

Teaching as community property; putting an end to pedagogical solitude.

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The belief in a 'community of scholars' often founders on the reality that teaching is a solitary experience. Teaching will be valued more by the academic community and society-at-large if it becomes more visible and accessible to the community.

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Putting an End to Pedagogical Solitude

At the end of the June commencement ceremony at which I received my graduate degree, George Beadle, then president of the University of Chicago, turned to those of us baking in our robes in Rockefeller Chapel and proclaimed, "Welcome to the community of scholars." Perspiring though I was, a chill went through me because this was something I had aspired to--membership in a community of scholars.

As the years have gone by, I've come to appreciate how naive was my anticipation of what it would mean to be a member of a scholarly community. My anticipation contained two visions. One was the vision of the solitary individual laboring quietly, perhaps even obscurely, somewhere in the library stacks, or in a laboratory, or at an archaeological site; someone who pursued his or her scholarship in splendid solitude. My second vision was of this solitary scholar entering the social order--becoming a member of the community--interacting with others, in the classroom and elsewhere, as a teacher.

What I didn't understand as a new Phd was that I had it backwards! We experience isolation not in the stacks but in the classroom. We close the classroom door and experience pedagogical solitude, whereas in our life as scholars, we are members of active communities: communities of conversation, communities of evaluation, communities in which we gather with others in our invisible colleges to exchange our findings, our methods, and our excuses.

I now believe that the reason teaching is not more valued in the academy is because the way we treat teaching removes it from the community of scholars. It is not that universities diminish the importance of teaching because they devalue the act itself; it is not that research is seen as having more intrinsic value than teaching. Rather, we celebrate those aspects of our lives and work that can become, as we say in California, "community property." And if we wish to see greater recognition and reward attached to teaching, we must change the status of teaching from private to community property. I would suggest three strategies that can guide us in this transformation.

First, we need to reconnect teaching to the disciplines. Although the disciplines are easy to bash because of the many problems they create for us, they are, nevertheless, the basis for our intellectual communities. Like it or not, the forms of scholarship that are seen as intellectual work in the disciplines are going to be valued more than forms of scholarship (such as teaching) that are seen as non-disciplinary.

Notice that I say non-disciplinary, not inter-disciplinary. (I would argue that most modern disciplines are in fact inter-disciplines.) The distinction is not between disciplinary and inter-disciplinary but disciplinary and non-disciplinary. Look, for instance, at the way the improvement of teaching is treated in most of our schools. Institutional support for teaching and its improvement tends to reside in a universitywide center for teaching and learning where many of the TAs are trained, and where faculty--regardless of department--can go for assistance in improving their practice. That's a perfectly reasonable idea. But notice the message it conveys--that teaching is generic, technical, and a matter of performance; that it's not part of the community that means so much to most faculty, the disciplinary, inter-disciplinary, or professional community. It's something general you lay on top of what you really do as a scholar in a discipline.

Similarly, in most of our institutions, the student evaluation forms are identical across the disciplines, as if teaching civil engineering and teaching Chaucer were the same. But of course they're not. We would never dream of sending out examples of someone's research for peer review to people at another university who were on that other university's faculty in general. The medievalists evaluate the research of other medievalists; research by civil engineers is reviewed by other civil engineers. Not so with teaching.

The first strategy I would argue for, then, in attempting to make teaching community--and therefore valued--property, is that we recognize that the communities that matter most are strongly identified with the disciplines of our scholarship. "Discipline" is in fact a powerful pun because it not only denotes a domain but also suggests a process: a community that disciplines is one that exercises quality, control, judgment, evaluation, and paradigmatic definition. We need to make the review, examination, and support of teaching part of the responsibility of the disciplinary community.

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The second strategy I would propose is that if teaching is going to be community property it must be made visible through artifacts that capture its richness and complexity. In the absence of such artifacts teaching is a bit like dry ice; it disappears at room temperature. You may protest, "But that's so much work!" Notice that we don't question this need to document when it comes to more traditional forms of scholarship. We don't judge each other's research on the basis of casual conversations in the hall; we say to our colleagues, "That's a lovely idea! You really must write it up." It may, in fact, take two years to write it up. But we accept this because it's clear that scholarship entails an artifact, a product, some form of community property that can be shared, discussed, critiqued, exchanged, built upon. So, if pedagogy is to become an important part of scholarship, we have to provide it with this same kind of documentation and transformation.

The third strategy is that if something is community property in the academy, and is thus deemed valuable, this means we deem it something whose value we have an obligation to judge. We assume, moreover, that our judgments will be enacted within the disciplinary community, which means, I'm afraid, that the terrifying phrase "peer review" must be applied to teaching. Think what this would mean: if your institution is like mine, the principle of peer review is best expressed not as an inverse-square law but as a direct-square law. The influence of any evaluation of someone's scholarship is directly related to the square of the distance from the campus where the evaluator works. So for Stanford faculty, a Berkeley review is pretty good, but Oxford is much better. (I haven't checked to see whether the curve continues as you go to Australia or if there's a plateau, but this is the sort of thing higher education researchers would probably enjoy studying.) My point is that the artifacts of teaching must be created and preserved so that they can be judged by communities of peers beyond the office next door.

This kind of peer review may seem far-fetched on many campuses; it is far from the norm. But one of the sources of pleasure I have had at Stanford is serving on the universitywide Appointments and Promotions Committee and thus reviewing promotion and appointment folders for the business school. In our business school, and I suspect in a number across the country, the promotion folders look very different from those in, say, history or biology. The portfolios of business school faculty are often just as thick in the domain of teaching as they are in the area of traditional social science and business scholarship. Included in them are samples of instructional materials developed by the teachers, cases they have written, and detailed essays in which candidates gloss and interpret the course syllabi that are included in their portfolios. Most

impressive of all, one finds reviews by colleagues who visit their classes and critique their case-based teaching, and reports by faculty at other business schools who examine their teaching materials and their cases. What a contrast to the promotion dossier that provides three sets of student ratings and two letters that say, "She must be a good teacher, she sure gives a good talk!"

There's an important corollary point to mention here too. We should evaluate each other as teachers not only with an eye to deriving accurate measurements of our teaching effectiveness--though of course we must have precision. Our evaluations should also have positive consequences for the processes and persons being evaluated. We are obliged, that is, to organize the evaluation of teaching so that the very procedures we employ raise the likelihood that teaching gets treated seriously, systematically, and as central to the lives of individual faculty and institutions. This means we are obliged to use procedures from which faculty are likely to learn how to teach better. I like the way the chair of the English Department at Stanford put it: "What we're trying to do," he said, "is to create a culture of teaching, one in which the conversations, the priorities [and, I would add, the rituals and kinship systems] of the department have teaching at their center."

No single change will produce this culture, but let me end with one suggestion that would, I think, take us a long way toward it. If we really want a different kind of culture, we ought to change our advertising. By way of example, I've drafted an ad for The Chronicle announcing a new position in 20th Century U.S. History at Shulman College. "We seek a new faculty member who is good at both research and teaching"--the ad says the usual things along those lines. But then it goes on to say that candidates who are invited to campus will be asked to offer two colloquia. In one colloquium, they will describe their current research--the usual research colloquium. In the second, which we'll call the pedagogical colloquium, they will address the pedagogy of their discipline. They will do so by expounding on the design of a course, showing systematically how this course is an act of scholarship in the discipline, and explaining how the course represents the central issues in the discipline and how in its pedagogy it affords students the opportunity to engage in the intellectual and moral work of the discipline.

Think of the impact on our doctoral programs if we knew that there were colleges and universities out there that had agreed to employ the pedagogical colloquium as a regular, central portion of that mating ritual we call recruitment. We could begin to change the ways we think about preparation for a life or career of scholarship. Moreover, the public nature of this pedagogical colloquium would change the culture of the institution doing the recruiting. We could

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begin to look as seriously at evidence of teaching abilities as we do at research productivity. We would no longer have merely to pray that this good young scholar can educate. We would have evidence of his or her abilities as an educator-in-the-discipline.

To change academic culture in this way will not be easy. But colleges and universities have always taken justifiable pride in their commitment to inquiry and criticism in all fields, even those where dogma and habit make real scrutiny uncomfortable. Now we must turn this tough scrutiny on our own practices, traditions, and culture. Only by doing so will we make teaching truly central to higher education.