

Book Review / Compte rendu

Gingras, J., Robinson, P., Waddell, J., & Cooper, L. D. (Eds.). (2016). *Teaching as scholarship: Preparing students for professional practice in community services*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press. Pages: 195. Price: CDN\$ 34.64 (Paperback)

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At Canada's first national symposium on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) at the University of Toronto in 2005, the Concept of SoTL was introduced to a large group of Canada's university and college administrators. Along with this introduction, there were discussions around its significance to higher education as well as exploring how best to support it. In the same year, Ryerson University, like many other Canadian universities, established a research center with a principal focus on SoTL. In *Teaching as Scholarship*, a number of members of the Faculty of Community Service (FCS) at Ryerson University provided narratives of their educational practices inspired by the principles of SoTL. The primary focus of *Teaching as Scholarship* is to (a) explore new ways of bringing research and practice to the community scale for students, and (b) search for new approaches towards teaching and learning that are responsive to community needs. The significance of the book's discussions is in taking the ongoing changes of communities' needs into account and making necessary changes in the education of students who are going to work as (care) professionals within communities, accordingly. Since the focus of this book is on the fields dealing with care and/or social service provision (e.g. health care, social work, early childhood, etc.), aspects of social transformation, critical reflection, and ethics of care are highlighted throughout.

The book is responding to a call to provide concrete outcomes of incorporating scholarship of teaching and learning towards the creation of positive impacts in the communities. One of the strategies proposed by Gingras et al. is to cross the boundaries of commonly-accepted meanings of teacher and researcher. This is brought about by including stakeholders (e.g., students) as partners in the process of teaching and knowledge dissemination. Kennedy and Jancar, in chapter two, explain how involving and supporting writing teaching assistants (TAs) and incorporating a focus group component in their

faculty-wide writing skills initiative have led to more student engagement as well as effective learning outcomes. Bailey et al., in chapter four, describe the implementation of a pedagogical approach, “Intellectual Partnerships” (IPs), through which teachers and students are partners and engage in the co-creation of knowledge through creative and intellectual discussions and activities.

Reflexive critique, and innovative and creative teaching practices grounded in a learner-centered context were among the other strategies, mentioned within the book, for the development of teaching and learning scholarship. In chapter seven, Gingras and Rudolph privileged and acquired a student-centered learning approach, in the context of health education, through involving students in the teaching process with the purpose of creating a space for more equitable distribution of power in learning contexts. Schwind, in the eighth chapter, shifts the focus to reflective processes as they allow for developing “personal knowing” in future practitioners aiming for more respectful relationships with those for whom they provide care. In the following chapter, Wehbi, Preston and Mofatt explain their experience of using art (particularly photography and multimedia) as a pedagogical approach for teaching about community issues.

The purpose of *Teaching as Scholarship* is to provide a “frame” for educating students as professional care/service-providers within communities. At the same time, this frame is used to help secure aims of social justice (e.g., by advocating for inclusion and equity in educational practices), and social transformation. In order to address these goals, in several chapters the contributing authors articulate undertaking an ethic of care. For example, in chapter three, Ahmad Ali proposes incorporating an ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982) into the education of students studying Nursing, Early Childhood Studies and Social Work, and in the practices of public institutions, particularly in regards to issues faced by immigrants. She argues for “client-centered” practices of service providing for immigrant families as a way of resistance to the liberal ethics of justice. This is towards making the voices of these families be heard, increasing their recognition (Fraser, 2005), and therefore facilitating their efforts towards realization of their rights. However, within the book, there is not enough reference to the role of community itself in the process of designing the frame for working against discrimination caused by systemic hierarchical orders. Such a frame has to be shaped through reciprocity and taking into account the “desired impacts” on their communities. On a macro level, and regarding the context of higher education’s practices of preparing professionals, this is towards breaking the existing hierarchy of knowledge through which academics are viewed as the “knowers and producers” while communities remain passive receivers of the knowledge, processed and put into practice by the academics.

Resistance to objectivity and impartiality takes multiple forms. In the context of workplace education, education of future professionals has to go beyond learning certain skills and instead move towards preparing socially conscious professionals (and citizens) who are then prepared to actively critique (Johnston, 2007), and contribute, to social transformation. The significance of this discussion, in the area of workplace learning, is in the often contradictory principles of learning (professional) skills and social change. The neoliberal aim of higher education institutions in training “professionals” for the market becomes an oxymoron when put together with social justice aims. This is due to the main principles of neo-liberalism as an ideology which is based on domination of markets through making

individual rights fit in corporate actors. Therefore, preparing students (particularly in the fields of social service and care) requires acquiring a theoretical framework that allows for critique as well as careful examination of the assumptions about the roles of service providers while responding to (the rights of) community. This has to be towards debilitating reproduction of hierarchical power structures and reinforcement of sharing and collaboration. These values are more likely to be fostered in engaged contexts rather than traditional classroom-based educational contexts. Since most of the practices mentioned in this book value student-centered approaches and emphasize student learning, there is a gap for more discussion on, and acknowledgement of, the rights of communities to collaborate in the establishment and implementation of policies and practices that deal with their lives. Although, in several places (see chapter 1) the authors highlight the benefits and value of collaborative educational approaches, it remains at the level of university stakeholders (e.g. students, TAs, instructors, etc.)

There is a strong desire for stimulating approaches towards bringing about social and systemic change, particularly in the areas that deal directly with the lives and rights of communities and individuals. Creating space for pedagogical innovations that value activism, collaboration, critical thinking and care is important to support sustainable changes on a broad scale level.

Reading *Teaching as Scholarship* can benefit groups and individuals beyond the ones mentioned within the book, such as pre-tenured faculty members and faculty who teach in fields with a professional and/or community approach. Those who are involved in community organizations that work directly with communities or those who liaise between communities and universities might also benefit from the innovative teaching/research practices in higher education institutions that were discussed in this collection. 🍁

References

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- Johnston, N. (2007). What aren't we teaching our students: Critical pedagogy and the co-op education curriculum. *Journal of Cooperative Education and Internships*, 41(2), 23-29.