

# BUILDING BRIDGES TO OVERCOME BREACHES: SCHOOL AND ACADEMY, CONTENT AND PEDAGOGY, SCHOLARSHIP AND TEACHING

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**Abstract:** There is a general sense that something is amiss in the way that schools are remote from the academy, content is distinguished from pedagogy, and k-12 teaching is divorced from academic scholarship. This paper proposes that there are five inter-related but distinguishable aspects to the trend. Beyond these aspects, however, this paper will argue for the surprisingly similar structure of the knowledge held by the scholar and the teacher. They may not know the same things, but they *do* the same things; that is, they pursue parallel cognitive or intellectual practices.

## Introduction

Sam Wineburg's 1991 article, "On the reading of historical texts," launched his influential research program on the teaching and learning of history: he wanted to understand how experts (historians) make sense of texts, how novices (students) do, and what the differences were (Wineburg, 1991).<sup>1</sup> The subtitle – "Notes on the breach between school and academy" – articulates his agenda. The idea of a "breach" between school and academy suggests an unwelcome and unhealthy state of affairs in which school history has become unmoored from its disciplinary basis in the academy, a breach that ought to be bridged. Indeed, at one point in his article, he explicitly acknowledges that agenda. "Where should our standard [of good interpretation of historical texts] come from? To me, there is only one defensible answer. We must look to the discipline" (Wineburg, 1999, p. 516).

Wineburg's research program emerged out

of work by his mentor, Lee Shulman, who had championed a "missing paradigm" of subject-specific pedagogical research. Like Wineburg, Shulman too was motivated (at least in part) by a sense of an unhealthy breach between teaching and the disciplines, or between pedagogy and content (Shulman, 1986 and 1987). And in related ways, the dissatisfaction with the split between school and academy figures in other recent and influential articles, such as Peter Seixas' (1999) paper about efforts to help history educators become more sophisticated in "doing the discipline" of history and Deborah Ball's (2000) paper on the divide between content and pedagogy in teacher education more generally.

All this may seem somewhat murky. What is separated from what, and what needs to be bridged? This article is an attempt to sort through this dissatisfaction, this general sense that something is amiss in the way that schools are disengaged from the academy, content is distinguished from

pedagogy, or k-12 teaching is divorced from academic scholarship. I will distinguish five aspects of this general concern: four ways of thinking about the breach, each with its proposed bridge, and one philosophical argument. These are interrelated, to be sure, but still distinct. And so, while I will not pursue each in depth, I do hope to provide a kind of taxonomy of the phenomenon under discussion. I then want to pursue the philosophical argument that may lurk beneath.

### **Four Breaches and Four Bridges**

The first breach is between two groups of people, university scholars and educators, who rarely interact. Academic physicists and academic anthropologists, for example, are content to remain in their ivory towers,<sup>2</sup> doing their research and writing their books and articles. With a few notable and important exceptions – a textbook here, a science education commission there, and every once in a while, a scholar who becomes engaged in the intellectual challenges of teaching the – they do not spend a lot of time out in the physics education community or the anthropology education community. As Robert Bain recalls:

For years, I lived like Bruce Wayne or Clark Kent, with separate yet connected dual-identities. By day I was a high school history teacher, and at night I was a graduate student pursuing advanced degrees in history. The difference was greater than merely day and night... I switched worlds. (Bain 2000, p. 331)

The existence of these separate worlds, for this observer and others, is a problem.

Scholars and educators ought to have more regular interaction.

Why? There is an obvious answer – obvious but wrong. The obvious answer supposes that scholars supply the content, the “what,” and educators supply the pedagogy, the “how.” The answer comes easily to the lips of academics, especially, who imagine that they are thereby paying appropriate respect to some body of esoteric knowledge held by educators, educational researchers, or, to use the inflated term, “educationists.” And the obvious answer has the virtue of efficiency, since it proposes a kind of division of labor between scholars and educators. That model, however, is unlikely to be productive for either party, and more importantly is conceptually flawed, because it treats knowledge as static and assumes that the goal of education is the transmission of that static knowledge into the heads of the learners.

A better answer is that both academic scholars and educators might learn from shared engagement with questions of common concern. What are the goals of teaching this subject (physics, or anthropology, or other fields)? What are the challenges? What do teachers actually *do* in the teaching of the subject – what questions do they ask, what representations of ideas do they use, what learning tasks do they assign – and what might be considered the *core practices* of teaching the subject? Obviously, the answers to these questions will differ depending on the setting and the age of the students. The claim, however, is that a shared conversation about subject-specific questions – a conversation *across* settings and ages, but *within* a specific subject – has

the potential to be constructive for all involved.

So the first breach is between scholars and educators. But I have already alluded to a model of the work of teaching in which teaching is a product of a division of labor, between the scholar-producers and the teacher-transmitters. (The third group of people in the model – the students – are conceived as consumers.) Pedagogy, according to this model, is content-neutral, or generic. This is most easily seen in teacher education and professional development, which, according to Deborah Ball, “has consistently been structured across a persistent divide between subject matter and pedagogy” – between those courses and experiences that teach teachers *what* to teach and the courses that teach them *how* to teach (Ball, 2000, p. 242).<sup>6</sup>

Rather than leaving individual teachers to enact their own idiosyncratic synthesis of content and pedagogy, Ball’s alternative is to try to study more closely what good teachers actually know about their subject, in order to understand more comprehensively what good teachers *need* to know – which, we will find, is far more complicated and robust than the “lists of content ... derived from the school curriculum.” (Ball, 2000, p. 244-245). We will then be able to develop a richer sense of what kinds of learning experiences would help teachers develop that knowledge. The second breach, then, refers to the division-of-labor model of the work of teaching, and the bridge might be articulated as a contrary claim, that pedagogy is always pedagogy *of something*. Bridging content and pedagogy means focusing on and developing greater

sophistication about subject-specific pedagogic questions.

A third aspect of this general trend, related to the preceding, calls more specifically for greater consideration for the larger enterprise into which we induct students when we teach. We do not necessarily intend to train academic historians of China when we teach about the Cultural Revolution, or professional mathematicians when we teach algebra. On the other hand, we *do* want to introduce students to a field, a discipline, a particular intellectual practice, or a body of literature. In too many cases, teachers seem to lack a conceptual framework – a larger structure of meaning and significance, a conception of the field into which they are or should be introducing their students through deliberate strategies – within which to argue on behalf of the inclusion of some aspect of the curriculum, or the exclusion of some other aspect.

What do we think this present subject that we are proposing to teach, any subject, is all about? What constitutes an intriguing question or a compelling answer within this subject? What are the particular skills or intellectual habits that are associated with this subject? What are the multiple orientations to the subject itself, and how are they importantly different from each other? What, in the end, do we want students to know and be able to do in the study of this subject, and why? There must be a conception of the field of scholarship or the discipline or the particular intellectual practice into which our pedagogy is embedded, within which it is grounded. There must be a conception behind our pedagogic

decision-making that allows us to establish and prioritize the goals of teaching and learning this particular subject, a conception of the subject area to which we feel responsible and to which we want to hold ourselves accountable. In this third breach, pedagogical choices all too often seem unmoored from the “flexible, thoughtful, and conceptual understanding of [the] subject matter” that ought to inform them (McDiarmid et al., 1989).

Finally, there’s a fourth, related, aspect to this trend, which focuses not so much on the breach between scholarship and pedagogy but on the development of a scholarship *of* pedagogy, or as it is more commonly called, a scholarship of teaching. This term, invented by Ernest Boyer (1990), has developed the more specific meaning of scholarly inquiry into the practice of teaching, making teaching and/or learning the focus of study – especially the kind of study that only those subject-matter specialists with a deep and rich knowledge of the subject matter can conduct. Like other forms of scholarship, the scholarship of teaching must become publicly accessible, and it must be subject to peer review and critique, turning teaching from private property into communal property (Shulman, 1993). Paradigmatically, the scholarship of teaching is a product of inquiry into the teaching that one knows *best*, namely, one’s own.

The scholarship of teaching is not oriented towards the *evaluation* of teaching, nor the diagnosis and correction of problems. Nor is it simply synonymous with reflection; on the contrary, it is characterized by a qualitatively deeper level of inquiry facilitated by close

attention to records of practice such as lesson plans, videotapes, students’ work, or teacher journals. Most basically, the scholarship of teaching can pursue a deeper understanding of a particular aspect of teaching or of students’ learning about which one is simply curious, holding normative questions (about whether this is a good practice, much less the *best* practice) in abeyance.

Like the first bridge discussed, the scholarship of teaching is a means to the end of a deeper and richer understanding of teaching that can then serve to improve educational practice. But also like the first aspect, it is not *merely* a means to an end. The very idea of making teaching the focus of serious study is itself an important point, overcoming a breach between the values of scholarship on the one hand and the field of teaching on the other. “Great and forbidding walls continue to divide North American university professors both from what happens in the secondary schools and from the efforts of educational researchers to facilitate learning,” writes David Pace in his brief on behalf of the scholarship of teaching and learning in the field of history. “Even a cursory reading of the best examples of this literature can convince the reader that it is time to begin to breach the divide” (Pace, 2004, p. 1184).

### **Scholarship-Pedagogy as a False Dichotomy**

The four problems identified to this point each identify some breach and propose some bridge. Recent discussions in the literature typically invoke one or more of these inter-related but conceptually distinct breaches, and typically endorse

one or more of the bridges. But I also believe that there is a fifth aspect of this general dissatisfaction, based on an epistemological argument about the surprisingly similar structure of the knowledge of the subject as held by the scholar and the teacher – not that they *know* the same things, but that they *do* the same things, that they pursue parallel cognitive or intellectual practices. One might call this a kind of epistemological parallelism, which serves to undermine the dichotomy between scholarship and pedagogy itself. I am not claiming that what the authors cited and others are *really* talking about is an epistemological issue. Nevertheless, I believe that my argument is consistent with those other aspects of this multi-faceted issue, that it illuminates the concerns about breaches in a new way, and that it helps us to understand the value or potential benefit of the various bridging proposals. “Every study or subject,” writes Dewey in a famous passage in *The Child and the Curriculum*, “has two aspects: one for the scientist as a scientist; the other for the teacher as a teacher.” He then elaborates what the subject matter means for each.

For the scientist, the subject matter represents simply a given body of truth... [The teacher] is not concerned with adding new facts to the science he teaches; in propounding new hypotheses or in verifying them. He is concerned with the subject-matter of the science as representing a given stage and phase of the development of the experience... He is concerned, not with the subject-matter as such, but with the subject-matter as a related factor in

a total and growing experience...  
(Dewey, 1902, p. 478-9).

We might say that the scientist is concerned with science for its own sake; the teacher, on the other hand, is concerned with science because of the way that it captures some aspect of the child’s experience or has the potential to do so.

The claim has a kind of *prima facie* plausibility to it; scientists do tend to differ from science teachers in their priorities and their concerns. In fact, Sam Wineburg and Suzanne Wilson say something similar about historians and history teachers: whereas historians “face inward toward the discipline,” history teachers have to face both inward to the discipline and outward toward their students (Wineburg & Wilson, 1991, p. 335). But is this depiction accurate? One red flag in the Dewey passage is Dewey’s reference to the subject as a “given body of truth” to which new facts are added, a strikingly un-Deweyan over-simplification of the nature of scientific inquiry. Another reason to think more carefully about this is the suggestion that the scientist is concerned with the subject matter “as such,” as if it were possible to disengage scientific knowledge from the (intellectual or practical) problems that generate the inquiries that result in that knowledge in the first place.

In contrast to Dewey, and Wineburg and Wilson, how might one demonstrate the *similarity* in the relationship of scholars and teachers to their common subject? Consider what scholars and teachers actually do, or to be more precise, what they do *in relation to the subject matter*. A teacher takes some subject and constructs

the best possible understanding of it for herself. As she does so, she encounters problems, things that she doesn't understand or that don't make sense, or perhaps she simply finds her curiosity piqued by this or that aspect, and so she does some more digging until she is able to re-construct a coherent picture of the whole. With her own understanding as the background, she then makes a judgment about what the students' prior understanding of the particular subject is, and makes a further judgment about what kinds of activities are likely to move the students from where they are, now, in their understanding of the subject, to where the teacher thinks they ought to be. Sometimes, frontal communication serves her purpose, but at other times, she decides to assign readings, or writing, or problem sets, or some other kind of educational activity. The pedagogical techniques that she chooses are always (or should always be) in the service of the learning objective, that is, the goal of having the students move from where they are to where the teacher wants them to be.

Now consider what scholars do. The scholar takes some subject and constructs the best possible understanding of it for herself – just like the teacher. As the scholar constructs that understanding, she encounters problems, things that she doesn't understand or that don't make sense, or perhaps she simply finds her scholarly intuition piqued by this or that aspect, and so she does some more digging until she is able to re-construct a coherent picture of the whole – just like the teacher. With her own understanding as background, the scholar then makes a judgment about what her target audience's prior understanding of the particular

subject is – just like the teacher. (The target audience may be her colleagues, or the readers of a particular journal, or “the field.”) Next, the scholar makes the further judgment about what kinds of communication are likely to move her audience from where they are to where she thinks they ought to be – just like the teacher. And like the teacher, for the scholar too, straightforward communication is often not enough. The scholar has to convince a skeptical audience by the use of evidence and argument – she has to write her article in a compelling way, or present the relevant data, or document the key piece of evidence – techniques that she hopes will serve the objective of moving the audience towards an acceptance of her position.

This sketch of the work of the scholar and the teacher is intended to demonstrate the common structure underlying the intellectual work that they do. This is not to deny the reality of relevant distinctions. It is surely relevant that scholars tend to spend more of their time interacting with their subject – doing research, writing – as they construct their own understandings, and less time interacting with their audience, while teachers do the reverse. (And yet, is it not true that we learn *through* the process of communicating?) It is surely relevant that scholarship propels one towards specialization, whereas teaching often demands flexible knowledge of wider areas (and yet, is it not possible that Boyer's (1990) “scholarship of synthesis” is attainable only by those who do not over-specialize?). It is surely relevant that the scholarly community acknowledges and rewards novelty in subject matter knowledge in a way that the teaching

community does not. (And yet, when peers review scholarship, is there ever a yes-or-no determination of novelty, or is there rather a more subtle judgment about a “contribution to the field”?) And it is surely relevant that the teachers’ responsibilities encompass the promotion of the *general* growth and development of their students – not just the growth in a particular subject but the growth of their intellectual and moral character in general – in a way that researchers’ responsibilities do not. These distinctions need to be carefully examined and their epistemological significance considered. But the basic argument here is that the rigid dichotomy of scholarship and pedagogy is itself fundamentally flawed: *insofar as, and to the extent that, teachers of a subject are engaged in an epistemic relation to a subject, their knowledge practices are parallel to those of scholars.*

This has at least two implications. One implication is that it forces us to rethink the relationship between scholarship and teaching as they are carried out in the academy. On a practical level, academics who are invested in their research commonly lament, not unreasonably, that time spent on teaching is time away from research, and vice versa. On an epistemological level, on the other hand, teaching is scholarship by other means – and vice versa.

A second implication of the present argument – that the dichotomy of scholarship and pedagogy is a false one – is that it forces us to take much more seriously the knowledge that is held by teachers at all levels. Consider my colleagues at two ends of the educational spectrum, Shira Horowitz (who teaches Bible to first graders) and Marc Brettler

(who, in addition to his biblical scholarship, teaches Bible to undergraduates and graduate students). It is surely the case that Brettler knows more Bible than Horowitz does, by whatever measure we might care to use: he has studied more of the texts, he has studied more *about* the texts, he knows the scholarly field in a way that she does not. In one sense, incontrovertibly, Brettler knows more.

But in another sense, the knowledge of Bible that Horowitz possesses is not merely a pale imitation of the knowledge of Bible that Brettler possesses; the difference between them is a difference in kind, not merely in degree. Nor is it correct to characterize the former as knowledge of how to teach Bible to first graders, and the latter as knowledge of Bible itself. Each knows a lot about how to construct understanding in Bible *for their particular audiences*. Each is an expert, but their fields of expertise are (related but) distinct. Each is both a scholar and a pedagogue.

Above, I discussed the second aspect of the general trend, which called for attention to subject-specific pedagogical issues. I suggested that pedagogy is always pedagogy *of something*. So, pedagogy, in this sense, is inherently scholarly. The argument that I have just pursued, on the other hand, has emphasized that scholarship is always scholarship *for someone*. Thus scholarship, in this sense, is inherently pedagogical.<sup>15</sup>

## Conclusion

I propose, then, the generalized dissatisfaction regarding a breach between scholarship and pedagogy comprises no fewer than four discrete problems, plus

one philosophical argument. The first problem is a practical issue about the lack of interaction between two groups of people, university scholars and educators, and an argument about the potential benefit bringing them together. The second is a problem with the standard division-of-labor model in which teachers ought to know their material, on the one hand, and possess generic pedagogic techniques on the other. That problem points to a programmatic claim about the importance of subject-specific pedagogy in teacher education and professional development. The third aspect is a brief on behalf of scholarship in pedagogical thinking, in the specific sense of a larger structure of meaning and significance – a conception of the field or subject – to which pedagogic decision-making is responsible. The fourth aspect is an appeal for the development of a particular kind of scholarship, a scholarship of teaching.

But the philosophical position undermines the scholarship-pedagogy dichotomy itself, arguing for their epistemological parallelism, i.e., the way in which the two knowledge practices of teaching and scholarship share a common structure. If that argument is compelling, this might be a case where philosophy can contribute to the bridging of a breach.

How? Well, if the two knowledge practices share a common structure, then it makes sense to imagine that bringing scholars and educators together to think about the challenges of teaching the subject will be a productive enterprise – not an exercise in the enlightenment of the educators by the scholars but an opportunity to explore together the ways that each make sense of their shared

subject, the ways that each deal with difficulties in the subject, and the ways that they think about helping others understand it.

If the two knowledge practices share a common structure, then it makes sense to think that the division of labor model is flawed, and that many of the most generative and most essential questions about pedagogy are subject-specific questions – not just questions about “how to teach” but questions about “how to teach this specific subject.” For in-service or pre-service teachers, bridging content and pedagogy means attending to and nurturing their capacity to, as Peter Seixas (1999) puts it, “do the discipline.”

If the two knowledge practices share a common structure, then it makes sense to demand that teachers, no less than scholars, need to have a compelling conception of the field or discipline. This does not mean that teachers’ conception must mimic the (supposedly unified and clearly articulated) academic conception. It does mean that pedagogical practice will benefit when choices are made on the basis of principle rather than idiosyncrasy, when teachers aspire to create learning opportunities that serve loftier goals, and when educational institutions determine the criteria on the basis of which they want to hold themselves accountable.

Finally, if the two knowledge practices share a common structure, then it makes sense to think about the scholarship of teaching not as a radically distinct enterprise, in which we ask scholars of the Great Depression or of set theory or of modernist English poetry to transform themselves into scholars of pedagogy. Instead, the scholarship of teaching



represents something like a subtle shift of attention from a certain kind of subject-specific inquiry to another kind of subject-specific inquiry – from trying to understand, for example, how meaning is conveyed by a T.S. Eliot poem to trying to understand the challenges for students in making sense of a T.S. Eliot poem.

I do not mean to erase all distinctions. Studying the teaching of a survey course in American history is not the same thing as studying the economic or political causes of the Great Depression; the inquirer must use different analytical tools, call upon different theoretical frameworks, and build on different literatures. And yet, if my argument about the knowledge practices of teaching and scholarship is accurate, then the lines between them are not quite as sharp as we might have thought. Building a bridge may be a less a matter of piling up stone or steel, and more a matter of peering through the mist at structures that are already in place.

## Notes

1. Wineburg's central influence has been through his book, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts* (Wineburg, 2001), and an edited volume, *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives* (Stearns, Seixas, & Wineburg, 2001). See also more recently Wineburg & Martin (2004) and Wineburg (2004).
2. Physicists typically do their research in labs, of course, while anthropologists do theirs out in the field, and each of these can lead to a degree of engagement with the real world. But the issue here is engagement with *education*, specifically.
3. In recent years, those isolated academics engaged in studying the teaching of their

subject have coalesced into a kind of movement, under the banner of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), with journals, websites, and conferences devoted to the enterprise. I will briefly discuss SoTL later in this paper.

4. Barry Holtz writes about the context of Jewish studies: "Scholars and educators live in almost parallel universes" (Holtz, 2006, p. 5).

5. Conversations *across* subject areas are potentially instructive as well, both because of enlightening contrasts and because of unexpected commonalities.

6. Lee Shulman argues that while the content-pedagogy division is well entrenched, it is in fact a relatively modern phenomenon (Shulman, 1986).

7. This brief discussion has focused on subject-specific pedagogy, but it is worth at least noting the corollary of subject-specific *learning*. What does a developing sophistication in this subject look like? What does a novice believe, relative to an expert? What are the central conceptual, interpretive, imaginative, or analytical tasks that a learner must master? These questions have been especially central to Wineburg's research program. Just as pedagogy is always the pedagogy of *something*, so too learning is always the learning of *something*, some particular field or subject or practice with its own trajectory and its own challenges.

8. Joseph Schwab (1964), in his influential article "The structure of the disciplines: Meanings and significances", called this the "substantive" and "syntactic" structures of a discipline," but I find Schwab's scheme too rigid to account for the dizzying and constantly evolving variety of disciplines, fields, subjects, and

areas of inquiry. It is important to emphasize that there may be *multiple* appropriate conceptions of the field; we need not establish an artificial unification of the field and then impose that unified conception on the educational system.

9. While the SoTL movement has tended to focus on higher education, over the last decade the Carnegie Foundation under the leadership of Lee Shulman promoted analogous efforts in k-12 education (see, for example, the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, CASTL).

10. Barry Holtz (2006) quotes Argyris & Schon (1974), who argue that practitioners are not the best theorists of their own practice, at least not without help: “We cannot learn what someone’s theory-in-use is simply by asking him. We must construct his theory-in-use from observations of his behavior” (p. 9). This is one reason why SoTL thrives when it has access to artifacts of teaching that can serve as data for analysis.

11. Of course, almost all scholars are teachers as well, but I am treating “scholar” and “teacher” as ideal types. One result is that my argument can be taken to mean that real-life scholar/teachers are not as bifurcated as they sometimes believe or seem to others – they are not splitting their time between two sharply distinct activities – but rather pursue the same epistemic activity throughout.

12. Feiman-Nemser & Buchman (1986) use the metaphor of bridge-building: “thinking about how to build bridges between one’s own understanding and that of one’s students” (p. 239).

13. “Where the teacher wants them to be” does not necessarily mean a specific interpretation of a text. It may rather

involve, for example, greater sophistication or more nuanced thinking about the subject, or avoiding a standard pitfall, or developing particular interpretive sensibilities.

14. Some might be tempted, therefore, to construct a dichotomy between research in pursuit of the truth about the subject versus teaching in pursuit of healthy attitudes (“loyalty,” say, or “commitment”). But it is by now commonplace to acknowledge that the research enterprise is never entirely value-neutral; the researcher (in determining what to study and how to pursue the argument) is not immune from considerations of what she believes is good for the intellectual and moral growth of her audience or the field more generally. And the good teacher, on the other hand, has her “eye on the [disciplinary] horizon,” as Deborah Ball might say.

15. McEwan and Bull (1991), in an article that I read many years ago and re-encountered after composing the present argument, put the point rather nicely: “All content knowledge, whether held by scholars or teachers, has a pedagogical dimension” (p. 318). Or again, towards the end of the article: “Subject matter is always an expression of a desire to communicate ideas to others, whether they happen to be members of the scholarly community, newcomers to the field, or laypersons” (p. 331). Or finally, in a pithy formulation which, at some unconscious level, must have influenced my own: “Explanations are not only *of* something; they are also always *for* someone” (p. 332). There are aspects of their argument with which I disagree; for example, I believe they give too much weight to a Rortian emphasis on solidarity

as the grounds for justification of claims, which collapses any distinction between inquiry and mere rhetoric, and I find that they give too little weight to the subject-matter inquiry of teachers. However, general, their article is a valuable complement to the argument that I have pursued here. In particular, their careful reading of Dewey provides a context for the passage that I quoted above. While they are willing to offer mild rebukes to Dewey (e.g., for his “incautious remarks about ‘psychologizing’ subject matter”, p. 328), they argue the interpretation I offered represents a misunderstanding of Dewey’s position when taken as a whole. I am inclined to agree.

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