



# Renewing pride in teaching: Using theory to advance nursing scholarship

Sandra Carter \*

*Centre for Nursing Studies, 100 Forest Road, St. John's, Canada A1A 1E5*

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**Summary** Teaching is, by its very nature, a scholarly activity. However, in the seventeen years since Boyer articulated teaching as a key domain of nursing scholarship, its full scholarly value has yet to be realized. The inherent nature of teaching scholarship is evidenced through mechanisms designed to build “bridges of understanding”. Teaching scholarship then advances nursing scholarship by its impact on nursing practice. Recognizing teaching practices as scholarship also demonstrates pride in teaching.

This article demonstrates the scholarship of daily educational practice by describing how reflections on the teaching–learning relationship, associated role changes, and time impact the “bridges of understanding”. Theoretical frameworks of learning partnerships, learner-centered teaching, and critical inquiry are brought to life when described in terms of actual course activities. This, in turn, demonstrates how teaching advances nursing scholarship.

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## Introduction

Remember those moments? The moment you knew that the student had grasped the elusive concept because you recognized a lack of understanding and modified your approach. Remember the moment you saw the graduate maintain high standards as taught and in turn mentor a student or a new graduate? The search for these moments is what

brought many to nursing education and these are the moments that *help* sustain us. We must celebrate our daily work as scholarly activity. This is what drew many to education, and truly valuing it has to start within ourselves. We must then explicate the complexity of our day-to-day work as scholarship to ensure that our teaching receives the value it deserves. We instinctively know that nursing scholarship underlies each of the aforementioned teaching moments, and yet the challenge remains to translate this personal knowledge (Carper, 1978) into acceptable evidence of scholarship.

\* Tel.: +1 709 777 7347.

E-mail address: [scarter@cns.nf.ca](mailto:scarter@cns.nf.ca)

It is important to value both personal knowing and the diverse expression of knowledge (Estabrooks, 1998; Rentschler and Spegman, 1996). These factors are key components of knowledge development. There is concern that as nursing education moves into the university setting, the scholarship of teaching will be primarily equated with research and publication (Carr, 2007; Ludwick et al., 1998; Rolfe, 2007). A narrowed focus of teaching scholarship would devalue the teaching role and could distance teachers from that which nurtures excellence in teaching. Using Boyer's broad conceptualization of scholarship, the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN), defines scholarship of teaching as "the conveyance of the science and art of nursing from the expert to the novice, building bridges between the teacher's understanding and the student's learning" (CASN Position Statement Document, 2004). This definition embraces the essence of quality teaching and implies that evidence of this scholarship can be demonstrated in a variety of ways. In turn, teaching scholarship advances nursing scholarship by its impact on nursing practice. The critical thinking abilities and expert practice that graduate nurses display is influenced by their undergraduate teaching.

This paper shall provide evidence of teaching scholarship by demonstrating how reflection as teaching scholarship was used in the development and implementation of a first year nursing communications course. This course is taught in the first semester of a four year BN program. It is designed to enable students to demonstrate professional caring and communicate in professional relationships. Lab experiences use an experiential model to enhance self-awareness, interpersonal skills, and group dynamics (Bayntum-Lees, 1993; Pugsley and Clayton, 2003; White et al., 2000; Williams-Perez and Keig, 2002). Several communications labs have mini-writing components where students reflect upon their personal learning from the lab session, and relate the experience to course readings and future nursing care. However, teachers also utilize reflective practice in their teaching, and this reflective component may be the most undervalued yet critical component of teaching scholarship.

A key component of the communications course is to facilitate student abilities to partner with clients. However, the student's experience of partnering with clients arises from their experience of partnering with their teachers. We teach by example. First year nursing students learn about nurse-client relationships and roles within the context of the teacher-student relationship and roles. As such, teacher reflections that influence the part-

nering actions between the teacher and the student are important because they can influence the development of professional nurses. The student who partners with the teacher for learning may be better able to partner with clients for health care. However, this process initially arises out of teacher reflection on theory in the context of personal teaching practice.

This paper will first outline the author's theoretical reflections on the teacher-student relationship and roles. These reflections, which are based on cited literature, demonstrate how theory influenced the author's perspective on teaching partnerships. Theoretical reflections are based in the context of personal teaching experience. Since teacher-student roles are based on how the relationship is first conceptualized, both the relationship and roles are discussed separately. It is beyond the scope of this paper to perform a detailed analysis of these factors. Rather, selected aspects will be reviewed to help illustrate the complexity of teaching actions in the day-to-day scholarship of teaching. After the theoretical underpinnings are outlined to present the author's perspective on the teacher-student relationship and roles, selected teaching activities shall be described to demonstrate how this teacher reflection influences class activities, and as such are both examples of teaching scholarship. Teacher reflection and resultant activities are ways in which "bridges of understanding" are built. Underlying this illustration is an understanding of how much of this scholarship may never be revealed through scientific research as it is currently applied.

## Reflections on the teacher-student relationship

The teacher-student relationship is the most fundamental component of teaching, akin to client-centered practice in the nurse-client relationship. Critical reflection and linkage of theory to practice occur in the context of, and is supported by, the teacher-student relationship (Clark, 2005; Gillespie, 2005). The teacher must use critical reflection and theory in order to teach the student to use critical reflection and theory. Over time, this knowledge and skill is refined in both participants. Although necessary throughout the career of a teacher, the role of critical reflection for the teacher may be most evident when transitioning from a staff nursing role to a nurse educator role (teacher). While formal education is a key component to transition, support from experienced teachers

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