

**Scholarship in Support of Institutional Change ... Institutional Change in Support of  
Scholarship**

Richard A. Gale

Mount Royal College

Although I have no idea when he said it, where he said it, or if he said it at all, there is a quote attributed to hockey legend Wayne Gretzky that seems pertinent to advancing scholarship of teaching and learning at the institutional level: “I skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it has been.” This strikes me as the hockey equivalent of Lee Shulman’s “visions of the possible,” a phrase that first appeared with the subtitle, “Models for Campus Support of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.” In that essay, Lee articulated four academy models for coordinating and advancing teaching and learning scholarship at the campus level. Each model presented a structure for institutions to “skate where the puck is going to be,” and all can be found somewhere in North America.

But sometimes advancement comes not from one model or another but from other (often opportune) circumstances. During the last year I have been working as a visiting scholar for Mount Royal College (Calgary AB Canada), where institutional support for scholarship of teaching and learning is being driven by an institutional sea change—the transition from college to university status (Canadian colleges are generally two-year institutions). This new status is generating changes in the academic plan and encouraging a re-imagining of its commitments to teaching, learning, and scholarship. It is also raising important questions about how institutional change advances scholarship of teaching and learning, how scholarship of teaching and learning advances and supports institutional change, and how scholarship of teaching and learning institutions “skate to where the puck is going to be.”

### **Keeping high-quality teaching and learning front and centre**

There are certainly some colleges and universities that can approach institutional change from a perspective divorced or at least removed from learning and teaching. But for those (like Mount Royal) that have always been learning-and-teaching-centric institutions, any significant change must occur within a pedagogical context. This is where scholarship of teaching and learning can provide an important “identity marker” for maintaining core institutional values, keeping student learning and pedagogical innovation at the forefront of faculty work, and demonstrating a commitment to integrating old and new profiles in a way that will benefit the institution and its constituencies. By devoting resources (which need not be measured in dollars), ratcheting up the public rhetoric of visible and vocal and vigorous support from administration and faculty, and acknowledging the viability and stature of all forms of research (à la Boyer), institutions can use scholarship of teaching and learning to help redefine institutional identity. And in return, that new identity will naturally support the advancement of scholarship of teaching and learning, especially along vectors of institutional change.

### **Re-aligning the research profile**

Faculty research is often what defines a university, but scholarship of teaching and learning is rarely at the centre of any institution’s research agenda. Even those campuses that have embraced the idea of Boyer’s four scholarships (application, discovery, integration, teaching) often privilege discovery above all else. But with institutional change comes an opportunity for re-evaluation of faculty work, and re- alignment of research expectations. In recent years we have seen scholarship of application rise in prominence as community-based research and other outreach-oriented inquiry has gained traction. Something similar can be said for the scholarships of integration and teaching. But in all cases there has been a commitment on the part of campus leaders (VPs research, chairs, and faculty) to not only acknowledge alternatives to bench work, field study, archival investigation, etc., but also to understand them

deeply, promote them honestly, and support them consistently. Including all forms of scholarship as appropriate and serious avenues for faculty research has the potential to invigorate young faculty, who often enter the field of higher education with a passion for teaching but still have their advisor's research expectations ringing in their ears. Likewise, supporting scholarship of teaching and learning for experienced faculty members who have been devoting time and energy to excellence in teaching and learning and encouraging those teachers interested in building on their own experience in the classroom and turning their pedagogical expertise into scholarly inquiry can only yield positive outcomes and dividends ranging from a re-invigorated professoriate to a new process for passing the teaching excellence torch to a new generation. Such research will also respond to the growing need for evidence of student learning, helping institutions address issues of assessment and accountability.

### **Building and growing a core of experienced scholars, mentors, and exemplars**

In order to advance scholarship of teaching and learning institutionally, there must be both a core group and a critical mass of faculty committed to and engaged in systematic scholarly inquiry into student learning. One of the most successful ways of developing that population is through a teaching academy, similar to the model developed for the Carnegie Scholars of the CASTL Program.<sup>1</sup> This has been the approach taken by Mount Royal,<sup>2</sup> and it is particularly well suited to institutions trying to be intentional about fostering engagement with scholarship of teaching and learning. The most important features of such a program include instruction, production, community, mentorship, and sustainability. Selected faculty need to learn what it means to do scholarship of teaching and to actually conduct a research project with supportive yet critical guidance. They must produce scholarship that is of a high quality and

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/programs/sub.asp?key=21&subkey=63&topkey=21>

<sup>2</sup> <http://mtroyal.ab.ca/ProgramsCourses/FacultiesSchoolsCentres/InstituteForScholarshipOfTeachingLearning/ScholarsProgram/>

likely to create disciplinary and interdisciplinary impact. This must occur within a community of scholars with an explicit mandate to serve as mentors within the larger academic context of which they are a part. Finally, the program must be sustainable as an organizational entity (constantly bringing in new scholars and expanding the impact of the experienced scholars) and as a practice undertaken by those who are serving as exemplars (faculty cannot be burned out because of ever-increasing expectations). All scholars should understand the responsibilities of selection and embrace their roles as standard-bearers, mentors, informed colleagues, and future leaders. In turn, they will help establish scholarship of teaching and learning as a robust activity while coordinating parallel efforts within their own departments and establishing collaborative relationships with other faculty. Despite the fact that such a program needs administrative support, it is really a grassroots initiative: operating across the campus community, influencing individual programs as well as institutional processes, institutionalizing a faculty-centric process of exposure to, engagement with, and expansion of scholarship of teaching and learning.

### **Championing the intellectual link between teaching and scholarship**

For too long we have accepted the “two cultures” of teaching and research as necessary binaries—applauding those who care about both so long as they are scholars first and teachers second—when in reality they are complementary parts of a “braided practice” that includes disciplinary knowledge, pedagogical expertise, and scholarly inquiry (for more see Gale 2007). Although it may seem like a given, the idea of helping faculty build on their own teaching and learning expertise to establish a research agenda is somewhat novel as a growth strategy. It is, however, an important way for excellence in teaching and commitment to learning to be valued, rewarded, and celebrated. Similarly, it brings a renewed sense of stature to the academic enterprise and a new path for those looking to expand what was once simply good practice into research agendas for the greater good. By acknowledging and raising to prominence the

intellectual work of teaching and learning, by linking such work to the future and fortunes of the college or university, an institution is declaring itself to be a champion of more integrated approaches to the business of postsecondary education (which in my mind is where the puck is going to be).

As I said at the outset, all of these reflections have been sparked by my work with Mount Royal as they embark upon a new and exciting chapter in their 100-year (and counting) odyssey. But for many institutions, the changes they are facing have less to do with growth and expansion and more to do with re-grouping and re-evaluating in the face of dwindling resources. Can scholarship of teaching and learning support institutional change (and vice versa) during bad times as well as good? I have to say yes, it can. For it is during times of re-evaluation and retrenchment that we need to keep teaching and learning front and centre, rethink what kind of research can and should define our identity, build a culture of inquiry, and celebrate the intellectual work that goes into improvements in teaching and learning. What matters are not specifics of time and place and opportunity, but rather the willingness to think about scholarship of teaching and learning as central to institutional culture and to act on that thinking in productive, collaborative, and intentional ways.

### References

Boyer, E. (1990) *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. Princeton, N.J.: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Gale, R. (2007) "Braided Practice: the place of scholarly inquiry in teaching excellence," in *International Perspectives on Teaching Excellence in Higher Education*. London: Routledge.

Shulman, L. (1999) "Visions of the Possible: Models for Campus Support of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning"

<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/publications/sub.asp?key=452&subkey=621>

(accessed 30 July 2009).