Pat Hutchings

As current circumstances make effective teaching on many campuses increasingly difficult, efforts at improvement are hampered by the lack of openness about what goes on in classrooms. What's needed, and what is now beginning to appear, are not only different pedagogical methods but a campus culture in which faculty can be professional colleagues to each other in teaching as they are in research.

Breaking the Solitude of Teaching

"It's a goddam United Nations in there," Grant Eldridge, professor of sociology at Urban University, fumes in frustration to Anna Johnston, his closest friend in the department. "If I'm going to have classes filled with students who don't speak the language, who won't read the textbook, and who can't write decent papers, I'll need a cut in my teaching load so I'll have time to tutor some of them... I've been here for more than twenty years," Grant says, shaking his finger at his colleague, "and for the past five the quality of student has deteriorated rapidly. Teaching is like pulling teeth. Students cut classes and don't bother to call. They have no interest in sociology; they don't want to learn new things..." Teaching, once a pleasure and a source of pride, now feels to Grant like a chore and frustration.

Grant's situation (drawn from a case study by Rita Silverman and William Welty, at Pace University) does not pertain at <u>all</u> metropolitan universities, certainly. Unlike Grant, many faculty see opportunity and energy in today's increasingly diverse classrooms. And many of the students in such classrooms are in fact well prepared, though often through work and life experience more than by formal schooling; many care deeply about learning, though not perhaps for the same reasons or with the same goals in view as those embraced by their professors.

But even allowing for the varied conditions on various campuses, it is arguably the case that teaching, in metropolitan universities and in American higher education more generally, is *harder* than it used to be. What used to work doesn't work anymore -- not well enough, anyway. One circumstance, the one that Grant and many faculty get fastened on, is that students are "different" today, different from faculty in all kinds of ways, but increasingly diverse as a group, as well -- in age, race, ethnic background, level of preparation, goals, "learning styles," and other ways. But the challenge posed by a more diverse student body is exacerbated on many campuses by other circumstances:

larger classes, increased teaching loads, pressure from outside the institution for "productivity," an aging faculty, and reduced resources. Add it all up, and you have a powerful formula for fatigue and frustration.

But in today's circumstances, there's also a formula for change. Silverman and Welty's case about Grant Eldridge goes on to have Grant actually invite Anna to his class to observe and help him: "So, dear friend, what advice do you have for me?" he asks at the end of the class. A readiness for change is evident in the lively conversation on many campuses (and increasingly across campuses on electronic networks) about new or newly discovered approaches to teaching, whose names are loudly in the air and on conference brochures: collaborative and cooperative learning, experiential and service learning, classroom research and assessment... the last the subject of a 1993 Jossey-Bass volume by K. Patricia Cross and Tom Angelo which quickly broke all sales records there for publications on teaching and learning. Campus after campus is starting up a "teaching and learning center" to serve faculty who are, through frustration or otherwise, feeling the need to change what they do, to try something different, to find strategies that will help them reach today's students in today's classrooms.

The premise of this paper is that to take advantage of the energy for change that's "out there" today will require not just different methods in the classroom but the development of a campus culture in which faculty can be professional colleagues to each other in teaching as they are in research -- sharing what they know, critiquing each other's work, assisting each other to improve, and creating the conditions for appropriate recognition and reward of teaching.

Teaching as a Private Activity

That teaching is currently not a collegial activity on most campuses is well known. In a *Change* magazine piece entitled "Teaching As Community Property," Lee Shulman tellingly recounts his graduation from the University of Chicago, feeling the chill go up his spine at being welcomed as a new Ph.D. into "the community of scholars." Anticipating that this sense of community would be realized in the lively exchange of the classroom -- a welcome relief from solitary labor in the library stacks, Shulman notes, "What I didn't understand as a new Ph.D. was that I had it backwards! We experience isolation not in the stacks but in the classroom. We close the classroom door and experience pedagogical solitude, whereas in our life as scholars we are members of active communities" (*Change*, November/December, 1993, p. 6). And even when we emerge from the classroom, the solitude persists. As a faculty member at the University of Nebraska at Omaha puts it, "To talk publicly about one's teaching as if it were meaningful is to embarrass oneself; it's like discovering at a formal dinner that you're eating someone else's salad" (Gillespie, *Change*, July/August 1989, p. 57).

Why the embarrassment in serious talk about teaching? Why the "pedagogical solitude?" The fact is that opening the classroom door, literally or metaphorically, runs powerfully against the grain of values and habits -- of independence and autonomy -- that faculty hold dear. Some indeed would go further and suggest that academic freedom is at stake, as it may be in some instances. Certainly it is true that revealing what one does as a teacher is made more problematic by the lack of consensus on most campuses about what constitutes good pedagogical practice. Where the sharing of teaching portfolios is proposed, for instance, faculty very reasonably ask: Who will see my work? By what criteria will my teaching be judged? The very

reasonable fear is that in the absence of agreement about effectiveness, personal preference and caprice will prevail: that "good teaching" will necessarily mean "teaching like I do." And even where no high-stakes decisions like promotion and tenure are at issue, many faculty are threatened by the thought of showing what they do as teaching. Most, after all, are making it up as they go along, making their way through trial and error, since they had no formal preparation for their roles in the classroom.

Whatever the causes, the costs of pedagogical solitude are considerable. Parker Palmer observes as follows:

"This privatization of teaching may originate in some misguided concept of academic freedom but it persists, I believe, because faculty choose it as a mode of self-protection against scrutiny and evaluation. Ironically, this choice of isolation leads to some of the deepest dissatisfactions in academic life. I visit dozens of campuses each year to lead faculty workshops on teaching and learning, and I often hear about the 'pain of disconnection' among faculty, the pain of people who were once animated by a vision of 'the community of scholars' but who now find themselves working in a vacuum" (*Change*, "Good Talk about Good Teaching," November/December, 1993, p. 8).

The Role of Colleagues in Improving Teaching

The need to get beyond our current private practice of teaching is painfully clear in Palmer's observation. But a further imperative lies in the kind of knowing that good teaching entails, which is in fact an experiential knowing. Even, that is, if faculty were better prepared for their roles as teachers in graduate school, they would still face the reality that much of their learning is ahead of them. Learning to teach is, in large part, a matter of *learning from experience*.

What does this imply? What must a teacher be able to do in order to learn from experience? At a minimum, she needs, first, to develop an accurate picture of what she *actually does* in the classroom. Second, she needs to know what the *effect* of her actions is on her students. Third, she needs to *reflect* on her actions and results and, in light of her intended purposes, consider whether an alternative approach might bring about better results.

This sounds simple enough, on the face of things. But in fact, the circumstances of teaching and learning on most campuses for most faculty work against such reflective practice. Speaking in the context of schools, but in ways that pertain to higher education as well, Shulman notes: "Learning from experience requires that a teacher be able to look back on his or her own teaching and its consequences. The ordinary school setting does not lend itself to such reflection. It is characterized by speed, solitude, and amnesia. Too much is occurring too rapidly. One is alone attempting to make sense of the buzzing, blooming confusion of classroom life... The difficulties of learning from experience are characteristic of the limitations of any individual trying to make critical sense of a complex world while working alone" (*Schooling for Tomorrow*, 1988, p. 181).

In contrast, professions that are seriously engaged in learning from experience have developed elaborate mechanisms for working together. Palmer points to medicine and law:

"No surgeon can do her work without being observed by others who know what she is doing, without participating in grand-round discussions of the patients she and her colleagues are treating. No trial lawyer can litigate without being ob-

served and challenged by people who know the law. But professors conduct their practice as teachers in private. We walk into the classroom and close the door -- figuratively and literally -- on the daunting task of teaching. When we emerge, we rarely talk with each other about what we have done, or need to do... "

Not only does this isolation lead to "some of the deepest dissatisfactions in academic life," Palmer goes on; it deprives faculty of "the continuing conversation with colleagues that could help us grow more fully into the demands of the teachers' craft" (*Change*, November/December 1993, p. 8).

Or consider the example of professional football, where videotapes of each game enable coaches to *replay* crucial situations, help players see what "moves" they made and might have made, and allow the team to hash out and agree on better strategies for the next time out.

Teaching is not football, and colleges are not hospitals or courtrooms. It is possible to argue with the analogies. But what is not arguable is that faculty need to develop similar mechanisms and habits in order to learn from their experience as teachers. Palmer's reference above to grand rounds is wonderfully suggestive, for instance. Imagine faculty routinely gathering to examine, debate, and make decisions about the pedagogical "cases" before them, be it an individual student who encounters difficulty in the seventh week of calculus, or a group of adult students who might be nudged to connect coursework to work they do in professional settings. Such a prospect stands quite in contrast to the norms on most campuses, where discussion of students is, if it occurs at all, not in the form of problem solving but of "student bashing." Sadly, the phenomenon is so common it now has a name.

The assistance teachers require to improve needn't come only from peers, of course. Staff from a campus instructional technology center can play a crucial role. Students can provide invaluable feedback on the effects of teaching on student learning. But there are dimensions of teaching performance that *peers* are best qualified to observe: currency in the field, appropriateness of focus and of goals for student learning (do the goals, for instance, help students make connections with or prepare for other courses in the field?), selection of examples, awareness of where and how students may have difficulty, insight into possible misconceptions and strategies for untangling them, the quality of the thinking that lies behind pedagogical choices made, awareness of options and appropriate rationale for choosing among them. And what, for instance, of the teacher's contribution to the learning of other teachers? Is that not an aspect of teaching effectiveness that peers can best judge, and that campuses would be wise to credit?

Thus, while there is real progress in the fact that 86 percent of liberal arts campuses now routinely require that student ratings be used in the evaluation of teaching (Seldin, 1993), it is notable that the faculty role is most often to consider evidence collected from and submitted by others (mostly students). Faculty are not, that is, engaged in the important processes of observing and interpreting each others' performance as teachers.

The point -- it is important to say -- is not that there is not wonderful teaching going on in many classrooms, or that faculty do not care about their students' learning. It is, rather, that the faculty role in ensuring the quality of teaching is episodic, *ad hoc*, a matter of individual inclination rather than of larger shared purpose and resolve. Often, therefore, it is inadequate to the job of educating today's students for the world in which they must live and work. What's needed are more and better mechanisms, more widely practiced, for learning from each other.

The Peer Review of Teaching

The good news is that we're making progress. Largely in response to the Ernest Boyer's widely known report, *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990), many campuses have been charging task forces to reexamine various aspects of faculty roles and rewards; a point of agreement in the reports of virtually all of them is the need to raise the level of attention to teaching, which means, among other things, improved strategies for the evaluation of teaching, and greater rewards for its effectiveness.

In California, for example, the nine-campus University System established a Task Force on Faculty Rewards. Chaired by Karl Pister -- at that time, dean of engineering at UC-Berkeley, now Chancellor of the University of California at Santa Cruz --the Task Force met five times and issued a report in June 1991 urging (among other things) "that peer evaluation of teaching be given the same emphasis now given to the peer evaluation of research." Similar recommendations have come forward in reports issued on other campuses, including Northwestern University, the University of Wisconsin at Madison, George Mason University, Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis, and others. Seen from one point of view, these recommendations reflect external threats of imposed, bureaucratic forms of accountability, which campuses are trying to get "out ahead of." But a move toward the peer review of teaching is also a move toward greater faculty responsibility for monitoring the quality and improvement of teaching.

What might be entailed in this move toward the peer review of teaching? On the one hand, the concept of "peer review" is clear enough. It refers to the processes whereby colleagues observe and judge each other's work. One thinks of the peer review panels employed by granting agencies, of peer review processes employed by scholarly journals, perhaps even of courtroom juries "of one's peers." But when it comes to teaching, the meaning of peer review is far from established. What most faculty think of when they hear the phrase is classroom observation, and the context most often conjured up is that of promotion and tenure deliberations.

But peer review need not be understood as a single mechanism or process; nor need it pertain only in high-stakes decision making contexts. Indeed, to move toward a culture where teaching is, as Shulman puts it, "community property," the place to begin is not, probably, thumbs-up/thumbs-down decision-making, or any single mechanism for gathering evidence, but with a range of processes and occasions through which faculty can make their teaching available to each other for collegial observation, study, debate, and improvement; ways for faculty to be professional colleagues to each other in teaching as they are in research.

Thus the peer review "menu" might include a process recently introduced at Eastern Michigan University called "Featured Faculty" -- a program coordinated by the Faculty Center for Instructional Excellence wherein faculty known for their effective teaching invite colleagues to visit their class on a specified day. After class, the visitors meet with the teacher for a kind of "pedagogical debriefing" to discuss what was done, why, how it worked, and what might be learned from the "featured faculty."

A more elaborate version of the Featured Faculty program is a process devised by Sheila Tobias, which she calls "Peer Perspectives." In the course of studying students' difficulty with mathematics and science subjects, Tobias observed that even when "emotional blocks" are removed, students stumble on "conceptual difficulties" that stem from being new to the field. Thus, she proposes that faculty stand (or sit) in for students and help each other observe and articulate those conceptual

difficulties. A group of humanities faculty observing a physicist teach a lesson on inertia can for instance give feedback on where they get stuck, which examples don't click, how the lack of prior knowledge prevents them from distinguishing the important points from the merely illustrative ("Peer Perspectives on Physics," *Physics Teacher*, February, 1988, pp. 77-80). The Peer Perspectives process, which Tobias has observed on numerous campuses and in a range of disciplines, not only the sciences, is, she says, "unusually rich in outcomes, easy to mount, inexpensive to run, and, for participants on both sides of the lecture podium, fun" (*Change*, "Peer Perspectives on the Teaching of Science," March/April 1986, page 41). Additionally, one might note that the process invites discussion of content as well as process -- a circumstance that may have much to do with the "fun" factor, and, therefore, the learning it evokes for faculty.

Or, to continue the menu, peer review might take the form of mentoring and "buddy" systems. The New Jersey Master Faculty Program is a long-standing model here. Faculty pair up and take turns visiting each other's classes over the course of the academic year. Along the way they interview each other's students, review materials, and meet regularly to help each other make sense of and reflect upon the complex experience of teaching and learning.

Greater collegiality around teaching may be possible, too, through teaching portfolios. On the University of Pittsburgh campus, for instance, faculty nominated for teaching-excellence awards "show their work" in portfolios that they assemble and submit for review by the selection committee. At the CUNY York College, teaching portfolios, which are used for promotion and tenure decisions, are nevertheless collaboratively developed through "portfolio mentoring" at the department level: faculty who have already developed portfolios help colleagues who are in the process -- and both learn a lot about teaching along the way. Interestingly, portfolios are one of several tools discussed in a paper developed through The Mathematical Sciences Education Board entitled "Documenting Growth and Effectiveness in Undergraduate Mathematics Instruction."

Beyond specific strategies, there's promise in new ways to organize for collective attention to teaching and its quality. At San Jose State University, traditional teaching awards have been replaced by the "Teacher Scholar Project" which aims to create a cohort of faculty whose role is to work together, on behalf of the institution, for excellence in teaching and learning. Teacher-Scholars open their classrooms for visits by colleagues; they meet together to discuss issues of teacher growth and development; and they undertake teaching-improvement projects on behalf of the larger campus community. The Pennsylvania Society of Teaching Scholars, a program of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, the Faculty Colloquium on Excellence in Teaching (FACET) in the state of Indiana, and the newly established "Teaching Academy" of the University of Wisconsin at Madison represent similar efforts. The University of Wisconsin at Madison is also one of twelve institutions participating in a project entitled "From Idea to Prototype: The Peer Review of Teaching." Coordinated by the American Association for Higher Education, in partnership with Lee Shulman at Stanford University, the project is designed to develop "prototypes" for capturing and sharing "the scholarship of teaching." By putting more varied and refined tools in the picture, the project will help campuses and disciplinary communities move ahead with policies and processes that promote greater collegiality about teaching.

It is important to say, probably, that the promising practices indicated above are mostly small scale, often new, and therefore vulnerable; involvement by faculty

peers in each other's teaching is the exception, not the rule. But a good example is a powerful thing, and there *are* good examples out there to learn from, build on, and -- importantly -- to build *in* to ongoing, institutional processes and practices.

Notes

1. "Grant Eldridge" is one in a series of cases focused on issues of diversity in the classroom being developed with support from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. For more information, contact Rita Silverman or William Welty, Center for Case Studies in Education, School of Education, Pace University, 78 North Broadway, White Plains, NY 10603.

2. "Teaching Growth and Effectiveness: An Issues Paper," is a draft report prepared by the Mathematical Sciences Education; it is intended to provide a framework for discussion and feedback.

For more information, contact Susan Forman, Director of College and University Programs, Mathematical Sciences Education Board, 2101 Constitution Avenue, NW, HA 476, Washington, DC 20418.

3. Some portions of this paper are adapted from the proposal for this project, with permission from proposal co-author Russell Edgerton. The project is funded the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts. For more information, contact Pat Hutchings, AAHE Teaching Initiative, American Association for Higher Education, One Dupont Circle, Suite 360, Washington, DC 20036.

Suggested Reading

Eric Anderson, *Campus Use of the Teaching Portfolio: 25 Profiles.* Washington, DC, American Association for Higher Education, 1993.

Ernest Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Princeton, N.J., 1990.

Change, November/December 1993.

Russell Edgerton, Pat Hutchings, and Kathleen Quinlan, *The Teaching Portfolio: Capturing the Scholarship in Teaching*. Washington, DC, American Association for Higher education, 1991.

Pat Hutchings, *Using Cases to Improve College Teaching: A Guide to More Reflective Practice*. Washington, DC, American Association for Higher Education, 1993.

Lee Shulman, "Teaching Alone, Learning Together: An Agenda for Reform," in *Schooling for Tomorrow: Directing Reform to Issues that Count*. T. J. Sergiovanni and J.H. Moore, Eds. Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 1988.