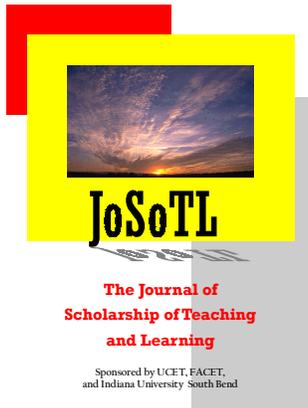


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From Minsk To Pinsk: Why A Scholarship Of Teaching And Learning?¹

[Lee S. Shulman](#)

**The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement
of Teaching**²

Preamble

More than 25 years ago, I was serving as an American Psychological Association visiting scholar to the psychology departments of small liberal arts colleges. I spent two days at a lovely campus in southeastern Indiana, Hanover College. I particularly enjoyed the energy and intelligence of an undergraduate psychology major named Randy Isaacson. A short time later, he was admitted to the doctoral program in educational psychology at Michigan State University, where I had been teaching since 1963. When Randy completed his PhD at Michigan State, he returned to Indiana as a member of the faculty at Indiana University, South Bend.

What a pleasure it has been to reconnect with Randy so many years later around our mutual passion for the importance of a scholarship of teaching and learning. I deeply appreciate his role in the creation of this on-line journal. The Indiana University System is demonstrating significant national leadership in sponsoring this effort, as well as in its pioneering initiatives to recognize and reward scholarly contributions to teaching and learning among its faculty members.

¹ These remarks were originally prepared for a meeting of the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) campus affiliates hosted by the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) at its 2000 annual meeting held in Anaheim, CA, March 29, 2000.

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A Strange Journey

As more individual teacher/scholars and their institutions become engaged in the scholarship of teaching and learning, we often find ourselves discussing the history of the phenomenon, the precise definitions of “scholarship,” “teaching,” and “learning,” and some of the methodological and technical standards for conducting such research in an excellent manner. Periodically, it is worthwhile to step back and ask: “*Why* are doing this? What are the reasons we are committed to the pursuit of such work?”

At such times I am reminded of the old Jewish story of the Russian itinerant who needed to travel from Minsk to Pinsk. He caught a ride with a wagon driver whose cart was drawn by a rather ancient horse. As they approached the first significant hill on the Minsk-Pinsk highway, the driver halted the cart, unhitched the horse, and asked the passenger to assist him in pushing the wagon to the top of the hill. At the top, he hitched up the horse again, and they proceeded on their way until the next small elevation, where they again repeated the previous procedure.

After the fifth such ritual, the now-exhausted passenger dropped to his knees at the side of the road and looked quizzically at the driver. “I know why I have to get to Pinsk. I suspect you have a reason for going there as well. Enlighten me please. Why are we bringing the horse?” As we strengthen both our resolve and our capacities for moving faculty in higher education from the Minsk of a restricted view of scholarship to the Pinsk of a more comprehensive and inclusive perspective, we had better step back and make sure we understand why we need the horse of a scholarship of teaching and learning.

Three P’s

I’d like to suggest that there are three broad rationales for advocating a serious investment in the scholarship of teaching and learning: Professionalism, Pragmatism, and Policy. *Professionalism* refers to the inherent obligations and opportunities associated with becoming a professional scholar/educator, and especially with the responsibilities to one’s discipline symbolized by the PhD. *Pragmatism* refers to the activities needed to ensure that one’s work as an educator is constantly improving and meeting its objectives and its responsibilities to students. *Policy* refers to the capacity to respond to the legitimate questions of legislatures, boards and the increasingly robust demands of a developing market for higher education.

Professionalism. The most important reason for engaging in the scholarship of teaching is professional role and responsibility. Each of us in higher education is a member of at least two professions: that of our discipline, interdiscipline or professional field (e.g., history, women’s studies, accounting) as well as our profession as educator. In both of these intersecting domains, we bear the responsibilities of scholars—to discover, to connect, to apply and to teach. As scholars, we take on the obligation to add to the core of understanding, skepticism, method and critique that defines our fields and their ever-changing borders. We also assume the responsibility for passing on what we learn to discern and act, through teaching, social action, and through exchanging our insights with fellow professionals. Indeed, the core values of professional communities revolve around the expectation that we do not keep secrets, whether of discovery or of grounded doubt. We are expected to share our knowledge by making it public, whether via publication, correspondence,

presentations or pedagogy. The new technologies make such exchange even more widely possible than ever before.

I have emphasized the professional imperatives for a scholarship of teaching most seriously in other writings. In so doing, I have also emphasized the importance of distinguishing between two equally important and desirable activities—scholarly teaching and a scholarship *of* teaching. This is a distinction that Boyer chose not to make in ***Scholarship Reconsidered***. Scholarly teaching is teaching that is well grounded in the sources and resources appropriate to the field. It reflects a thoughtful selection and integration of ideas and examples, and well-designed strategies of course design, development, transmission, interaction and assessment. Scholarly teaching should also model the methods and values of a field, avoiding dogma and the mystification of evidence, argument and warrant.

We develop a scholarship of teaching when our work as teachers becomes public, peer-reviewed and critiqued, and exchanged with other members of our professional communities so they, in turn, can build on our work. These are the qualities of all scholarship.

Both scholarly teaching and a scholarship of teaching are deeply valued in the professional community. Scholarly teaching is like the clinical work of faculty members in a medical school's teaching hospital. I would never wish to be associated with a medical school that was not home to outstanding clinical faculty. That clinical work, however valued, does not become scholarship until it is subjected to systematic reflective analysis. Such reflection leads to its display or communication in ways that render it community property in the fullest sense—public, reviewed and exchanged.

The *professional* rationale for engaging in the scholarship of teaching is that affords all of us the opportunity to enact the functions of scholarship for which we were all prepared. We can treat our courses and classrooms as laboratories or field sites in the best sense of the term, and can contribute through our scholarship to the improvement and understanding of learning and teaching in our field. Thus, the professional imperative for a scholarship of teaching is both individual and communal. We fulfill our own obligations as members of the dual professions with which we identify, and we fulfill our responsibilities to our professional peers to “pass on” what we discover, discern and experience.

Pragmatism. The professional rationale is critical, but not sufficient. We also have a practical rationale for pursuing the scholarship of teaching and learning. Such work helps guide our efforts in the design and adaptation of teaching in the interests of student learning. By engaging in purposive reflection, documentation, assessment and analysis of teaching and learning, and doing so in a more public and accessible manner, we not only support the improvement of our own teaching. We raise the likelihood that our work is transparent to our colleagues who design and instruct many of the same students in the same or related programs. Active scholarship of teaching provides the teacher with a very different perspective on what he or she may have been doing for many years. I have recently had such an experience myself.

A Recent—and Personal—Example

During the past semester, I have been team-teaching (with my colleague Professor Linda Darling-Hammond) a course—*Principles of Learning for Teaching*—that I have taught at Stanford since 1983. For most of those years, I co-taught the class with a variety of colleagues. The team teaching alone fostered serious reflection about the teaching. I have written about my strategies of teaching in the

course (e.g., Shulman, 1996)³, but I never actively conducted research on the teaching and learning taking place in the course itself.

This year, for the first time, we agreed to conduct more systematic research on the teaching and learning processes. This commitment was in no small measure motivated by my experience in working with Carnegie Scholars on their own scholarship of teaching projects.

The course is offered to all (nearly 60) secondary teaching candidates at Stanford. They are preparing to teach mathematics, social studies, English, science or foreign languages in middle and high schools. All students already hold at least a BA or BS in their discipline and will receive an MA at the completion of their teacher preparation. During the academic year, each student is actively teaching in a secondary school for the first half of the day, returning to campus in the afternoon for formal classes, practicums and seminars.

At the core of the class is the case-writing assignment.⁴ All students are expected to complete a case study of their own practice during the class. They begin with brief “case starts” in which they outline an extended episode that they believe will be “caseworthy.” After feedback from the instructors and from their own colleagues, they prepare a first-draft case, which is presented in a small working case conference. Based on feedback, they then spend nearly a month revising and editing their case (often choosing to write an entirely new case) which is presented at a second case conference and then written in final form. During this period, they continue to read a variety of theoretical and research material on teaching and learning, as well as additional cases written by others. The final version of the case is written up after the second case conference, and is accompanied by two commentaries written by others, and a five-page reflective essay on the whole process.

We decided before the class was offered that we would conduct research on the processes of learning through case writing that constituted the central structure of the course. Our teaching colleague Dr. Karen Hammerness took on responsibility for documentation and data gathering. Karen systematically collected each draft of every case written, including the commentaries and the reflective essays. Extensive notes were taken of every class session. Selected sessions were videotaped, and selected case conferences were also videotaped. These data will now be organized and analyzed to answer a number of questions about the efficacy of case writing in promoting reflection, deep understanding and motivation among the students in the program.

We intend to do several things with these data. We will certainly meet to reflect on our findings and use those insights to redesign the course for the coming year. These meetings have already begun. We will also prepare more formal oral and written presentations on our experiences, methods, and findings. Hammerness is also taking leadership in developing a new web-site through which she will communicate our activities in the course, our insights into the learning that did (and did not) occur, and our analyses of the effort. We will also provide abundant examples of evolution of selected cases written during the term. Thus the web-site will also include examples of student work and their own reflections.

³ Shulman, Lee S. (1996). “Just in Case: Reflections on Learning from Experience” in J.A. Colbert, P. Desberg & K. Trimble (Eds.) *The Case for Education: Contemporary Approaches to Using Case Methods*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

⁴ The web page with the syllabus, instructions for writing cases and other materials for the course can be found at <http://www.stanford.edu/class/ed269/>.

I offer this personal account as an example of how the pragmatics of engaging in a scholarship of teaching on a course I have taught for years has introduced far more intelligent design and analysis of my own work than I have ever done before. Moreover, it has brought me into collaboration with close colleagues in new ways. I fully expect that our efforts at rendering this work public, reviewable and available for exchange can serve as a valuable resource for colleagues both within Stanford and in the more general community of teacher educators. I also believe that these efforts will lead to significant improvements in the course itself and in the program of which it is a part.

Policy. We in higher education are also enmeshed in webs of national, state and local policy. Those who make policies and approve budgets for our institutions are increasingly asking for evidence that we are making measurable progress toward our educational goals. Accrediting agencies are insisting on educational “audits” in which we provide evidence that we are achieving our stated goals and missions. “Accountability” and “Assessment” have become the themes of the emerging movements toward reform in higher education.

These are not bad ideas. They only become problems when the wrong indicators are used to assess the quality of our efforts. They are only problematic if the metrics employed are chosen because of convenience or economy of use, rather than because they serve as authentic proxies for the learning and development we seek to foster. These indicators cannot be “one-size-fits-all” quick-and-dirty off-the-shelf instruments that purport to measure the outcomes of higher education. They should be the result of carefully conceptualized, designed and deployed studies of teaching and learning in each of our fields, conducted by scholars qualified to pursue them. This kind of work cries out for a vigorous scholarship of teaching and learning engaged by discipline and field-specific scholars of teaching.

The free market is also creating new challenges for higher education. For-profit providers, distance learning, and other new sources for higher education are creating a market wherein institutions must be prepared to document and display evidence that they are fostering learning, deep understanding, passionate commitments and civic virtues in the domains in which they educate. Once again, unless we can provide relevant evidence of the processes and products of our pedagogies, we will find ourselves making empty claims and offering degraded arguments.

I envisage a scholarship of teaching and learning offering the kinds of evidence that can be powerful in these policy and free market discussions. New forms of institutional research will be developed that are learning-focused, domain-specific, and oriented toward analyzing the educative experiences and outcomes that institutions support or fail to support.

So who needs the horse?

I began this essay with a story about making the journey from Minsk to Pinsk.⁵ The protagonists seemed to understand why each of them needed to make the journey; it was unclear why they needed the horse. In this case, I believe it is clear why our professional, pragmatic and policy interests can be supported and enhanced by a scholarship of teaching and learning. It will not be an easy journey. At first, it may seem as if the horse is either useless, or an additional burden itself. Ultimately, however, we will need a sturdy horse to carry us on these journeys. We cannot do these

⁵ By the way, Minsk and Pinsk are now cities in Belarus. Minsk is the national capitol. In the 18th and 19th centuries they were usually part of Russia, but at different periods one or the other was in Poland or Lithuania.

things alone. We will need to develop networks of campus-based teaching academies to serve as centers, support systems and sanctuaries for these kind of scholarly efforts.⁶

Our interest in engaging in such work was summarized by three P's, our professional interest, our pragmatic responsibilities, and the pressures of policy. Scholarship of teaching and learning supports our individual and professional roles, our practical responsibilities to our students and our institutions, and our social and political obligations to those that support and take responsibility for higher education. We should be making all three journeys and we need a really good horse. This journal, its leaders, readers and contributors, are helping to make the journey possible.

⁶ I have written about a variety of visions for such academies in my essay "Visions of the Possible" reproduced at the Carnegie Foundation website: <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/OurWork/OurWork.htm>