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Building the Teaching Commons" by Mary Taylor
Huber & Pat Hutchings (2005)*

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Book Review

The Advancement of Learning: Building the Teaching Commons. Mary Taylor Huber and Pat Hutchings (2005). Stanford, California: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and Jossey-Bass.

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This book is a dose of adrenalin to the educational body, a provocative and insightful probe that goes right to the heart of what is wrong about higher education and elevates and reifies what is right about it. It is written with such elegance and balance that it could hardly give offense, but its thesis is pointed, persuasive, and transforming.

To many of us, the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) is an obviously good idea-or has been, at least, since Earnest Boyer pointed out the obvious to us a quarter-century ago. Much good scholarship has been done and much foundational theory laid-by Boyer himself, Lee Shulman, his successor as president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and many others. What has been lacking until now is a concise and readable introduction to the subject that brings together theory and practice and makes the empirical case for SoTL from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective. Now, we have it. Mary Huber, a senior scholar at Carnegie, and Pat Hutchings, vice president, have brought forth a succinct, vivid, and comprehensive account of the rationale and practice of SoTL. This book is an ideal introduction to the subject for those coming to it anew and also a systematic and engaging review that will inform and edify those already familiar with the field. Huber and Hutchings have both been involved with the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) for several years, and they draw upon a wealth of examples to introduce us to many of the people engaged in this work at different levels and in different contexts.

They note that "the problem the scholarship of teaching and learning aims to address is that teaching has, traditionally, had so few ways to improve itself." To address that problem entails four processes which they present as the defining features of SoTL: questioning, gathering and exploring evidence, trying out and refining new insights, and-finally and crucially-going public.

This scholarship changes teaching, in Lee Shulman's words, from "private property to community property." Academic research has thrived through the creation of a "robust commons" in which the processes and the discoveries of research are publicly shared. Teaching, on the other hand, has remained largely the private concern of the teacher in the classroom: "*Individual* faculty work hard at their classroom craft, but the larger, collective enterprise of teaching does not move forward because the work of improvement is so often done in isolation, in the school of hard knocks, one might say, and by the seat of the pants. In contrast, the scholarship of teaching and learning offers the prospect of work in which teachers-to use Sir Isaac Newton's famous image-'stand on the shoulders of giants.'"

Huber and Hutchings make clear that the teachers must be the scholars, that practitioners must be engaged in applying their discoveries about how students learn and how they can

learn better. To illustrate the point they offer several detailed examples. Teachers, I suspect, will find that this book begets dozens of ideas. We cannot read about Curtis Bennett and Jackie Dewar's Taxonomy of Mathematical Knowledge Expertise without parallels from our own disciplines leaping from the page. Likewise, Mariolina Salvatori's study of difficulty in reading and interpretation speaks to the condition of students in all fields. Maura Flannery's study of students' sensory experience of the principles of biology taps into principles that apply differently, but still apply, in other disciplines. Some of the references are brief, some developed in detail. But they will lead to a ferment of hypotheses and questions for every engaged teacher.

The authors go beyond the classroom and raise the questions of institutional support for SoTL and the necessary infrastructure for the teaching commons, again providing a range of examples that put flesh on the bones of an as-yet-unrealized vision. While this book is an engaging and inspiring introduction to SoTL, it leaves the reader wanting more. It is at once a careful and convincing reflection and an inspiring call to action that defines a robust and rewarding future within our reach.