NIPISSING
UNIVERSITY

Centre for Flexible Teaching and Learning Newsletter

Welcome from the Academic Director

In most universities, faculty members engage in teaching, research, and service. Recently, some North American universities have been criticized for valuing research more than teaching. Positively, in my opinion, more emphasis is being placed on teaching in some institutions. In Canada, for example, the widespread existence of teaching and learning centres on campuses, certificates in teaching for graduate students and less experienced faculty, the use of teaching dossiers, and various forms of teaching evaluation suggest an increased valuing of university teaching (Chism, 2007; Sorcinelli, 2000).

Additionally, the field of scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) as it includes teaching, educational research, and discipline-based research in educational contexts is emerging on campuses all over North America. Boyer's (1990) work Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate is often raised in the dialogue around teaching and research. According to Boyer, scholarship of teaching is as important as the scholarship of discovery or research.

Getting the balance right and moving to a model of teaching and research rather than teaching versus research is no small undertaking. Universities do require faculty to engage in scholarly work, and research is part of the life of the academy. At the same time, faculty involvement in the scholarship of teaching and learning can be a practical and rewarding way of marrying a faculty member's passion for teaching and the requirement to be actively engaged in research and other scholarly activities.

As we move into summer and contemplate what might be next on our professional journeys, perhaps SoTL might find a place. SoTL is an identified value in Nipissing's strategic plan and a pillar in the work supported by the Centre for Flexible Teaching and Learning. Please think about ways by which the CFTL might support your involvement in SoTL. Perhaps it is a collaborative educational initiative or participatory action research project where the Centre could provide certain supports. Perhaps it is the opportunity to network with others about publishing in general and more discipline-specific journals

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Lorraine

Boyer, E. (1990). Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate. Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Chism, M. (2007). Peer review of teaching: A sourcebook (2nd ed.). Bolton, MA: Anker.

Sorcinelli, M.D. (2000). Principles of good practice. Washington: American Association for Higher Education.

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Rob Graham

Q How do you assess the learning of your students?

A Guided by my teaching and learning philosophy, and by an understanding of the 21st century learner, it is important that my students have the opportunity to develop higher-level metacognitive skills and the ability to assess their own learning needs. I tend to make use of various forms of self-assessment as one part of the evaluation process. We know that opportunities for flexible online learning have blurred the traditional boundaries in terms of how, when, and where students take courses. The requirement for constant upgrading in today's workplace requires an individual to be able to guide their own learning journey and to have the skills to critically assess their own learning needs. I believe this is a hallmark of the 21st century workplace. Given this, we are doing our students a disservice by not fostering these important skills and developing this ability where possible. I often get students who tell me it is the first time in their academic career they have had the opportunity to critically self-assess their learning. I also get many students who tell me how difficult it is.

Q The term SoTL refers to the scholarship of teaching and learning. What projects do you have on the horizon that involve SoTL initiatives?

A I am fortunate in one sense that I am currently a doctoral candidate at Lancaster University in England. The field that I am researching and studying is e-Research and Technology Enhanced Learning. A key focus of the program is to critically examine the impact that online learning and networked learning is having on how we teach and how our students learn. In this sense, we are being challenged to consider taken-for-granted notions of networked learning and teaching. When you introduce online learning as an option for your students, you must be aware of the changes that this imply for teaching and learning. As I near the completion of the research modules for this program, I have come to realize just how much I really do not know about teaching and learning! I recently completed an action research project with a school that I found revitalizing. The impetus for this research came when one of my students at Nipissing asked me how I used one of the technologies we were exploring with the students I used to teach at W.J. Fricker. When I had to reply, "I did not have a chance to use this form of technology with them," I was disturbed by the fact I was teaching technology and not from what I regard as a real point of reference. To use a term I have adopted from Lin, I felt my teaching had an aspect of technolust to it (for more details join me for a coffee…you buy!). The action research got me back into the school system working actively with, and learning from other classroom teachers and students. I will now have a different answer for my students next year when that question is asked! In terms of upcoming initiatives, I am currently working on a podcasting project that is focused on aspects of SoTL. I will be interviewing teachers, academics and leaders in the field of technology enhanced learning with a view to gaining some deeper insights into the barriers and the successes of teaching with technology and in networked learning environments. I am currently working with the University to get the technological workflows in place and any issues sorted out before I begin posting. The goal is to make use of ITunes University and to have a presence with a purpose for the Nip U portal.

> To use a term I have adopted from Lin, I felt my teaching had an aspect of "technolust" to it

> The ability to connect with others via online networks can open many doors

Q What advice would you offer to colleagues who are ready to actively engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning?

A I would encourage any of my colleagues who are interested in this domain to make use of the many online communities of practice that currently exist. The ability to connect with others via online networks can open many doors. Of course, we also have the CFTL that can act as a great starting point. I would also suggest that this area of research and study is currently being challenged by the introduction of online learning environments. By moving learning and teaching online, we are being challenged to look at theories of learning with a renewed focus. There is some great work coming out of Lancaster University where I am studying, and the Open University (http://www.open.ac.uk/research/), also in the UK. The focus here is the scholarship of learning and teaching within the sphere of e-learning. There is considerable room for empirical investigation within this domain.

Arlene Grierson

Q What strategies do you as a professor use to foster students' learning?

A As a teacher educator, I believe that "how" I teach is as important as "what" I teach, which is Language Arts and Literacy. Consequently, it is important for me to "walk the talk" and provide social constructivist-oriented learning experiences, as I advocate that my students do so for their students. Social constructivism emphasizes the role of language and social interaction in the processes through which individuals make connections between new information and existing networks of prior knowledge, and learn through constructing representations through which they make sense of experiences. Accordingly, I engage students in collaboratively constructing new understandings through experiences that require them to access, share, discuss, and build on their prior knowledge. I try to provide students with "food for thought" which they "digest" through activities that require them to use the information and relate it to their classroom teaching experiences.

Q How do you assess the learning of your students?

A I use a variety of assessment strategies including small group class presentations, collaborative assignments that require students to assess and/or create teaching resources, and a series of individual reflective journals. The journals require students to synthesize the theoretical knowledge developed during the course, relate their theoretical knowledge to their practical teaching experiences, articulate their teaching beliefs, and identify areas for personal growth as a language arts teacher. Although most complete written reflections, in keeping with my belief in the importance of providing for diverse learning styles, students are provided with the opportunity to use alternative forms of representation. Some have used audio recordings, pictorial representations, graphic organizers, and in one instance, a complex "choose your own adventure" story. The journals provide abundant evidence of students' learning and enhance students' awareness of their own growth over time.

Q How do you know when you as the professor are successful?

A Students' reflective journals provide evidence of my effectiveness in meeting my objective of enhancing students' understandings of what they know, how they know, and what they need to learn next. I also gather feedback on a weekly basis through use of "tickets out of class" on which students list the key insights they derived from each session, as well as any questions or areas of confusion. This provides information to guide my subsequent instruction and enables me to be more responsive.

In addition to the standard course evaluation forms, my students provide anonymous feedback at the end of each term through a survey rating their perceptions of my enactment of six principles that I attempt to "live by" as a teacher educator: teaching is a relational activity, differentiated instruction enhances student learning, and the primary purpose of assessment is to support student learning. Students use an ordinal scale to rate the frequency (consistently, usually, sometimes, rarely) with which they perceive I adhere to each principle and provide anecdotal comments.

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Q What advice would you offer to colleagues who are ready to actively engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning?

A SoTL enables faculty to be simultaneously teaching and research focused. It is a very worthwhile area of study that has enhanced my teaching, my students' learning, and my research profile. Faculty members do not need to make a choice between devoting time to critically analyzing and seeking to improve their teaching practices or working on their research – through SoTL, they can do both!

Over the past seven years, I have engaged in several autobiographical and collaborative S-STEP (self-study of teacher education practices) research projects. Through experience, I have learned that collaborative self-study is particularly complex and it is critical to clarify all expectations at the outset of the study. This includes developing shared understandings about data ownership and use, whether participants will be identified in reporting the findings, the responsibilities of co-investigators throughout and following completion of the study, and the expectations for collaborative authorship. As outlined by McGinn and colleagues (2005), these understandings should be documented and formalized in ethical protocols and research agreements.

McGinn, M. K., Shields, C., Fenton, N.E., Manley-Casimir, M., & Grundy, A. (2005). Living Ethics: A Narrative of Collaboration and Belonging in a Research Team. Reflective Practice, 6, 551-567.

Q What strategies do you as a professor use to foster students' learning?

A In preparing BEd candidates to teach mathematics in a reform-based era, I find it helpful to model Problem-Based Learning (PBL) throughout the year-long course. By the time they have experienced, and then taken turns leading about a dozen or so "rich math problems" in various workshops, it becomes quite second nature for them and so they generally feel well-prepared to facilitate these types of learning experiences in their practicum classrooms. I have also found that maintaining an instructional website, along with a weblog for announcements, has been a very helpful way to organize and retrieve information for myself and for students, respectively, in the iTeach laptop program.

Q The term SoTL refers to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. What projects do you have on the horizon that involve SoTL initiatives?

A I am presently involved in several research projects that do relate to SoTL in various ways. One is an international (Canada/UK) project looking at how university mathematics professors use technology (Computer Algebra Systems) in their teaching and research, and how these are connected. A second project, entitled RE4RMU8, is the creation of a web- and mobile device-based resource for Grade 7 and 8 teachers to support the teaching of reform-based mathematics in Ontario schools. And a third, which we have just finished, was an ETFO project looking at Collaborative Action Research teacher teams in elementary schools working together to deepen their own knowledge about self-selected aspects of their mathematics teaching practice. As university professors, we were members of small teams around Ontario who provided support to these teacher teams, documenting their progress, and just enjoying the opportunity to watch teachers learn together about things that matter to them.

Q Do you have any resources you would recommend to colleagues interested in exploring the scholarship of teaching and learning (books, journals, conferences, etc.)?

A In terms of mathematics education, the Ontario Association of Mathematics Educators (OAME) publishes a professional journal, The Gazette, which regularly includes articles written for, and by, teachers that are very helpful at the classroom level. Dr. Doug Franks and I are pleased to have contributed a June 2011 Gazette article entitled "Messy Time: Transition to Reform-Based Mathematics Teaching and Learning", in which we share our ETFO project case study findings regarding how elementary teachers tend to encounter this uncomfortable feeling of "messy time" transition as they move towards reform-based methods, but how this phenomenon is natural, needed, reflective of the student journey, and should be supported by administrators wanting to encourage their teachers to expand their practice in schools. Academic journals such as the *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education* and *For the Learning of Mathematics* are also informative.

> "I think the scholarship of teaching and learning often involves deep (prolonged) curiosity, uncomfortable (and pedagogically messy) risk-taking, and careful (honest) reflection on practice.

Q What advice would you offer to colleagues who are ready to actively engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning?

A There is a well-worn aphorism that goes something like, "Primary teachers love their students, secondary teachers love their disciplines, and post-secondary teachers love themselves." I've met enough colleagues along my own journey thus far to know that while there may be some truth in the above indictments, there are also many exceptions and overlap in all three categories, and usually the best teachers at any level are equally concerned with their students, the curriculum, and their own well-being and work/life goals. I have the privilege at the Schulich School of Education to work with an incredible group of educators who simply love teaching and who, year after year, infect hundreds of students with their contagious enthusiasm and growing expertise. I think the scholarship of teaching and learning often involves deep (prolonged) curiosity, uncomfortable (and pedagogically messy) risk-taking, and careful (honest) reflection on practice.

Introducing the CFTL Team

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What's New in the CFTL

- The iTeach Laptop Learning Program is now fully integrated into the Aboriginal Teacher Certification Program. Orientation will take place July 4th and 6th.

- The CFTL instructional design team is participating in an international project called the MEL (Meaningful e-Learning) Project. Participants are from Ontario, Western Canada, and Australia.

- CFTL staff was instrumental in developing the new Nipissing website.

- An exciting day is being planned in early December with Dr. Richard Gale from Mount Royal University in Alberta. Richard is going to offer a Getting Started Workshop for SoTL.