

# opinions

## Teaching the teachers

What does scholarship mean in the 1990s and beyond? The premise of my answer is that the coexistence of research and teaching are fundamental to the definition of scholarship. Scholarship must fundamentally be about the creation and communication of knowledge and wisdom. Without research, scholarship becomes ossified; without teaching, scholarship becomes pointless. If scholarship is like the DNA double-helix, then research and teaching are the intertwined and equally essential backbones of that elegant molecule. And if the power of the double-helix resides in the strength and elegance of its structural symmetry, then the power of the university, as the sanctum of scholarship, resides in the symmetry it seeks between excellence in research and excellence in teaching.

As a psychology graduate student, I do much research. Our department, like many departments, has an intense devotion to the God of Research, which we placate with offerings of research results packaged as journal articles. Such devotion is a good thing, for research is integral to the definition of scholarship. Furthermore, my department, by giving me access to mentorship, resources, and expert advice, does a superlative job of training me to be a competent researcher. For all this, I am grateful. Nevertheless, I feel that something is lacking in my training as a graduate student and as a member of the future professoriate. That something is knowledge in the practices and principles of effective teaching.

To those who say teaching cannot be taught, I say, much of teaching is a skill, and skills can be taught. To those who say self-reflection about teaching would make one too self-conscious in the classroom, I say, critical self-reflection is a powerful tool for self-improvement and can increase confidence in the classroom. And to those who say good

teachers are born, not made, I say, if training is important in activities as diverse as music, acting, computer programming and sports, then surely training can be important for teaching.

The list of skills I think important to teach can be distilled to seven themes: (1) communicating effectively; (2) organizing and presenting information efficiently; (3) fostering an inclusive learning environment that respects student diversity; (4) dealing appropriately with critical classroom incidents; (5) enhancing students' critical thinking skills; (6) evaluating students equitably and effectively; and (7) using appropriate teaching methods to achieve specific learning objectives. These skills can be taught — ought to be taught. We first need a consensus that teaching how to teach is an important thing to do. We then need to move that consensus from the realm of lip-service to the realm of action.

It seems self-evident to me that future university teachers ought to be trained to teach. But if self-evidence is not compelling evidence, one could be empirical and refer to the undergraduate experience of university teaching. Ask a typical senior undergraduate what was the percentage of good teachers — not outstanding, just good — they have encountered, and you will be in for a rude surprise. Every year the litany of complaints is the same: "I learn more from the textbook than the professor." "The professor mumbles and never faces the class." "How can someone take a subject so interesting and make it so boring?" And so on, *ad nauseam*. Consider that elementary school teachers require a teaching degree or diploma, while university professors are not required to attend even a workshop on teaching. Forgive me for sounding cynical, I only mean to be critical. It's just that I cannot be silent when what I cherish is threatened. Silence would

be cynicism of the most insidious kind.

We stand at the threshold of the Third Millennium, with its storm and stress of social, political, ethical, and environmental problems; problems that are rapidly converging together, threatening our way of life and even the future of life; problems that demand decisive action and imaginative solutions. Those solutions will largely come from the people being trained to be scholars today. It is the scholars, as the creators and communicators of knowledge and wisdom, who will best be able to show us the road to the New Jerusalem. I began with the premise that a balance and dynamic interplay between research and teaching is the defining feature of complete scholarship. If the promise of that premise is to be realized, we must seriously reform the way we train the future professoriate. To begin, let us celebrate teaching, that noble process which fertilizes the mind so that the human spirit may grow and flower. And while we are loudly celebrating, let us also quietly begin transforming our words into actions.

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To the editor,

Student Council President's comment that "The GAZETTE stinks" is a GROSS UNDERSTATEMENT. To my mind it's dull, flat, and extremely uninteresting.

When I see that the GAZETTE is out, I immediately snatch it up in my hot little hand and hopefully look for some news about DAL, but inevitably a manhole cover is staring me in the face or there is a grape boycott somewhere in California. ARE YOU GUYS FOR REAL?

Perhaps it has an intellectual appeal or there is a great amount of symbolism involved in the articles. Well I don't know about anyone else, but I want a hell of a lot more news about DAL-HOUSIE!

For instance, the sports page is just about non-existent. A football game was played on Saturday, and the GAZETTE came out on Wednesday. Where is the write-up? There will be a football game this Saturday between Dal and X. Where's the write-up? The Mail Star reporters talk to the coaches about upcoming games. Surely a Dalhousie student reporter should be able to get an interview with them. Why not talk to some of the players, and get their views? For Heaven's sake talk to someone and put it in the paper. Stop padding, get off your cloud, come down to earth, take a look at your fellow DALHOUSIE students. Then start talking to them about anything. Find out about any important events. It would be nice to have some headlines on the front page and maybe some names under the pictures. Is this asking too much, fellows?

Sports was only an example. Why not get a Dal calendar and find out about all the nice faculties we have at Dal? Maybe the Med. representative, or the Engineering rep. have something to say. If they haven't, pry something out of them. There surely must be more to be said about DAL events. WHY is there so much about S.F.U., McGill, or Memorial? HEY, GUYS, WHAT ABOUT DALHOUSIE?

Understand, gang?

Perhaps, if you print this letter it might provoke some more comments. I might find that I'm the only one who thinks this way. In any case, give us all a chance to find out. You might even get a controversy going.

Yes, as Mr. Smith says, "The Dalhousie Gazette stinks" and as far as I'm concerned, it STINKS because it is GARBAGE.

Doug Hill

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