REFLECTIONS – 26 JAN 2010

Today's classroom discussion focused on our first readings regarding the definition of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. I found the actual readings and definitions a little ambiguous at first. The fact that there is not a single source that everyone goes to for a definition of SoTL still poses a challenge for me. Having my educational and professional backgrounds in math and business, my immediate reaction was to ask why there were so many options. How can I apply SoTL when there isn't a standard for me to know whether I am doing it correctly?

I was pleased when we discussed whether there should be one definition of SoTL or many. It began to dispense a bit of the fog around what constitutes SoTL and to clarify some of the common elements such as reflection, review, publication, and reuse.   Going through a chronology of definitions, so to speak, helped me understand that SoTL is not a single method of teaching.   It encompasses teaching as an entire process of vision, design, interaction, outcomes, and analysis (Schulman) where what happens inside the classroom (interaction) is only a single step in the process.

I was also struck by our discussion on interdisciplinary barriers in higher education. Carrie Ann mentioned she would enjoy receiving critiques from teachers outside her discipline because it would be more in line with getting feedback from her non-music major students. Darren then pointed out that there is a fear of having people not within the same discipline affect the decisions made regarding career progression (the selection for tenure, for example). Initially, I wholeheartedly agreed with Carrie Ann's comments, but after Darren brought up his point, I reconsidered somewhat. In my current workplace, we had just gone to a pay-for-performance evaluation system where the same point was argued, and it's something my office experiences constantly. We do our work and produce high-quality products for use throughout the agency. However, because not enough of our leaders understand the basics of civilian payroll, it's difficult to get high ratings in boards for awards and/or promotions that

these same leaders oversee. By the same token, though, when it works, when someone outside of our field can communicate what we have taught him or her about civilian pay, it carries weight in those other areas (e.g. human resources). Interdisciplinary barriers can and should be broken, but it is certainly worth first considering the attitudes of the participants before trying to do so.

I learned in our discussion that what I would have thought to be standard actions for most teachers and educators are not necessarily natural or standard. For instance, I would think performing self-reflection upon completing a course would be a natural action for any teacher, regardless of the level or content being taught. As I was reading, I thought that explicitly naming that as a key characteristic of a definition of scholarly teaching did not seem necessary. However, based on comments from my classmates currently working in higher education, many teachers are not truly trained to teach.   Those who do have the formal training may possess varying levels of education but still be unable to communicate information effectively.