

Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning for Christians in Higher Education

Volume 2 | Issue 1

Article 4

2007

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Recommended Citation

Norton, Timothy D. (2007). Reviewing *Balancing Acts: The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Academic Careers*. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning for Christians in Higher Education*, 2(1), 8-11. Retrieved from http://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/sotl_ched/vol2/iss1/4

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Reviewing *Balancing Acts: The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Academic Careers*

Balancing Acts: The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Academic Careers

by Mary Taylor Huber

Stylus Publishing: Sterling, Virginia, Copyright 2004. 250 pages.

ISBN 1-56377-065-2. \$22.00.

by Timothy D. Norton, Ed.D.

In *Balancing Acts: The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, Mary Taylor Huber examines four individual faculty members with respect to “the pathways they have traveled through the scholarship of teaching and learning, the issues with which they engage, the communities [their] work brings them in touch with, and the consequences (so far) for their careers” (p. 2). Her intent for this examination is to provide for the larger academic community substantiation for the recognition of excellence in the scholarship of teaching and learning and to remind it that scholarship will only be maintained only as the “work that matters also becomes work that counts” (p. 3). The scholars in her case studies are Dan Bernstein, a psychologist at the University of Kansas; Brian Coppola, a chemist at the University of Michigan; Sheri Sheppard, a mechanical engineer at Stanford University; and Randy Bass, a teacher of English and American studies at Georgetown University. Huber’s book is an excellent study of how four professors dealt with the friction that often exists between teaching and traditional academic areas of study.

Through these scholars Huber gives her reader great insight as to the joys and traumas of walking the road less taken. Huber herself is familiar with the scholarship of teaching and learning; she is senior editor at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and works with the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. This book is the third in a series of Carnegie Foundation publications. The first two, *Scholarship Reconsidered*, to which Huber contributed, and *Scholarship Assessed*, which she coauthored, brought to the forefront the concept of the scholarship of teaching and learning.

The recognition of teaching as a serious scholarly endeavor is a theme found throughout the careers of each of the professors examined. The visibility of teaching, its subjection to peer judgment, the issues of teaching and learning being debated and critiqued, and the concluding concepts being built upon by others are ideas through which each of Huber’s scholars demonstrate that they are serious about the intellectualism of teaching and learning. In contrast to this ideal were the customary stepping stones to promotion and tenure that each department and university held as sacrosanct to the successful scholar’s confirmation. How each aspirant dealt with the muck and mire of the promotion system and held true to the commitment to his or her idea of the scholarship of teaching and learning is the examination presented in *Balancing Acts*.

“Get tenure, then you can go back and do the things you think are important” (p. 34). Such were the words expressed to Dan Bernstein of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln by his chair as he began his course toward promotion. Huber begins her examination of these four professors with an all-too-familiar concept faced by those whose research in teaching is all encompassing and yet does not produce the traditional

academic idea of scholarship. Huber points out that one of the major reasons for this is that teaching has not been seen as part of the “community property” produced by the university (Schulman as cited in Huber, p. 45). This is partly because resources and broad reputations are more easily brought to individual faculty, departments, and institutions through the traditional research and publication tracts and partly because academics are not professionally prepared in the area of teaching. Strengthening the idea that teaching can advance scholarship is the reason Huber presents Dan Bernstein’s story.

Peer review has become a theme since the mid-1990s with Bernstein and others leading the charge in their institutions. Through Bernstein’s story, Huber effectively illustrates that the implementation of peer review will reward not only good teaching but that teaching itself will be enriched by such a collegial review. An evaluation focused on student learning and course review offers the best means of creating the needed intellectual community of scholars. It is in this renewed interest and commitment to the scholarship of teaching and learning that faculty can “design, implement, and modify courses in the light of inquiry into learning so that more students will learn more deeply” (p. 62).

Huber notes that in the latter 1980s and early 1990s Bernstein himself finally had to prove “himself by the rules of the modern research game” (p. 37). He was promoted to full professor and received tenure. Bernstein’s renewed concentration on teaching and learning led to his commitment to Nebraska’s participation in the American Association for Higher Education’s (AAHE) Review of Teaching Project. In 2002, he joined the faculty at the University of Kansas and became the director of their Center for Teaching Excellence.

Huber moves on to the second professor’s story and observes, “Because pedagogy is not widely seen as a legitimate focus for disciplinary scholarship, it can be a challenge to make the case that it is worthy of departmental and institutional support” (p. 95). This was the dilemma facing associate professor of chemistry Brian Coppola at the University of Michigan as he began to pursue his tenure track promotion. In traditional departments where the faculty “do” the subject and newer, lower ranked faculty “teach” the subject, the idea of tenure and promotion centered around the scholarship of teaching and learning is difficult to establish. Huber points out that part of the problem is that departments are not necessarily interested in establishing a teaching position within their departments. It is this challenge of presenting work that does not echo the traditional teaching, research, and service model that must be overcome by the academic centered on the idea that teaching can be a major and complete contributing part of scholarship. As such, teaching is not for those who can’t “do” but is a legitimate specialization for any professor. With this perspective, Coppola had to establish a new way for his department to view what he does.

Rather than presenting himself in the “language of exception” (p. 106), Huber points out how Coppola became a professor of chemistry with a specialty in discipline-centered teaching and learning. This approach allows for the traditional steps in formulating one’s promotion record through the avenues of teaching evaluations, grants and publications, and establishing a reputation in the field. To confirm these accomplishments, a model can be developed and would include descriptive categories highlighting the “day to day teaching practices...the structure of an educational program . . . [and] assessment and evaluation practices” (p. 107). Huber comments on how this

pattern can establish a new way for a department to view what faculty members concerned with the scholarship of teaching and learning actually do. This formula, along with the support of his colleagues, allowed Coppola to receive tenure.

Even though Sheri Sheppard, an associate professor at Stanford, had been a pioneer in engineering classroom teaching approaches, directing summer workshops on pedagogy for new engineering faculty, and exploring the process of teaching engineering, her colleagues agreed that her educational approach might hinder her tenure. Huber points out that the role one's instructional colleagues play as well as the respect garnered within the profession outside of one's institution lends credence to the acceptability of upward academic success. Considering the scholarship of teaching and learning as an academic endeavor when it does not align with one's colleagues' priorities and personal scholarship is to engage in a very risky business. Huber emphasizes that the scholarship of teaching and learning involves "exploring pedagogies, curricula, and assessments that will broaden and deepen student understanding" (p. 145). As such, it merits acceptance as an exacting exercise of academic rigor. The concern lies in how to assess this intellectual endeavor.

At issue is that the scholarship of teaching and learning may include unconventional pedagogical innovations. How then does one show evidence of the impact of a teaching innovation? How can the spread of this impact be demonstrated? How may the individual credit for the success of this impact be legitimized in the faculty reward system? Additional concerns surface as to the credibility of authorship:

[The] central question to be resolved in the years ahead is the extent to which postsecondary teaching is an entrepreneurial activity carried out by individuals in search of personal gain, or a community activity carried out by people with shared commitments who are in conversation with one another. (Knight Higher Education Collaborative on "Who Owns Teaching" as cited in Huber, p. 160)

Huber concludes that this shared idea, which is very different from the traditional concept of academic authorship, must lead higher education to encourage faculty in their engagement of teaching and learning pedagogical and curricular innovations with their own unique systems of reward and recognition. Though Sheppard did receive tenure, her experience adds credence to the call by Huber and others for a new view on the legitimate value of the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Randy Bass sees technology as a means of fostering "learning cultures" (p.170), with faculty and students. He brought to the English department at Georgetown University the idea that technology could serve the humanities through the scholarship of teaching and learning.

"Visibility" is a key value and challenge for the scholarship of teaching and learning. Somehow, teaching must be made visible to colleagues if it is to enter a community of scholars who can provide constructive critique and evaluation and build upon it in their own pedagogical work. (Schulman as cited in Huber, p. 189)

Huber uses the tenure case of Randy Bass to speak to technology and its contribution to teaching. Concerns are aired as to the limits found with the traditional avenues of academic expression. The rising cost of publication for journals and scholarly books has

provided a need for “other genres as outlets for research” (Phillips as cited in Huber, p. 189). She points out that the print medium is not always the best way to share or highlight the scholarship of teaching and learning. The use of portfolios, email, online communities, and international electronic connections are providing new venues for teaching and learning. All of these means of educating must be made visible to peers. At the same time, institutions must be willing to see the value of the new ways of teaching and learning.

Bass experienced a split view when his department was not opposed to his technological innovations but encouraged him to mix them with traditional scholarly publication. Instead of following this advice, Bass decided to redesign his courses, to make each component intentional, and to document his course in a portfolio. These innovations, along with his growing recognition as a pioneer in technology outside of Georgetown, aided in his attaining tenure.

These brief vignettes of the careers of four scholars on the road to recognition by their colleagues and institutions are but the tip of the iceberg as represented by Huber. Huber shows how these four individuals took the cause of teaching and learning and brought it forward as an acceptable indication of true scholarship and as a vital part of academic careers. Her book is well researched, well presented, and well worth the read.

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