from their own classroom research for others to read, much like they do when it comes to the scholarship of discovery. To that end, Cross [6] predicted that college teaching as a scholarly endeavor would come into its own in the 21st century through the creation of “teaching/learning communities with the shared goal of understanding learning well enough to improve it - individually and collectively”. Her prediction may slowly becoming true as more faculty members take an interest in conducting research on their teaching and making the methods and findings public.

The early notion of the current concept, referred to as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) began when Shulman [7] pointed out that “Boyer did not draw a sharp line between excellent teaching and the scholarship of teaching”. According to Shulman, what Boyer intended to do was encourage educators to make teaching a process that was open to public scrutiny so that it could be used by others to advance their teaching. Just as it is in the case of traditional research which is defined as “an activity of critical, systematic investigation in one or more fields and the submission of one’s findings, for criticism by professional peers and the public through published writings, lectures, or other modes of presentation” [7].

Boyer’s work really began to take hold in the academic community in the late 90’s when more and more campuses made a public commitment to the scholarship of teaching through the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL). This major initiative was launched in 1998 as a response to Boyer’s work on the scholarship of teaching. As indicated on its website (http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/scholarship-teaching-learning) the CASTL program:

“...sought to support the development of a scholarship of teaching and learning that: fosters significant, long-lasting learning for all students; enhances the practice and profession of teaching, and; brings to faculty members’ work as teachers the recognition and reward afforded to other forms of scholarly work. Achieving these goals involves significant shifts in thought and practice. For faculty in settings, teaching is a private act, limited to the teacher and students; it is rarely evaluated by professional peers. The result...is that those who engage in innovative acts of teaching rarely build upon the work of others; nor can others build upon theirs. Thus, the goal of CASTL is to render teaching public, subject to critical evaluation, and usable by others in both the scholarly and the general community.”

A big part of the CASTL program is the Institutional Leadership Program. The CASTL Institutional Leadership Program builds on the influential work undertaken by colleges and universities, campus centers and educational organizations, scholarly and professional societies, and CASTL Campus Program Leadership Clusters, to facilitate collaboration among institutions with demonstrated commitment to and capacity for action, inquiry and innovation in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Another big part of the CASTL program is Carnegie Scholars program which started in 1998 and has run five cohorts of faculty who have participated in the on-year residency program at the Carnegie Foundation. During their residency, a select group of diverse faculty from various academic units and universities work on producing individual scholarship of teaching and learning projects, represented in diverse forms including project summaries, multimedia snapshots, and online portfolios. To date, this initiative has graduated 140 Carnegie Scholars who go back to their respective campuses to plant the seeds of SoTL.

Hutchings and Shulman [8] pointed out that one of the key reasons for campus to commit to the scholarship of teaching was that more faculty were engaged in sustained inquiry into their teaching
practice and their students’ learning, which is different from excellent teaching. Hutchings and Shulman [8] felt that all faculty members have an obligation to teach well but when one’s teaching “entails certain practices of classroom assessment and evidence gathering, when it is informed not only by the latest ideas in the field but current ideas about teaching the field, when it invites peer collaboration and review, then that teaching might readily be called scholarly, or reflective or informed”. But to be considered scholarship of teaching, faculty need to make their teaching available to the public, open to critique and evaluation, and in a form that other educators can build on to enhance the quality of their teaching and that of student learning. Thus, what makes the scholarship of teaching separate from excellent teaching is for faculty to “frame and systematically investigate questions related to student learning – the conditions under which it occurs, what it looks like, how to deepen it, and so forth – and do so with an eye not only to improving their own classroom but to advancing the practice beyond it” [8].

Although Boyer advocated that academia expand the definition of scholarship to include not only research (scholarship of discovery) but also the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application, and the scholarship of teaching there were no standards by which to measure the four forms of scholarship. That changed when the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching conducted a survey to come up with standards for measuring all forms of scholarship. As reported by Glassick [9], six shared themes “emerged, called ‘standards’ that stated for a work of scholarship to be praised, it must be characterized by clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, outstanding results, effective communication, and a reflection critique…which could be applied to all forms of scholarship proposed by Boyer”.

Kreber and Cranton [10] argued that there were three perspectives from which one could view the scholarship of teaching. The first perspective is that of traditional research which culminates in journal articles, conference presentations, textbooks, etc. From this perspective, teaching effectiveness is inferred from the scholarly output of the teacher. In the second perspective, the scholarship of teaching is equated with excellence in teaching as evidenced by teaching awards, peer and student evaluations of teaching, and so forth. This perspective suggests that the teacher has extensive knowledge about the subject of teaching and learning. The third perspective is that scholars of teaching are those who apply educational theory and practice into their teaching and develop a veritable wisdom of practice that comes from trying new things and reflecting on the results.

Smith [11] continued the quest to discern the difference between teaching and the scholarship of teaching when he stated that teaching is not only defined as what teachers do in the classroom it “refers to the design and implementation of activities to promote student learning and includes course design and the development of instructional materials, the out-of-class interactions between faculty members and students, as well as formative and summative assessment of student learning”. Smith went on to say that “scholarly teaching goes beyond being a scholar in one’s field and knowing the latest stuff…it includes knowing about teaching and learning, pedagogy and andragogy, instructional design, teaching and learning styles, methods of assessment – the adequate preparation for teaching – as well as implementation, impact, and reflective critique”. Similar to others, Smith also pointed out “that in order to contribute to the scholarship of teaching, the results of one’s inquiries into teaching and learning, must, at minimum, be public to some audience, permanent in some way, and judged to be scholarly by some community of practice”. And some of the ways faculty can make their teaching public is through research papers, conference presentations and teaching portfolios.

Kreber [12] argued that “the scholarship of teaching is not for everyone for all time…faculty members do different kinds of scholarly inquiry and pose different questions at different times in their professional lives…some scholars will choose to focus on teaching and learning; others will not”. Therefore it is important to recognize and reward those who are excellent teachers compared to those who engage in the scholarship of teaching. The difference, according to Kreber [12], being that:

“…scholars of teaching are excellent teachers, but they differ from both excellent and expert teachers in that they share their knowledge and advance the knowledge of teaching and learning in the discipline in a way that can be peer-reviewed. They differ from excellent teachers in the nature and sources of their knowledge construction, with personal teaching experience being one of various valid sources. Scholars of teaching are also expert teachers in that they engage in focused reflection on or self-regulated learning about teaching, relying on building on their declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge, and implicit knowledge of teaching and learning and the discipline. However, they go further so as to make their knowledge public”.

Lueddeke [13] advocated engaging in the scholarship of teaching due to a fundamental problem he saw in academia when commenting that “main deterrents to realizing a more responsive and progressive higher education environment appears to be a tenacity by which the academic community holds on to fundamental values and shared beliefs about teaching and learning, in spite of the evidence that suggests that there might be a better way of doing things”. An institutional mindset that was at odds with the findings of his study that found a rather “high interest staff have in ongoing dialogue on matters pertaining to teaching and learning…the need to be part of a community of teachers, to talk seriously about teaching and learning, to have one’s ideas listened to and taken seriously, to get to slow down for a moment and reflect, and to be recognized by peers as contributing to an important larger enterprise” [13]. A sentiment that is central to the theory and practice of the scholarship of teaching and perhaps the reason Lueddeke [13] concluded that “…if teaching is to be considered a professional calling, then academics may need to place their preparation to do research on an equal footing with that for teaching…They would be expected to know more than just their subject…they would need to know the ways it can be understood, the way it can be misunderstood and what counts as understanding… and convincing staff members that problems they encounter in their particular teaching contexts are worth pursuing as an ongoing and intellectual focus”.

Trigwell and Shale [14] recounted Boyer’s call for a reconceptualization of the activity of the university to consider “the prospect of proportional and appropriate status for teaching alongside research, and, through greater respect for teaching, increased potential for enhancing the quality of student learning”. Overall, Trigwell and Shale [14] agreed with other researchers that the scholarship of teaching has three core aims: “that it should be a means through which the status of teaching may be raised; that it should be a means through which teachers may come to teach more knowledgeably; and that it should provide a means through which the quality of teaching may be assessed”. As a result of their study, the authors differentiated teaching from the scholarship of teaching by proposing teaching is a
scholarly process that makes learning possible, while the scholarship of teaching makes one’s teaching public so others can scrutinize how student learning was made possible.

But there are those who believe that teaching will not be considered equal to research until it is vigorously assessed using criteria that are recognized by the academic community. According to Bowden [15], although the state of teaching has improved it is not even close to being on par with the prestige of traditional research that is the primary pursuit of faculty at most colleges and universities. But the question remains as to whether teaching itself, or research about teaching, will indeed enhance the quality of instruction experienced by students. This is an important question to answer because students are increasingly voicing their concerns about the low priority being placed to teaching on campus, prompting Bowden [15] to lament that:

“In the current climate, students all too often are the losers. Today, undergraduates are aggressively recruited. In glossy brochures, they’re assured that teaching is important, that a spirit of community pervades the campus, and that general education is the core of the undergraduate experience. But the reality is that, on far too many campuses, teaching is not well rewarded, and faculty who spend too much time counseling and advising students may diminish their prospects for tenure and promotion”.

To enable other faculty to understand what it means to be a teacher-researcher, Vieira [16], noted that even though he was an educational researcher who advocated the use of pedagogical inquiry in education he had to learn how to do research on his own teaching in order to help others improve their teaching. To do that, he had to go against the traditional university culture and work with other disciplines, collaborate with peers, and conduct non-disciplinary research to discover innovative teaching methods that benefit student learning. In other words, he chose to believe that there is merit in doing research on one’s teaching, regardless of what others in the academy think. In his article, Vieira [16] proposed a set of qualitative “research-oriented standards to evaluate the quality of the scholarship, including: clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, and reflective critique”. Each of these standards was then clearly defined along with those things that hinder and help faculty achieve the standards. For example, “clear goals” meant faculty must be clear about the purpose of the scholarship along with clearly defined goals. One of the barriers to developing clear goals included the lack of tradition in that type of research that can be overcome by collaborating with others.

Unlike other scholars, Boshier [17] argued that if Boyer were alive today, he would have a hard time defining what even he meant by the scholarship of teaching never mind getting more buy-in from academics who conduct traditional research. And simply using the peer review process to evaluate one’s teaching does not validate the scholarship of teaching as scholarship. Leading Boshier [17] to conclude that “scholarship of teaching is down but not out…like an old racehorse, there is always the possibility of a comeback…In the meantime, faculty or academic staff with doubts about it might be better off using the traditional three-legged route (research, teaching, service) to promotion…Boyer’s [1] model was built on shaky foundation and has not improved with age”.

However, Boshier’s [17] sentiment does not ring true across the academic community these days. Due in large part to CASTL, there are many universities that have that have answered Boyer’s call to embrace the scholarship of teaching as reported by Bonner [18]. As it turns out, The University of Alabama encourages faculty to combine teaching and research because it is dedicated to being a student-centered research institution. The move to become a student-centered research university was started by a grassroots effort led by faculty a decade prior to the publication of the article. Bonner [18] stated that a student-centered research university is one where:

“…institutional effort and support go toward ensuring quality teaching and student learning…students engage with the institution, with each other, and with their learning…faculty focus time and attention on being the best teachers they can be to ensure student learning…faculty collect information about their teaching and student learning and that when appropriate, they seek scholarly dissemination of this information”.

The University of Alabama is not alone in this regard since Illinois State University has a SoTL initiative on its campus complete with website (http://sotl.illinoisstate.edu) that has lots of resources for faculty not to mention events, awards, grants, publications, and even an endowed chair in SoTL. Illinois State defines SoTL simply as “systematic reflection on teaching and learning made public” (http://sotl.illinoisstate.edu/) that was developed by a diverse group of faculty, staff, and students involved in the early CASTL Campus Program in 1998. As mentioned on its website (http://sotl.illinoisstate.edu/):

“The primary focus of our SoTL work is on the learning and development of Illinois State University students. Currently, our primary efforts to support SoTL on campus are housed with the Cross Chair in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. This site contains links to internal support for SoTL work, links to other sites about SoTL, and materials or links to examples of SoTL work. In addition, The Center for Teaching, Learning & Technology at Illinois State also supports the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL).”

There are also professional societies dedicated to the advancement of SoTL, such as the International Society of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) which was founded in 1994 by a committee of 67 scholars from several countries. According to its website, the ISSOTL (http://www.issotl.org/history) was organized to:

“…a) Recognize and encourage scholarly work on teaching and learning in each discipline, within other scholarly societies, and across educational levels, b) Promote cross-disciplinary conversation to create synergy and prompt new lines of inquiry, c) Facilitate the collaboration of scholars in different countries and the flow of new findings and applications across national boundaries, d) Encourage the integration of discovery, learning and public engagement, and e) Advocate for support, review, recognition, and appropriate uses of the scholarship of teaching and learning.”

A proliferation of discipline specific and at large journals has been launched that are dedicated to SoTL these days. The website hosted by Illinois State University (http://ilstu.libguides.com/sotl) lists close to 40 journals for those who want to read or publish articles on teaching and learning. Chief among them is the Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning published through Indiana University. The peer reviewed Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (JoSoTL) was founded in 2001 to be a forum for the dissemination of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in higher education for the community of teacher-scholars (http://Josotl.indiana.edu/).

According to its website, the objective of the journal is to publish
articles that promote effective practices in teaching and learning and add to the knowledge base. The themes of the articles found in the JoSoTL fall into the categories of those that are data-driven (formal research projects), reflective essays (may challenge the current practice of SoTL), reviews (which may include literature reviews), case studies (that illustrate SoTL and its applications), and comments & communication (which may include book reviews). There is also the International Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (IJ-SoTL), which, according to its (http://academics.georgiasouthern.edu/ijsotl) is an "open, peer-reviewed, international electronic journal published twice a year by the Center for Excellence in Teaching at Georgia Southern University to be an international vehicle for articles, essays, and discussions about the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and its applications in higher/tertiary education today."

Of particular interest to those teaching in hospitality and tourism programs are the peer reviewed journals that are dedicated to those who want to read or publish articles on advancing the quality of education provided by hospitality and tourism programs. For example, The International Council of Hospitality, Restaurant and Institutional Educators (I-CHRIE) publishes the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Educator (http://scholarworks.umass.edu/jhte/) which is a refereed, interdisciplinary quarterly designed to serve the needs of all levels of hospitality and tourism education through discussion issues with the common purpose of educational improvement. The International Society of Travel and Tourism Educators (ISTTE) also publishes the Journal of Teaching in Travel and Tourism (http://www.istte.org/journal.html) which is a refereed journal that publishes papers relating to travel and tourism education at various levels ranging from professional schools to degree granting universities. The Journal of Culinary Science and Technology (http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/wcsc20/current) is another peer reviewed journal that publishes articles on teaching and learning for culinary educators. Of course, this special issue on SoTL that you are now reading adds to the list.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Boyer sparked great interest and debate throughout Academia when he proposed that teaching be considered as a form of scholarship (scholarship of teaching) similar to traditional research (scholarship of discovery) when he published Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate in 1990. Although the debate over what is meant by the term scholarship of teaching continues to be had among scholars as to whether it leads to teaching excellence or vice versa the fact remains that there is a legion of faculty currently practicing SoTL, as evidenced by the proliferation of journals dedicated to those who do research on their teaching to discover new and better ways to educate students. Not to mention the conferences and professional associations that bring people from all academic units (not just those in schools of education) together to share what they have done to improve their teaching as well as listen to those who have done the same to enhance student learning. Were Boyer to be alive today he would have been humbled as to the positive impact his work in the lives of those who teach for a living and the benefits derived by the thousands and thousands of students who attend college to prepare for their chosen careers.

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