



## Epilogue: Scholarship of teaching and learning in progress

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### PROCESSES OF SCHOLARLY WRITING

This volume is the product of a rigorous selection process that involved blind multiple reviews of the full texts of 59 papers out of 74 conference presentations. The selected papers have raised important issues that fit coherently in a book on the theme of developing learning environments. Although many worthwhile papers were inevitably left out, the editorial work remained challenging in order to ensure that the selected papers communicated succinctly as discourse in scholarship of teaching and learning. The submissions varied in the extent to which curricula and pedagogy were presented and illustrated, ranging from detailed descriptions to bare outlines. This variation required further interactions between the editors and authors, beginning with a meeting in October 2001 during which we reached a reasonable consensus.

The book is rooted in contemporary local issues, yet transcends them to highlight the significance of scholarship of teaching and learning for wider readers including teachers, managers, and policy-makers. The

primary focus, however, is on *teachers*. As frontline practitioners, authors can communicate more authentically to teachers, in an optimistic tone without being naïve. The contributors to this book believe that it is possible to work around and within the constraints that affect the work of teachers and to see the potential for teachers to develop the environments and cultures in which they work. Together, the chapters signify scholarly work and contribute to a developing discourse on scholarship of teaching and learning. Rather than advocating certain approaches from successful experiences, the book generates ideas for research into teaching and learning.

During the year which followed the conference, the editors and authors were involved in further work on scholarly writing for more effective communication with the intended communities of teacher-learners. Authors were invited to consider how their contributions stood in the book, how they could reach peers of different disciplinary backgrounds, and how the book could stand significantly in the developing professional discourse for higher education. The primary concerns for editorial communications were to identify crucial themes for each paper and to probe for further depths that had not emerged as clearly as intended. As rigorous revisions were expected to reach readers, editors and authors entered further discussions on e-mail, by telephone, and through meetings. The rewards came with products that considerably exceed the calibre reached at the initial conference presentations, showing the vital significance of peer discourse in the processes of scholarly writing. After reviewing the chapters, different readers may find various forms of connection with the authors. Collectively, it is time to conclude our venture with recognition of the commitment to and celebration of scholarship of teaching and learning.

## COMMITMENT TO ADDRESS ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

Amid current changes for universities, academics are expected to reinforce the quality of teaching and learning while struggling with dilemmas on risks with innovations. Such struggles can be lonely in the university tradition of working in isolation. Individually, teachers may

query what can be done if there is a mismatch of expectations between teachers and students, if students are resistant to innovation, and if the environment is not conducive to risk-taking and mutual support. As committed teachers, the contributors to this book presented scenarios of how quality issues regarding teaching and learning are being addressed in the context of rapid expansion of higher education, as students are no longer as highly selected as before. Our learning environments in various tertiary institutions, as shown in the chapters, reflect the tension between constraints and the hope for strategic changes. A picture of our environmental challenges has been collectively painted.

### Understanding of students' needs

Themes under this heading which are identified in the book include:

- students' limited understanding about university education, and ineffective learning strategies (Kwan and Ko, Chapter 5),
- students' difficulties in learning (Ho, Chan, Sun and Yan, Chapter 13),
- students' insufficient English vocabulary to cope with academic studies (Hill, Chapter 10),
- demands from business sectors for students to attain acceptable levels of English on university graduation (Pemberton, Carmichael, and Lam, Chapter 6),
- creating support structure for socialization of novices to the profession (Cheng and So, Chapter 14), and
- breaking away from stereotype-views of the passivity of Asian students (Littlewood, Chapter 12).

Different facets in interpreting students' needs are presented here. Some projects that study students' needs are grounded in specific disciplines, whereas others harvest an overview from cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional collaboration. Emerging from the discourse is a fundamental position of teachers engaging in scholarship of teaching and learning: the intrinsic motivation to learn to improve teaching by studying learning. The teachers not only observe difficulties but also are prepared to confront them with commitment to learn about handling

the challenges. Understanding the nature of such challenges becomes highly relevant as the core for learning. Teachers' sense of responsibilities is therefore not confined in the chores of delivery of teaching duties but extends to enlightened exploration of alternatives.

### **Understanding constraints and activating strategic changes**

Under this heading, themes raised in the book include:

- environmental constraints on motivation, academic performance and creativity of Hong Kong undergraduate students (Moneta and Siu, Chapter 8);
- conflict between the demands for problem solving in professional practice and limitations of traditional modes of university lecturing in professional education (Lam and Wong, Chapter 3);
- a paradigm shift from information overload to professional education for development in knowledge, skills, and attitude (Nicholls and Chan, Chapter 9);
- understanding the critical nature of collaboration from discernment of paradigm differences between disciplinary discourses on teaching and learning (Barron, Chapter 11);
- going beyond a transmission mode and optimizing interpersonal communication through Web-based teaching and learning (Burton and Lau, Chapter 7); and
- building staff development from information and communication technologies (Noakes, Chapter 15).

Although it is alarming to observe the possibility that students' intrinsic motivation is unrelated to academic performance, teachers are in a process of forming a critical force in transforming our higher education environment. Through initiatives evident from introducing problem-based learning and interdisciplinary curriculum, teachers can break away from the tradition of heavy lecturing inputs and work in isolation. Initiatives to nurture learning environments also involve critique of limitations of recent technological advances which, if not properly harnessed, can only provide new means for reinforcing the transmission mode of teaching and learning.

## Conceptualization and re-conceptualization of pedagogy

Themes raised in the book under this heading include:

- problem-based learning for engineering students (Lai, Tsoi, and Chun, Chapter 2),
- case study approaches for clinical teaching (Cho and Csete, Chapter 4), and
- peer instruction and student electronic response in large lectures (Snider, Chapter 1).

The investigation of teaching and learning demands research skills, ranging from clear conceptualization in curriculum design and pedagogical decisions to critical analysis of experimentation. Accordingly, the scholarly teachers clearly specify the teaching inputs and systematically present students' responses. Each study concludes with a re-conceptualization, as a local and personal experience is extended to one for scholarly discourse of the significance of the chosen pedagogical approaches in promoting quality of teaching and learning.

## IN CELEBRATION OF SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The chapters in this book are a further move to celebrate scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education in Hong Kong, which remains a centre of international academic interflow with recruitment of scholars from different parts of the world. The book reveals insights that shed light on other higher education settings. The thematic division for the 15 chapters highlights three dimensions of scholarship, but by no means does each chapter exclusively reflect the designated dimension. Together, the reported studies show modelling of critical and creative thinking, motivation in learning, and collaboration in teaching and learning, as reflected in the ways that problems are identified and understood in the light of research literature. Also, curricular decisions are renewed rationally in the dynamics of collaborative learning with students and peers. Such qualities are not only a state of being limited in one context of higher education institute, but more powerfully, signify actions in progress. As poignantly described by Shulman (2000, 95–6), much of

the scholarship of teaching and learning is motivated by a spirit of faithfulness — *fidelity* — to the integrity of the discipline, the learning of students, the society, polity, community, and institution within which one works, and to the teacher's own identity and sense of self as scholar, teacher, colleague, or friend.

Through the public discourse of scholarly work among the faithful teachers, teaching professionalism moves beyond its conceptualization into a process of actualization, as the professionals' intellectual and practical accomplishments are directed to the service of society and community. Rather than coping with new challenges in isolation, or settling in mediocrity within environmental constraints, these committed scholars are sounding out their voices in a search for better alternatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Far from being conclusive, findings shared in the publication are ready to be validated or refuted by other scholars. Responses from readers, including disagreement, would be most desirable for the collective search as an ongoing process. Though this is an epilogue to the present volume, we hope that it will also be a prologue to further useful work to improve learning and teaching, not only in Hong Kong but more widely alongside counterparts elsewhere.

## FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

As indicated by the title, our future perspectives should be directed to how our educational environments can be developed. To this, the contributions in this book have indicated several crucial themes for reorientation.

### Focus on students

Each of the authors is deeply concerned with learning from and about students. In some cases, students are also involved in the evaluation of their own learning. The inquisitive orientation is a form of liberation for open pursuit in learning, rather than restraining teaching to rational decisions. Instances of such open pursuit can be highlighted as follows:

Feedback from first-year medical students about the new lecture format indicated that elements of the new format were an improvement over the traditional lecture. ... [This] new format should continue but may not be applicable to all lectures. (Nicholls and Chan, see Chapter 9, p. 188)

The overall impression is that good students benefit from this method of teaching, whereas students who are not as interested in learning do not care for it. ... [This] method of learning could be suitable for a broad range of subjects ... (Snider, see Chapter 1, pp. 27–8)

To help the students fulfil their role in peer assessment, a revised peer assessment form with clearly stated objectives will be used ... [to] further improve students' creativity, critical and independent thinking, and responsibility in their own work. (Cho and Csete, see Chapter 4, p. 72)

### **Transformation from community-building**

As asserted by Bowden and Marton (1998, 4), in the 21st century the university should be characterized as the *University of Learning*. Bowden and Marton argue for knowledge formation as the main task of the university, knowledge formation comprising learning on both the individual and the collective levels. Conceptualized in this way, the university is not primarily about the reproduction of the collective mind. Rather it is about expanding, widening, and transforming the collective mind, from the way individuals form and transform themselves to the processes by which the collective mind is formed and transformed through its diverse ways of grasping the world.

As teachers of higher education break away from the tradition of working in isolation, there is a notable emergence of learning communities from the reported cases, and leadership in creating platforms for professional discourse and for peer recognition of scholarly work. Nurturing of the learning environment becomes crucial, in which professionals harvest the sharing in pride. Arguments for and instances of such learning communities can be located as follows:

[M]easures of approaches to learning are not stable trait-like measures of the individual. They rather are functions of both the individual natural tendencies and the teaching environment. ... What can we do to transform our university environment so that it no longer penalizes intrinsic motivation and rewards extrinsic motivation? (Moneta and Siu, see Chapter 8, p. 160; 173)

The learning environment can be changed. We would not have thought that the engineering faculty could have been persuaded to allow a pass/fail system to be introduced, but they were. Institutional frameworks were not immutable. (Pemberton, Carmichael, and Lam, see Chapter 6, p. 123)

The Web site is subject to continuous assessment by both learners and teachers. ... [The site has] attracted considerable use, not only by University of Hong Kong students but also by visitors. Other institutions in Hong Kong that have been using the site include the University of Science and Technology, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the Hong Kong Institute of Education, and West Island School. (Hill, see Chapter 10, p. 202; 203)

... the real potential of online learning and teaching lies in the richness of a learning community built through the learning interactions of peer-supported learners. ... [A]ll of the teachers who successfully completed the online course began using Web-based teaching as an integral part of their on-the-ground courses. ... [T]he Language Centre has gone further than any other department in its online learning and teaching penetration. (Noakes, see Chapter 15, p. 312)

## Learning in progress

The studies reported in the book did not set out to prove anything about effectiveness of any chosen approach. Instead, it has opened possibilities for new practices. Instances can be drawn from:

We were not — and are not — comfortable with this somewhat cynical compromise. ... This is work in progress, so we have not yet arrived at final answers. ... [W]e offer tentative conclusions on possible



success factors in Web-based teaching for language learning. These, we hope, will in turn give rise to further debate and questions for further research and development of teaching and learning methods. (Burton and Lau, see Chapter 7, p. 142)

The abundant, detailed accounts of the specific learning difficulties that students experienced in their day-to-day learning demonstrate vividly that most of these difficulties were associated with the programme of study, generated during the process of learning and embedded within the learning tasks... What is called for is that departments should provide thorough orientation to students to help them understand the learning goals of the programme ... These requirements set new agendas and new challenges for university academics. (Ho, Chan, Sun, and Yan, see Chapter 13, pp. 266–7)

Instead of being seen merely as a quick inspiration for worthwhile ventures, much of the work reported in the book is capable of generating questions to inspire further ideas for scholarly teaching and learning across disciplines in the community of teaching professionals. The scholarly discourse in progress is not limited to a simple recognition of success but includes the extent of learning with an ethos of not being defeated by failures. Such continuity of learning signifies a promising future. As concluded by Stigler and Hiebert (1999, 178–9):

The star teachers of the twentieth century have been those who broke away from the crowd and created different and unusual methods of teaching. They distinguished themselves by being different, by leaving the standard practice behind. ... Although these efforts won the applause of educational critics, they did not have much effect on standard practice.

The star teachers of twenty-first century will be those who work together to infuse the best ideas into standard practice. They will be teachers who collaborate to build a system that has the goal of improving students' learning in the 'average' classroom, who work to gradually improve standard classroom practices ... The star teachers of the twenty-first century will be teachers who work every day to improve teaching — not only their own but that of the whole profession.

The works in this book have made transparent the dynamics of learning that can otherwise be assumed and ignored. Alongside reforms and changes, academic life remains promising to all those who share inner passion for continuous learning and discovery with vanishing disciplinary boundaries.