Journal of Communication Pedagogy
2018, Vol. 1(1) 20–23

DOI:10.31446/JCP.2018.06
Central States Communication Association

# Communication Pedagogy and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: A Natural Match and a Promising Future

**Mary Ann Danielson**

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) views "the work of the classroom as a site for inquiry, asking and answering questions about students' learning in ways that can improve one's own classroom and also advance the larger profession of teaching" (Huber & Hutchings, 2005, p. 1). Much like the Communication discipline, SoTL scholars recognize and accept "the diversity in definitions or understandings of SoTL [communication] that exist even among experts in the field" (McKinney, 2007, p. 5), even as we affirm the work of the professoriate involves the scholarship of teaching (Boyer, 1990). As Huber and Hutchings (2006) observed:

> There has always been a literature about the classroom. But systematic attention to teaching has largely been the province of small, disconnected communities of faculty reading and contributing to the few newsletters, journals, and conferences where pedagogical issues in their fields were aired. (p. 26)

As previously described (Danielson, 2012), SoTL offers a systematic approach to the study of teaching and learning by transcending effective teaching or even scholarly teaching (Smith, 2001) and entails a public account open to "critical review by the teacher's professional peers and amenable to productive employment in future work by members of the same community" (Shulman, 1998, p. 6). Although "there are many ways to improve the quality of education, we believe that the scholarship of teaching and learning holds special promise" (Huber & Hutchings, 2006, p. 25), as does the *Journal of Communication Pedagogy*.

## How Does Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Inform Communication Pedagogy?

Engaging in principles of good SoTL practice elucidates communication pedagogy and offers communication scholars opportunities to contribute to both the Communication discipline and

Mary Ann Danielson, Teaching and Learning Center, Creighton University, Omaha, NE
CONTACT: Mary Ann Danielson maddam@creighton.edu

a(n) (inter)national body of scholarship. Felten (2013) identified five principles of good practice in SoTL: (a) inquiry focused on student learning; (b) grounded in context; (c) methodologically sound; (d) conducted in partnership with students; and (e) appropriately public. The first principle invites us to think of teaching practice and the evidence of student learning as [research] problems to be investigated, analyzed, represented, and debated (Bass, 1999). Inquiry-driven research questions may be framed as "What is," "What works," "visions of the possible," and "formulations of new conceptual frameworks" (Hutchings, 2000, pp. 4–5). Although all research should be both grounded in both scholarly and local context and be methodologically sound, the second and third principles remind us to recognize how different disciplines incline faculty toward different questions and distinct ways of collecting and analyzing evidence of student learning [see Miller-Young and Yeo's (2015) Conceptual Framework for an illustration of the range of theories and methodologies available to SoTL researchers]. The fourth and fifth principles implore us to remember that when we engage student voices, we improve student learning and enhance faculty "communities of learning" (Bovill, Cook-Sather, & Felten, 2011; Duda & Danielson, 2015), which then requires that these findings be made public.

Opening our classrooms to educational inquiry has long been a SoTL hallmark. Communal and public sharing is necessary as Bernstein (2008) argued, "When we describe teaching as serious intellectual work or scholarship, we need to prove that the products of teaching can also be rigorously evaluated for excellence by a community of peers" (p. 51). Among our communication peers are SoTL pioneers and former Carnegie Scholars Carolyn Calloway-Thomas and Tracy Russo as well as Sherry Morreale (Huber & Morreale, 2002), whose work highlighted disciplinary styles' influence on inquiry into teaching and learning.

Drawing upon this seminal work, communication scholars now have opportunities to advance an understanding of communication signature pedagogies and threshold concepts, as but two of our limitless research agendas. Signature pedagogies "reflect the deep structures of the discipline or profession" (Ciccone, 2009, p. xiii). So, how does Communication as a discipline or interpersonal, organizational, or mass communication (or insert your communication sub-discipline) help students think like disciplinary experts? How do we move our students from generic to disciplinary learning (Pace & Middendorf, 2004) or from surface (recognition) to deep (complex, multi-layered, contextualized) learning? Deepening our students' knowledge—and our understanding of their knowledge—may be advanced through exploration of threshold concepts:

> Once students attain a deep understanding of such a concept, there is no going back; the new understanding integrates all previous knowledge into a transformed understanding of the subject, and also delineates its boundaries from other related subjects. Such knowledge, and especially the process of gaining it and transforming one's understanding, can often be difficult and troublesome for students, as it involves changing and rearranging previous conceptions and misconceptions. (Wismath, Orr, & MacKay, 2015, p. 64)

What are Communication's threshold concepts? Which communicative concepts produce a transformed understanding of our discipline? If you are not sure Communication threshold concepts exist, consider your course "bottlenecks" or where students struggle to learn or rearrange previous (mis)conceptions. These "teaching problems" may invite you into "the work of the classroom as a site for inquiry, asking and answering questions about students' learning" (Huber & Hutchings, 2005, p. 1).

## Conclusion

Why a *Journal of Communication Pedagogy*, particularly as grounded in SoTL principles? Borrowing from Shulman (2001): Essentially, it is our professional obligation to be scholars and educators in our disciplines; additionally, this work is practical and will help us and others (as it is made public) improve teaching and learning. Most importantly, you join a "community of educators[-scholars] committed to pedagogical inquiry and innovation [who] come together to exchange ideas about teaching and learning and use them to meet the challenges of educating students" (Huber & Hutchings, 2005, p. x).

## References


Bass, R. (1999). The scholarship of teaching: What's the problem? *Inventio: Creative Thinking about Learning and Teaching, 1*(1).

Bernstein, D. (2008). Peer review and evaluation of the intellectual work of teaching. *Change, 40*(2), 48–51.

Bovill, C., Cook-Sather, A., & Felten, P. (2011). Students as co-creators of teaching approaches, course design, and curricula: Implications for academic developers. *International Journal for Academic Development, 16*, 133–145. doi:10.1080/1360144x.2011.568690

Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Ciccone, A. A. (2009). Foreword. In R. A. R. Gurung, N. L. Chick & A. Haynie (Eds.), *Exploring signature pedagogies: Approaches to teaching disciplinary habits of mind* (pp. xi–xvi). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Danielson, M. A. (2012). SoTL as generative heuristic methodology in building learning communities. *International Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 6*(2), Article 4. doi.10.20429/ijsotl.2012.060204

Duda, G. & Danielson, M. A. (2015). *Collaborative curricular (re)construction (C3): Engaging students in the process of course re-design*. Paper presented at the meeting of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Melbourne, Australia.

Felten, P. (2013). Principles of good practice in SoTL. *Teaching & Learning Inquiry, 1*(1), 121–125.

Huber, M. T., & Hutchings, P. (2005). *The advancement of learning: Building the teaching commons*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Huber, M. T., & Hutchings, P. (2006). Building the teaching commons. *Change, 38*(3), 24–31.

Huber, M. T., & Morreale, S. P. (Eds.). (2002). *Disciplinary styles in the scholarship of teaching and learning*. Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Hutchings, P. (Ed.). (2000). *Opening lines: Approaches to the scholarship of teaching and learning*. Menlo Park, CA: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

McKinney, K. (2007). *Enhancing learning through the scholarship of teaching and learning: The challenges and joys of juggling*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miller-Young, J., & Yeo, M. (2015). Conceptualizing and communicating SoTL: A framework for the field. *Teaching & Learning Inquiry, 3*(2), 37–53. doi:10.20343/teachlearninqu.3.2.37

Pace, D., & Middendorf, J. (Eds.). (2004). Decoding the disciplines: A model for helping students learn disciplinary ways of thinking. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 98*, 1–12.

Shulman, L. S. (1998). Course anatomy: The dissection and analysis of knowledge through teaching. In P. Hutchings (Ed.), *The course portfolio: How faculty can examine their teaching to advance practice and improve student learning* (pp. 5–12). Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.

Shulman, L. S. (2001). From Minsk to Pinsk: Why a scholarship of teaching and learning? *The Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 1*, 48–52.

Smith, R. (2001). Formative evaluation and the scholarship of teaching and learning. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 88,* 51–62.

Werder, C., & Otis, M. M. (Eds). (2010). *Engaging student voices in the study of teaching and learning.* Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Wismath, S., Orr, D., & MacKay, B. (2015). Threshold concepts in the development of problem-solving skills. *Teaching & Learning Inquiry, 3*(1), 63–73. doi:10.2979/teachlearninqu.3.1.63