On the Scholarship of Learning and Teaching

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Brigham Young University–Idaho Faculty Meeting — August 21, 2001

I want to begin by describing something for the new faculty members because they do not know me very well. At these faculty meetings, I always see myself as a faculty member. You do not see me that way, but I do. When I came here as president, I indicated that I am not a president who used to be a teacher. I am a teacher who is now working as a president. I was not kidding then, and I am not kidding now. So in these settings if what you see and hear is a president standing up here giving edicts and announcing policy, then I will not have communicated very well and you may not have listened very well. I use these gatherings as opportunities to “stir the pot” and to present frameworks, concepts, and ideas and put them out before us as a body of faculty and say, “We ought to be thinking about and be interested in and focusing upon these issues.”

Two years ago I focused upon the topic of understanding—not understanding in the sense of intellectual comprehension, but understanding as it is defined in the scriptures—and how we are uniquely positioned at this institution to truly help students gain “understanding.” If I am at all successful in conveying what is in my heart and mind today, then we will better comprehend today why that message was necessary two years ago.

My purpose this morning is not to add to our already sizeable work load; it is to help us focus on doing better that which we should already be doing. It is crucial for you to hear what I intend and hope to communicate because we all hear what we want to hear and we all see what we want to see. So I am asking for your help.

I am going to stir the pot today in a way different from what I have done in the past. We put you through a bit of an endurance test today, and the last thing you need right now is the kind of presentation that you might attend at a professional meeting. But much of what I am going to talk about is grounded in a literature, and I am going to refer extensively to that literature. I am going to present a number of overheads. I would ask you not to take notes. I will make the text and overheads available at a later time because I think you may have some interest in them. So please do not try to write them down. There may come thoughts to your mind and feelings to your heart, and I certainly would encourage you to write down those impressions.

Let me see if, on the front end, I can articulate and work through a logic on this particular topic. Then I want to present some implications that I think the logic suggests for all of us as a faculty. In some measure, I am trying to get us thinking. Then I will conclude with some expectations and questions for us as faculty.
In all of the explanatory materials about BYU–Idaho that have been prepared during this transition, we use a series of six talking points. The talking points are simply key summary items about the transition of Ricks College to Brigham Young University–Idaho. For example, one of the six talking points explains that BYU–Idaho is a two-tiered institution—that as we move forward we will offer both associate and baccalaureate degrees. If you look at many other institutions of higher education, they also started that way. Then, in order to capture the necessary resources to upgrade various baccalaureate programs, they eventually cannibalized all of the associate programs. I cannot speak for future administrations. I am telling you that a similar process of eliminating all associate degrees will not happen while I am here as president. Such two-year programs offer opportunities for the young people of the Church that can be had nowhere else in the Church. So we are not going to eliminate all of the associate programs. That is what we mean when we say we are a two-tiered institution, and we use that as one of the talking points to help articulate a sense of what BYU–Idaho is all about.

Another one of the talking points is that the faculty is focused on the scholarship of learning and teaching. The faculty part of me says, “Great rhetoric. But what in the world does it mean?” That is what I am going to talk about this morning, i.e., what it means for a faculty to be focused on the scholarship of learning and teaching.

Let’s begin with the concept of scholarship. The Northwest Handbook simply defines scholarship as “. . . systematic study of a chosen subject characterized by a high level of expertise, originality, critical analysis, significance, and demonstrability”.

Lee S. Shulman highlights three related characteristics of all scholarship:

1. *it is public*
2. *it is susceptible to critical review and evaluation, and*
3. *it should be accessible for exchange and use by other members of one’s scholarly community*.

Will we as BYU–Idaho be engaged in scholarship? Absolutely yes. We must! If we are not engaged in scholarship, then we have no business being a university. So absolutely we will engage in the work of scholarship.

Within that overarching domain of scholarship, there are two specific subsets or types of scholarly activity—one of which is research, one of which is artistic creation. I want to be very clear in emphasizing that both research and artistic creation are types of scholarly activity. It is frequently the case that people simply equate research with scholarship, and that is not accurate. Research is one type of scholarship; it is not the totality of scholarship. Research in its various forms is not more important than or preferred over other types of scholarly activity. It is, however, a key component of scholarship at Brigham Young University–Idaho. So at BYU–Idaho we emphasize both research of various types and artistic creation of various types.

This framework is crucial for us to begin to understand the scholarship of learning and teaching. Research is scholarly activity directed toward constructing and/or revising theories or creating and/or applying knowledge. Types of research include basic or pure or fundamental research, strategic research, applied research, and action research.

Will there be a role for research at Brigham Young University–Idaho? In appropriate ways and as one form of scholarly activity, the answer is yes. Will such
research activity be conducted in ways similar to many other institutions of higher education? No. For example, in business and in education we will be heavily engaged in the work of action research. Such research is a vital part of what those faculty must do. So, of course, we will be doing that type of scholarly work; and we will be doing it with and for the benefit of students. Is there a role for some limited types of applied research? Absolutely. But not in the sense that we as faculty are “under the gun” to get external funding and have three or four major publications every year. We are not going there.

For those who may have the mind-set of I need my time for my research, I frankly do not think you fit at BYU–Idaho. There is room for scholarly activity and the kinds of artistic creation that will benefit students and help us in achieving our primary mission, which is becoming a premier institution of learning and teaching. But the attitude of I need my time for my research, and teaching is a hassle; and the more external funding I can get, the more I can buy out my time, the less I teach, and the more “real work” I can do; and what matters to me is my research, that attitude does not belong at BYU–Idaho. We are not going there. That attitude is contrary to the Spirit of Ricks that will continue at Brigham Young University–Idaho. Will we be engaged in appropriate kinds of scholarly activity, some of which will be in the form of research? The answer is yes. But such activity should always have the basic objective of, first and foremost, benefitting and blessing our students!

Artistic creation is also scholarly activity in the visual, performing, and literary arts that expresses original ideas, interpretations, imagination, thoughts, feelings, and so forth. We are talking about the overarching domain of scholarship with subsets of research and artistic creation.

In my mind, the overarching theme for all of our scholarly work at Brigham Young University–Idaho should be INSPIRED INQUIRY AND INNOVATION. Let me repeat that: inspired inquiry and innovation. We are not like other institutions of higher education; we have access to the gifts of the Spirit, which cannot be quantified nor counted. There are simply things we cannot adequately define and describe about the processes of learning and teaching with the Spirit. But, nonetheless, we should be excellent scholars; and our scholarship should be focused on the processes of learning and teaching. We will not be a recognized and highly regarded “research” institution in the traditional sense of that term. We will, however, emphasize a wide range of scholarly endeavors and excel in and play a pioneering role in understanding learning and teaching processes.

There is a growing literature on the scholarship of learning and teaching, and I am doing my best to stay current in and contribute to that literature. Let me share some observations from the literature:

Teaching is scholarly work. As faculty schooled in an academy dominated by the preeminence of research, we should know what that means: an activity that is problem based, intentionally designed, theoretically grounded, peer evaluated, and accountable. Teaching, like other forms of scholarly work, must not only be reflective, systematic, and replicable, but public.  

Please begin to think in terms of what this means for us at Brigham Young University–Idaho: “public” perhaps referring to a community of scholars on this campus. There are many opportunities for us to more effectively share with each other what we are learning in our classrooms and doing with our students.
Each of us in higher education is a member of at least two professions: that of our discipline, interdisciplinary, 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. The scholarship of teaching and learning is deeply embedded in the discipline; its questions arise from the character of the field and what it means to know it deeply.

So there are always two questions: the “what” and the “how.” The discipline provides the focus for the question of “what.” The processes of learning and teaching provide the focus for the question of “how.” The scholarship of learning and teaching requires all of us to have a simultaneous focus on both the “what” and the “how.”

A scholarship of teaching is not synonymous with excellent teaching. It requires a kind of “going meta,” in which faculty frame and systematically investigate questions related to student learning—the conditions under which it occurs, what it looks like, how to deepen it, and so forth—and do so with an eye not only to improving their own classroom but to advancing practice beyond it.

I would emphasize the words advancing practice. Here is one of the implications I will get to later. We ought to have, we will have, ways to more effectively share and distribute and disseminate our own inspired innovation on this campus. And as we do so, the world will come here. We will be a light on a hill in the scholarship of learning and teaching.

Teaching, by nature, is an egocentric profession in the sense Piaget used the term: we find it difficult to see when our teaching isn’t clear or adequate. We don’t easily imagine how what is so obvious and important to us cannot be equally so to novices. Combined with our strong desire to cause learning and to find any evidence of success, we are prone to unending self-deception. How easily we hear what we want and need to hear in a student answer or question; how quickly we assume that if a few intelligent comments are made, all students get the point. That is the tragic flaw inherent in trying hard, and for the right reasons, to get people to understand and value what we understand and value. It then often doesn’t occur to us that students are trying equally hard to appear knowledgeable.

As scholars of our teaching we must attend unremittingly to the responses of our students. We must use what we learn about their learning as data that justify or require us to change our practices, and we must make what we learn about our teaching one investigative process; it is the compound of the generative questions around which all creative and productive activity revolves. But in one’s teaching, a “problem” is something you don’t want to have, and if you have one, you probably want to fix it. Asking a colleague about a problem in his or her research is an invitation; asking about a problem in one’s teaching would probably seem like an accusation. Changing the status of the problem in teaching from terminal remediation to ongoing investigation is precisely what the movement for a scholarship of teaching is all about. How might we make the problematization of teaching a matter of regular communal discourse? How might we think of teaching practice, and the evidence of student learning, as problems to be investigated, analyzed, represented, and debated?

I love this next observation. I hope you also find it penetrating.
Teachers need to know more than just their subject. They need to know how it can come to be understood [I underscore and emphasize the word understood, the way we talk about it at Brigham Young University–Idaho], the ways it can be misunderstood, what counts as understanding; they need to know how individuals experience the subject. But they are neither required nor enabled to know these things.  

Next is a statement by Lee Shulman, who plays a prominent role in the Carnegie Foundation, about a recent study done at Stanford.

My colleague Larry Cuban recently completed a study of teaching and research at Stanford over the last 100 years—entitled “How Scholars Trumpeled Teachers”—and one of his themes is that at Stanford interdisciplinary entities were far more likely to innovate in teaching and curriculum than entities that were located in a single department. [Now remember our focus on integration.] How does this happen? Many departments treat teaching the same way they treat research. That is, I wouldn’t dream of telling my departmental colleague what she should investigate in her research. Neither, in most departments, would I dream of telling her what she should teach. Most departments in most research universities support a conception of academic freedom in which all aspects of the faculty member’s intellectual work is fully under her or his control. Curricula thus reflect the tastes of faculty members rather than a more superordinate conception of what and how students might best learn the field.

Now, brothers and sisters, if we think this statement only applies “out there,” we are wrong. This statement also applies to us at BYU–Idaho.

But, as Larry Cuban shows, when you move to an interdisciplinary center, you leave behind some of these predispositions; making an active choice to join such
a center, faculty are choosing to do something new. At Stanford an example would be the human biology curriculum which cuts across several schools and many departments, and which allows new and different work both in the research that faculty conduct and in their teaching and curriculum development.

The handicap of such interdisciplinary programs is that the reward structure continues to go through the department. You can’t get tenure in women’s studies, or area studies, or human biology, but only in economics, or history, or biology. I’m not unhappy about that. Centers and institutes are intended to be more flexible and adaptive than their more conservative departmental godparents. But we must recognize that there is an essential tension between these structures, which would have to be dealt with if we took certain views of what teaching academies might look like.¹²

The Brethren eliminated the fundamental tension when the basic guidelines were announced for Brigham Young University–Idaho—specifically, no faculty rank. We are the only institution of higher education on the planet that has the framework and structure in place to pursue—a primary focus on the scholarship of learning and teaching.

A second statement that substantiates this point:

Even faculty like Bass, who identify “problems” they want to explore and have the intellectual tools for doing so, face the reality that they live and work in a culture (on their campus and/or in their scholarly or professional community) that is only beginning to be receptive to such work.

On this campus we may not recognize how distinctive this guideline is. We have never had faculty rank at Ricks College. Consequently, no faculty rank at BYU–Idaho is a continuation of what we have always been. I spent my entire scholarly career at secular institutions before coming to Rexburg. In my former life as a full-time faculty member, if I or a colleague did any critical analysis or any kind of empirical or scholarly work in the realm of teaching and learning, it was pooh-poohed. It had no academic respectability. It was considered a joke. So for faculty to focus upon and for resources at secular institutions to be allocated for this type of scholarship constitute a huge change.

Doing it is a risk [meaning this interdisciplinary or extended focus on teaching and learning], both in terms of tenure and promotion and in terms of wider impact on the field, since there are as yet few channels for other faculty to come upon and engage with this work in ways that will make a lasting difference. . . . In short, the scholarship of teaching [and learning] runs against the grain in big ways.¹³

This next overhead is the last. I think it is especially appropriate for us at BYU–Idaho.

We can hardly be a moral community with mission statements that talk about the central place of teaching and learning if we are not also places that investigate those processes and place them at the center of the scholarship in which we properly take such pride.¹⁴

Let me discuss several implications that grow out of this theme or flow of logic from the literature.

**Implication Number One** | Every faculty member at BYU–Idaho should have an intense interest in, questions about, and approaches to the scholarship of learning and teaching. I have already seen this interest and approach and questions reflected in remarkable ways in a few of the CFS portfolios I have reviewed. I review every one every year, and there has been some progress in what we are doing. This is not simply an additional
hoop to jump through. This is a vehicle and a tool for focusing on the scholarship of learning and of teaching. Please remember that I am not saying, “Here is one more thing to do.” I am suggesting that we do better that which we are already doing. I used the example of CFS. I emphasize that this expectation does not just apply to new faculty up until the time they might receive CFS. Every faculty member at Brigham Young University–Idaho ought to have interest, an intense interest, on this dual focus of a specific discipline, which focuses on “what,” and the scholarship of teaching and learning, which focuses on “how.”

**Implication Number Two** | The scholarship of learning and teaching requires a simultaneous focus upon both what we teach and how we teach, what students learn and how they learn. I reiterate again that there is a dovetailing, there is a linking of the “what and the how.” Of course, if I am a biologist or an accountant or whatever my discipline, then I am going to have a focus on the questions that grow out of that discipline—but not in the sense of “I need my time for my research.” The scholarship we ought to be pursuing should involve and engage and benefit our students. The faculty in biology and various other departments would be the first to tell you that if a student wants to have a chance of being accepted into medical school or some other professional program, he or she had better be engaged in systematic inquiry, in an appropriate form of scholarly work as an undergraduate, or that student will have a difficult time making it into medical and other professional schools. But our motive is not directed at “promoting our personal, professional agenda.” Rather, we are benefitting and blessing students through scholarship, and we as faculty simultaneously are getting better as teachers as a result of what we do.

**Implication Number Three** | The scholarship of learning and teaching is inextricably linked to effective integration. The success of a department and of a major at Brigham Young University–Idaho will not be determined primarily by an ever-increasing number of majors, great job placement, or other traditional measures, as important as those are. Rather, success will be defined by what a department or a major does to strengthen other departments and other majors across the campus. I will use two examples.

Both our recreation education and accounting programs have a great opportunity to benefit other departments and other majors in significant ways. It is part of our intellectual upbringing that we think primarily within the boundaries of our discipline. And that is right and good. I am not suggesting we eliminate such a perspective. But if we stop there, we have missed a broader and more comprehensive view. We must also learn to look across disciplines. Our success as an institution will be determined in large measure by how well we facilitate the integration of curriculum and pedagogy across traditional boundaries. If we focus exclusively on departmental development and fail to achieve this overarching objective of effective integration, then we will have bungled one of the greatest educational opportunities of this latter-day dispensation. Let me repeat that one more time. If we focus exclusively on departmental development and fail to achieve this overarching objective of effective integration, then we will have bungled one of the greatest educational opportunities of this latter-day dispensation.

Well, let me conclude. At Brigham Young University–Idaho we are in a unique position—in the truest sense of the word unique—to make a major contribution to the scholarship of learning and teaching. As we move forward in this important work, many outside of our campus community will recognize this institution and come to this campus to observe, to ask, and to learn. We will become a light set upon a hill in the world of higher education.
An example was provided yesterday in the temple. It is an example of doing better what we already do. Yesterday in the 9 o’clock session at the temple, Brother Kip Hartvigsen talked about learning. Not everybody was in attendance to learn what he had to teach about learning. How should we make his work available to the campus community? How can we benefit from and return to the key points he articulated? How do we distribute and more effectively discuss his observations?

There are things we can do individually, there are things we can do departmentally, and there are things we can do institutionally. We have good channels and tools now, but they must be improved. Can you see a value for some kind of a center for learning and teaching on our campus that would involve, perhaps, rotating faculty fellows who would assist in this process? As I stir the pot, as I throw these ideas out, please give that idea some consideration. Think of some ways whereby we can do this better. We, as an administration, clearly are going to be making proposals. We invite and welcome proposals from you.

Let me present just a few questions to consider:

• How can we as full-time faculty members learn from the excellent teachers who work in staff and administrative positions at Brigham Young University–Idaho? If we think we cannot learn something from our nonfaculty colleagues, then we are guilty of what President Benson talked about in terms of the sin of pride.

• How can we as full-time faculty at BYU–Idaho share our insights in learning and teaching with our nonfaculty teachers and colleagues?

• How do we as faculty members learn with and from our students? How do we enlist and engage the students in our classes in a rigorous process of scholarly inquiry and artistic creation and investigation and innovation that keeps us at the cutting edge of our disciplines?

• How can our scholarly projects help us as faculty and our students learn about effective teams and team processes? Few skills in today’s work world are more crucial. And our scholarship can provide a laboratory for students and for us to gain great insight into that particular topic area.

Brothers and sisters, we are configured and prepared to move forward in a major way on this particular topic, i.e., a faculty focused on the scholarship of learning and teaching. And we need to do it, and we need to do it well. I have confidence we will.

I pray that we will all seek and qualify for the companionship of the Holy Ghost and the enabling and strengthening power of the Atonement—first and foremost to bless students, but also to be a light on the hill in an academic world that sorely needs what we have to offer. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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3. Eileen Bender and Donald Gray. The Scholarship of Teaching, Research and Creativity, Indiana University, April 1999, Volume XXII, Number 1, p. 2, emphasis added.
4. Lee S. Shulman. From Minsk to Pinsk: Why A Scholarship Of Teaching And Learning, Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Volume 1, Number 1, 2000, p. 49.
5. Pat Hutchings, Approaching the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, p. 7.
9. Eileen Bender and Donald Gray. The Scholarship of Teaching, Research and Creativity, Indiana University, April 1999, Volume XXII, Number 1, p. 3.
10. Lee S. Shulman, From Minsk to Pinsk: Why A Scholarship Of Teaching And Learning, Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Volume 1, Number 1, 2000, p. 50.