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The Scholarship of Application

Patricia Anderson

Ernest Boyer describes application scholarship as a move toward understanding and knowledge of the real world. He asks how knowledge can “be responsibly applied to consequential problems” and how “social problems themselves define the agenda for scholarly investigation.”¹ Boyer notes that application scholarship earned early legitimacy through the formation of land-grant institutions established by federal law in 1862. The intent was for these schools to carry on research that helped people in their daily lives. But Boyer decried modern professional schools, whose purpose might include the application of theory to practice, but whose graduates were often ill prepared academically.

Boyer’s new definitions created a challenge for many who thought them too loose or sufficiently ambiguous, but he added some useful definitional boundaries. In particular, he clearly indicated that scholarship of application was not community service that might occur while serving on a board of directors, or in completing an accreditation document with others. Rather, scholarship of application is “serious, demanding work, requiring rigor—and accountability—traditionally associated with research activities.”²

Clearly, the seeds of confusion lie in the discussion of scholarship as service as a type of scholarship of application. Service is often identified as participating in community activities; either on campus in governance activities or off campus in a myriad of social endeavors. Boyer specifically points out the difference between “doing good,” as in good citizenship and the scholarship of application. He identifies the role of application scholarship as first requiring *that knowledge be discovered and then applied*. He indicates that new knowledge can flow out of every instance where it is being applied. He states:

Such a view of scholarly service—one that applies and contributes to human knowledge—is particularly needed in a world in which huge, almost intractable problems call for the skills and insights only the academy can provide.³

Boyer adds, “While social and civic projects are important, they should not be considered a part of the scholarship of application. What *should* be included are activities that relate directly to the intellectual work of the professor and carried out through consultation, technical assistance, policy analysis, program evaluation and the like.”⁴

What seems more critical in this definition of application scholarship is that there may be two different types of scholarship being described: 1) using one’s expertise to consult, write a grant, respond to accreditation, etc. and 2) testing or evaluating theory in practice, in a “real world” situation. The former provides onerous questions as to how to document an individual faculty member’s contribution to the project (particularly when several faculty members contribute to a report) and its relationship to the expertise of the faculty member. When one is consulting or contributing as an expert, Boyer calls for written descriptions of each faculty member’s contribution, something that is then subject to peer review, which might even include outside experts, in order to assess the significance of the contribution. In some ways this requires a more demanding analysis and reflection.

I would argue that defining scholarship as giving advice to community groups or collecting materials already developed by colleagues in an accreditation report may be considered valid, but whether results can be evaluated for their impact on societal problems is a long stretch. Such a definition hampers the development of

clear criteria for application scholarship in the many disciplines where it might be used. The latter definition of actually testing theory in practical settings requires assumptions to be tested, a research design, data collection (formative or summative and qualitative or quantitative) and written results prepared for peer review. Moving from theory to practice simply offers clearer opportunities to design and carry out ‘experiments’ based on theory.

Expanding definitions

Following Boyer’s death, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching asked three colleagues to prepare *Scholarship Assessed*⁵ from Boyer’s early writing, notes and lectures on this topic. In this document one sees the expansion of the scholarship of application to include yet a newer definition of application: the scholarship of engagement, which Boyer coined in a speech that was published after his death.⁶ The examples are similar—applying the skills and knowledge of the faculty to the problems and issues of the community. What is added are ways to evaluate such application or engagement. Questions that might be answered by the faculty member who engages in this approach to scholarship are the following: Does the scholar’s work add consequentially to the discipline? Does the scholar’s work open additional areas for further exploration?⁷

Eugene Rice of the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) indicates that Donald Schon has done much to enlarge this definition in his article in *Change* magazine.⁸ Schon, author of the *Reflective Practitioner*, describes the high ground of basic research where problems are “relatively unimportant to individuals and society at large” and the swamp where problems are messy and confusing, and where methods cannot be (as) rigorous.⁹ He calls this the dilemma of rigor or relevance, which he relates to the epistemology of the research university and that of professional schools. Scholarship of application falls into this messy yet relevant domain.

Schon describes application scholarship as not less important than that done by the more rigorous basic scholars, but that which must consist of the application of science or systematic knowledge to the problems of practice. He argues that we should not think of higher or lower schools of knowledge; rather, that application scholarship provides not only for putting knowledge into practice, but its very generation. Thus, it is not merely carrying out theory to practice, but testing its fidelity. He calls this action research. He says:

If community outreach is to be seen as a form of scholarship, then it is the practice of reaching out and providing service to a community that must be seen as raising important issues whose investigation may lead to generalizations of prospective relevance and actionability...The scholarship of application means the generation of knowledge for, and from action.

A recent ASHE ERIC Higher Education Report, *Institutionalizing a Broader View of Scholarship through Boyer’s Four Domains*, published in 2002, provides greater clarity or perhaps greater confusion on application scholarship, depending on where a faculty member wants to focus her efforts. The authors of this report argue that service to the community, as long as it emanates from one’s scholarly discipline, should be considered scholarship.¹⁰ They list such examples as serving on community boards, on a university program review committee or preparing a seminar for local community members. Only in the appendix do the authors distinguish the above examples as scholarly activities rather than scholarship, per se. Compared to scholarly activities, “scholarship takes the form of unpublished scholarly outcomes and publications. Unpublished scholarly outcomes fully meet the definition of

scholarship if they appear in publicly observable form. By being publicly observable, unpublished scholarly outcomes meet the three criteria for scholarship delineated by Shulman and Hutchings: they must be public, subject to critical review and in a form that allows use and exchange by other members of the scholarly community.¹¹

Clearly the nuances of definitions and activities described by application scholarship are still formative. Whether serving on a university committee is a scholarly activity or scholarship confuses and perhaps enlarges such service beyond its merit.

Choosing to use the scholarship of application will require careful attention to the role of the faculty member in a community setting. Is she viewed as the expert and the community members as unequal participants? With ‘messy’ questions, will faculty members commit to the staying power (several years possibly) to plan and carry out program interventions and their evaluations? Is there a difference in terms of scholarship whether the faculty member provides consultation or engages in a lengthy study, which is presented or published in peer-reviewed venues? How will the academy judge the consultation? Is that consultation service rather than scholarship?

From the original definition to those versions finding their way into faculty handbooks, the scholarship of application has both a centered definition that receives little debate and multiple peripheral definitions that call for greater justification to link the activity to scholarship. The centered approach would require planning programs based on theory; evaluating professional programs whether a theory is posed or not, conducting meta-analyses of multiple program types, testing theories from multiple disciplines in a community setting and using knowledge to solve consequential problems. This is clearly scholarship that can be written about and presented.

Peripheral activities such as serving on a search committee, faculty executive or handbook committee, where questions of individual contribution, intensity of effort, expertise and even outcomes are more difficult to measure, or not perceived by most as scholarship, must engender greater specificity and justification if they are included as scholarship. It is critical that as we expand arenas for scholarly activity that we not fall into the trap where the public is presented with “inconsequential and trifling” activities at best or “the greatest intellectual fraud” at worst.¹²

Relationship of the *Fresno Pacific Idea* to Scholarship of Application

Fresno Pacific University faculty members carry on their work out of a deep value system described in the *Fresno Pacific Idea*. Three themes of the *Idea* are Christian influence, community and consequential outreach (prophetic). These themes might be connected through a statistical technique called path analysis. Christian influence leads to community, which in turn leads to disciplinary investment in our community. The *Idea* states in part:

...to be prophetic is to serve the church and society by engaging in dialogue with and critique of contemporary culture and practice. The university encourages informed reflection on personal, institutional and societal values which contribute to developing a vision for wholeness, justice and reconciliation. It offers leadership to the church and the world by enabling persons to extend perceptive, creative and skillful responses to current issues...

The problems of our society, in Fresno and beyond, call us to commit to using the best of our disciplines to consider solutions. Guided by our preparation in our disciplines and encouraged through the challenges in society, faculty should be on the forefront of analyzing, reflecting, offering solutions and evaluating solutions. These activities are application scholarship that flows naturally out of the prophetic theme of the *Idea*.

Examples

Following is a personal statement on application research as well as comments from four Fresno Pacific University faculty members.

1. *Testing Theory in Practice*: My article in the *Journal of Continuing Higher Education* entitled "Application of Curriculum Learning Outcomes from an Adult Baccalaureate Degree Program," tested theoretical research findings indicating that adults define success in learning as the ability to apply classroom learning to other settings, such as jobs. One conclusion suggested by this research with 185 Management and Organizational Development (MOD) alumni leaders from Fresno Pacific is that alumni working in leadership positions have been strongly proactive in taking leadership learning and applying this learning in their workplace. The findings of the research with these 185 Fresno Pacific MOD alumni leaders therefore suggest support for the literature. To summarize, adults are very intentional in what they seek to learn, and are very proactive at trying to put the learning gained to use in other life settings they consider important to them, such as the workplace. (Breck Harris, business faculty)
2. *Theory to Practice and Practice Revisions*: Several iterations of theory to practice, to research and practice, can be cited from a project I was involved with some years ago. During this period I was a consultant and researcher for a juvenile court in Washington State where the court was involved in a national demonstration project. As a consultant I was free to work with court officers and design new programs aimed at reducing delinquency. An early program in offering volunteers as mentors to juveniles referred to the court served as a springboard for another program: Family Crisis Intervention. This program was planned and implemented on various family intervention theories used in mental health. It was intended to extend that work to juvenile status offenders who are acting out sufficiently to be arrested or brought to the jurisdiction of the juvenile court. Both the mental health setting and the juvenile setting were viewed as symptoms of family dysfunction. Critical to the intervention theory was that families are more open to change and growth during the period of crisis. The intervention approach was also based on one used in Texas for families in mental health crises, not criminal justice crises. The Texas program called on professional mental health therapists to be assigned to each member of the family. Multiple mental health members were each assigned to a family member in an intensive two-to-three day period. The purpose was to identify and explore problem issues in full families and to rotate among various smaller-than-family settings down to individuals. In all of these settings, the assigned therapist stayed with his/her assigned family member. The results were profoundly positive and lasting.¹³

If the program worked with professionals in a mental health setting, could trained volunteers work with families in crisis over a shorter period of time? A number of research questions surrounded the approach and outcomes. In short, volunteers were trained and even with more seriously delinquent juveniles and their families, the recidivism rates for those in a 6-8 hour intervention was significantly lower than that of similar offenders not provided the intervention. A report of the project design and findings was written with the collaboration of members of the juvenile court, a national research firm, volunteers and consultants. The U.S. Government Printing Office published the report, *Family Intervention*, for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (Patricia Anderson, provost)

3. *Implications from Practice:* From 1993-2004, I directed the Small Business Institute (SBI) program, or capstone class, for senior-year business students. This class assists students in their transition from the classroom to the workplace through a process that takes the theories learned in their undergraduate experience and applies them to actual business situations in the local community. Businesses are approached through the Central Valley Small Business Administration, the Central California Chamber of Commerce or through personal references. Working with the business owner or management team, the student teams design practical, realistic and affordable solutions to specific problems or challenges faced by their client business. Students work in teams of three to four. They are required to understand the client business or industry and to use the actual financial statements in developing solutions. Each team works confidentially and independently with their client through scheduled meetings during the semester. Regular classroom sessions are held to discuss similar problems or situations encountered in the projects and to review basic business concepts that all businesses face. Examples of some of the benefits to the clients include innovative concepts for marketing strategies, assistance with accounting systems, advice on the use of technology, diversification or expansion ideas. Students benefit through gaining a systemic view of the working of an actual business through hands-on organizational development work. At the end of the semester, students present their results to their clients in an oral report and provide their client a written and bound report with full details of their study. This project has been submitted to a professional peer-reviewed organization. (Consuelo Meux, former business faculty.)
4. *Disciplinary Expertise to Practice:* From 1992 to 1995, I served as a training consultant and counselor for the YWCA-Marjoree Mason Center in Fresno. In addition to keeping my counseling skills active and relevant to the courses I taught in Fresno Pacific's social work department, particularly "Foundations of Social Work Practice" and "Working with Groups." These community activities also gave me the opportunity to apply current theories of intervention to real-life situations and evaluate their usefulness. I also taught these counseling theories and skills to the staff of the center through various professional development training sessions that I conducted for them. In turn, my work at the center lead me to conduct a research project investigating the manner in which organizational structure impacts shelter workers'

ability to function effectively in their jobs. The research results were presented at the 2001 Pacific Sociological Association's annual meeting in San Francisco and a journal article is under review by the social work journal, *Affilia*. (Stacy Hammons, sociology faculty.)

5. *Theory Testing*: An important, but secondary, dimension of my doctoral study, "Negotiating Cultural Identities: Conflict Transformation in Labrador" (Syracuse University, 2002) raised key methodological questions concerning the relationship between the conflict intermediary role of mediator as carried out in the context of conducting applied research. I concluded that these roles are both compatible and complimentary and suggest that the praxis reflected in their unique combination provides a useful model for both ethnographic research and practice within the emerging field of conflict resolution. Following Burdick's (1998) approach to social movements' political analysis of culture, I suggest that a careful, measured ethnographic voice can be an added presence to a disputing party's analysis of conflict. Furthermore, I argue, following Hudson and Taylor-Henley's¹⁴ experience of conducting research among First Nations, that different aspects and forms of research are not best seen in their parts but essentially as a unified set of concepts and approaches. As the relatively new field of conflict resolution produces emerging scholar-practitioners—what some have called "pracademics"—this method and methodology will serve as a model for combining research and practice. (Larry Dunn, conflict management and peacemaking faculty)

Implications for Fresno Pacific University

Assuming that added diversity of scholarship is helpful, I pose the following definition for scholarship of application:

The scholarship of application includes all forms of scholarly inquiry that use current theory or knowledge gained from practice in new situations where knowledge is not complete. It generally takes the form of studying professional practice or programs using established research design protocols developed to solve real-world problems. It is intended to solve consequential problems.

Evidence would include published materials, both refereed and not, articles, monographs, books, music and exhibitions in the faculty member's field. Invited participation in programs or presentations at professional meetings, local community organizations and the like would serve as evidence. Obtaining grants requiring expertise in one's field would also qualify.

Service to the University

To avoid confusion and not reduce the value of service, service should be identified separately (as in teaching, scholarship and service) as a worthy endeavor of faculty members (as it has for at least the last 75 years in higher education).

University service activities would include those engaged on campus or off campus that arise from the faculty member's special field of knowledge. On-campus activities make significant contributions to the mission, *FPU Idea*, curricular,

educational and governance goals of the university. Off-campus service would include participation and leadership in professional or disciplinary organizations, accreditation teams, providing expertise to governmental agencies or court or law, serving on local boards of directors and participation in leadership of the church and her affiliate organizations.

Notes

- ¹ Boyer, Ernest L. *Scholarship Reconsidered* (New Jersey: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990), 21.
- ² Boyer, 22.
- ³ Boyer, 23.
- ⁴ Boyer, 36.
- ⁵ Charles Glassick, Mary T. Huber, and Gene I. Maeroff. *Scholarship Assessed*. (New York: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1997).
- ⁶ Ernest Boyer. "The Scholarship of Engagement." *Journal of Public Outreach* (1996), 1, 11-20.
- ⁷ Glassick, Huber and Maeroff, 29.
- ⁸ Donald A. Schon. "The New Scholarship Requires A New Epistemology." *Change*, Nov/Dec. 1995, vol 27. no 6.
- ⁹ Donald A. Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).
- ¹⁰ John Braxton, William Luckey, and Patirica Helland, "Institutionalizing A Broader View of Scholarship Through Boyer's Four Domains," *ASHE ERIC Higher Education Report* (2002), 32.
- ¹¹ John M. Braxton, William Luckey, and Patricia Helland, 141.
- ¹² Martin Anderson, *Impostors in the Temple* (California: Hoover Institution Press, 1996).
- ¹³ Robert MacGregor et. al., *Multiple Impact Therapy with Families* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).
- ¹⁴ Burdick, John, "Uniting Theory and Practice in the Ethnography of Social Movements: Notes Toward a Hopeful Realism," *Dialectical Anthropology* 20 (1995), 361-385. Hudson, Peter and Sharon Taylor-Henley. 2001. "Beyond the Rhetoric: Implementing a Culturally Appropriate Research Project in First Nation Communities." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 25(2): 93-105.