

## **The Portfolio: In Support of a New Scholarship of Assessment for Professional Learning**

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*ABSTRACT: This chapter explores the possibilities for a new Scholarship of Assessment promoted by faculty of higher education who investigate student learning and document it through a reflective portfolio process. Taking a cue from the recent incessant injunctions for greater faculty engagement in the assessment of student learning outcomes and the suggestion of Pat Hutchings of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and others calling for a new Scholarship of Assessment, this chapter examines the possibilities of initiating a program of formative assessment in support of the education of students of a range of professions, including: teacher educators, social workers, health professionals, etc. Building on their prior work fostering a Scholarship of Teaching project with faculty of University College Cork, Ireland, as well as their experiences as editor and chapter author for the 2010 publication of the Handbook of Reflection and Reflective Inquiry: Mapping a Way of Knowing in Professional Inquiry, Lyons and Halton look at a model of formative assessment, especially to examine how students learn over time --over a class, a course or a program, carried out by faculty themselves and documented through a reflective portfolio process. The three sections of the Chapter take up a set of related issues:*

- I. A review of the state of the art of student learning and the assessment of its evidence in higher education today; with some reasons for the current crisis rhetoric;*
- II. The usefulness and potential in this atmosphere for a new Scholarship of Assessment program, similar to the successful Scholarship of Teaching programs of the 1990's; and,*
- III. A report on a pilot research project undertaken by the authors to explore what and how people respond to questions of learning over time, an area little researched, and then identify potential critical research questions centered on the evidence of how and what students do learn over time to be taken up by faculty in support of a Scholarship of Assessment and described and documented through a reflective portfolio or an electronic portfolio process.*

### **Part I**

#### **Assessment in Higher Education: An Historical Review**

At a time of intense calls for answers to the questions, “What do students actually learn in school? How do we know?” there are increasing demands for assessment by faculty of student learning outcomes in higher education. Driven by a business model, education is increasingly cast as a marketable commodity. The theories and practices that are driving this assault are,

some argue, mostly American in origin, “conceived in American business schools and management consulting firms. They are frequently embedded in intensive management systems that make use of information technology (IT) marketed by corporations .... They are then sold to clients such as the UK government and its bureaucracies, including the universities” (Head, 2011, p. 58). But today, some fear, “this alliance between the public and private sector has become a threat to academic freedom in the UK, and a warning to the American academy about its own freedoms” (Head, 2011, p.58).

In the United States emphasis has increasingly riveted on what students have learned in school, especially in college, and demands that faculty address this task of assessing student learning outcomes. But, as Stanley Katz points out, there is a curious omission of needed research: *research is lacking* on what students have learned over time, including across their college years (Katz, 2010, p.18). While there are studies regularly carried out of which courses and how many students have completed, research on what students have actually learned over time in and across programs is critically needed. One difficulty in convincing faculty to engage in assessment is this challenge: “Anyone who believes that educators have a responsibility for critical and holistic self-evaluation of the process of education ought to support the most effective forms of outcome evaluation. That said, the jury is still out on what the most effective existing mechanisms are” (Katz, 2010, p. 18).

This chapter first presents a brief overview of this history and why the intensity of outcomes assessment demands at third level have grown over the last 25 years in the US, Canada and Europe. Then, in contrast to assessments of outcomes, usually considered *summative assessments* of what students have learned for purposes of assigning a final grade, the idea of *formative assessment* is presented: a reflective, exploratory process to uncover how students learn and how learning might be improved to meet students’ needs (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Bloom et al, 1971).

**1980s:** In the US, this history begins with the 1980s school reform movement, triggered by *A Nation at Risk* (1983). That report first raises the issue of assessment in elementary and secondary education because of a concern about the effectiveness of US education to prepare

citizens for challenging global economies. But the objective quickly shifts to teaching, including higher education.

Some institutions take on a unique goal: to assess undergraduate education for the purpose of improving student learning. Since 1973, Alverno College (2000) has focused on judging the individual in action, implemented by reflective commentaries by the students of their own self assessment. Alverno terms this process “student assessment as learning” (Alverno College, 1992, 2009; Mentkowski & Rogers, 1993).

**1980s:** Others begin to focus on teacher assessment to improve teaching. In 1987 in the US a newly formed, teacher-based National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) invites Lee Shulman of Stanford University to develop protocol assessments of teaching, acknowledging that state of the art of assessment could not yet capture the complexity of teaching. Shulman (2011) identifies and tests the idea of a teaching portfolio, one not unlike that of artists, that could come to “represent a dynamic process of teachers documenting the evidence of their work and growth, gathered and authored by them through careful reflection, shared with colleagues and students, and presented for public discussion and debate about their conceptions of good teaching and its practices” (Lyons, 1998, p. vii).

**1990s:** In the US, Ernest Boyer’s acclaimed 1990 book, *Scholarship Reconsidered*, awakens interest in new forms of scholarly activities. “We urgently need today a more inclusive view of what it means to be a scholar—a recognition that knowledge is acquired through research, through synthesis, through practice, and through teaching” (Boyer, 1990, pp. 24-5). Boyer’s work launches the highly successful Scholarship of Teaching movement. Boyer’s work provides a conceptual framework for national reviews of higher education.

**1990s:** Teachers begin to engage in investigations of their own teaching and their students’ learning. Simultaneously, these practitioners document this work through a reflective portfolio process. Lee Shulman, a key proponent of the Scholarship of Teaching and an experimenter of the uses of a portfolio, cogently advances the arguments. The idea gains extensive international attention, interest and practitioners (See Shulman, 1998a; Hutchings, 1998).

In response to one question of concern: *How do we know what students know and have learned from a class or program of study? How can we find out?* Faculty begin several important assessment projects largely to refine their understanding of their own teaching and improve student learning. Documentation through a reflective portfolio process becomes a valued approach throughout the US and Europe (Hutchings, 1998; Shulman, 1998. See also Lyons, 1998; and Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey, & Russell, 2004).

In Europe, the 1999 Bologna Accords of 47 countries creates the European Higher Education Area. Discussions focus attention of its members on commitment to making academic degree standards more comparable in Europe.

**2000s:** Yet, there remains a widespread belief that assessment of student learning, how and what students learn, hasn't been fully internalized by faculty. In the US, former Harvard President, Derek Bok, (Bok, 2006), finds college students lack critical thinking skills and the ability to make sound judgments beyond a naive epistemology, that is, an understanding of what knowing and knowledge are and how we know: "Many seniors graduate without being able to write well. Many cannot reason clearly or perform competently in analyzing complex, nontechnical problems...." (Bok, 2006, p. 8).

As Katz observes: "We ought to be up to the task of figuring out what it is that our students know by the end of four years at college that they did not know at the beginning" (Katz, 2010, p. 16). But such research into teaching and learning must be supported by institutions and in tenure decisions to be legitimate.

**2000s:** In the US, the Bush administration initiates the "*No Child Left Behind*" law (2002), addressing K-12 education with a major emphasis on evidence-based accountability. Testing of student performance is called for with heavy penalties for schools and teachers who fail to meet standards, such as losing a teaching position.

**2008s:** Margaret Spellings, Bush appointed US Secretary of Education, continues pressing for assessment in higher education, asking "Does college matter?" How does the product perform? *How do we know? How can we find out?* Colleges do little to measure what students learn, so doubt lurks. Under Spellings, focus of attention falls on the process of accreditation of higher

education and results in the Higher Education Act of 2008. It brings new rules and reporting obligations for higher education and accreditation. Judith Eaton, president of the Council of Higher Education, argues accreditation “is being transformed from a valued private-sector process—over which the federal government historically has exercised limited control—to a process that is subject to more and more federal involvement. The implications of this...can include the erosion of academic freedom and the loss of appropriate authority and responsibility for key decisions that have defined the faculty role for centuries....” (Eaton, 2010, p. 21).

**2008s:** In a study of higher education policy and the knowledge economy, Madgett and Blanger report on the commercialization of higher education policies in Canada and the United Kingdom, including the shifting of publicly funded research towards market oriented research objectives, resulting in a greater employment of performance and management structures similar to those employed in business and to quality measurements to allocate funding (Madgett & Blanger, 2008, p. 1).

**2008s:** In the US, the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) surveys some 1,500 colleges---all accredited, undergraduate, degree-granting two and four year public, private, for profit institutions—about assessments underway. The survey reveals: “Most institutions have identified a common set of outcomes for all students, most use a combination of institution-level and program-level assessments: the most common use of assessment data is for accreditation; gaining faculty involvement and support remains a major challenge—with campuses wanting more assessment expertise, resources and tools” (Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009, p.3).

Outside assessors become an immediate growing phenomenon in higher education. Increasingly these for-profit organizations seek to “assist” faculty with student assessment, summarizing, for example, assessment tracking across programs and college. These include: TracDat, Blackboard, EduMetry, for data management. Collegiate Learning Assessments (CLA) considers devising individual student assessment prototypes (Hutchings. 2009, p. 26).

**2010s:** A growing insistence on evidence-based assessment heats up in Europe as well. While Europe has been more engaged in national and cross-national assessments, only recently has the US begun to align itself with them. President Obama initiates the *Race to the Top* program of

competition for major funding for measuring K-12 learning and also initiates a substantial, 1.2 million dollar funding for promoting measuring higher education student learning cross-nationally and globally, and launches the Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes project (OECD, 2010).

**2010s:** Collegiate Learning Assessments (CLA) initiates a new program, “outcomes” assessment of individual student learning for inter and cross-institutional assessment, with an ever widening set of colleges, prompting the question: *Who should assess student learning at third level?* (CLA, 2010).

**2011s:** Simon Head, of Oxford and New York Universities, suggests a grim picture of British Universities. They have already lost tenure. “British universities, Oxford and Cambridge included, are under siege from a system of state control that is undermining ...their world-wide reputation: that is their scholarship.” The problem goes back to the Thatcher years with its policies strengthening the Britain’s performance in the global marketplace. Mr. Head sees “the system has therefore markedly shifted the balance of power in British universities from academy to managers. As one young professor commented; the bureaucratization of scholarship ‘is simply spirit-crushing’” (Head, 2011, pp .61-64).

In Ireland, a managerial approach is taken up by most universities with the similar approaches to assessing their effectiveness (Hunt, 2010). A national financial crisis exacerbates the situation of Irish universities with increased cuts in budgets.

**2011s:** In America, public higher education unlike the UK is not the responsibility of a central government but of individual states. However, American universities suffer their own crises. Peter Brooks of Princeton University comments on the crisis rhetoric: “If crisis there is, it surely has something to do with the larger crisis in American society: the increasing gap between haves and have-nots, the retreat from any commitment to economic fairness, the sense that the system is rigged to benefit a tarnished elite that no longer justifies its existence” (Brooks, 2011 p.10). Brooks finds Martha Nussbaum’s book, *Not for Profit*, one of the few clear-headed responses to the higher education situation. Nussbaum sees that, in the US and abroad, thinking about the aims of education has gone disturbingly awry. “Anxiously focused on national economic growth, we increasingly treat education as though its primary goal were to teach students to be

economically productive rather than to think critically and become knowledgeable and empathic citizens. This shortsighted focus ...has eroded our ability to criticize authority, reduced our sympathy with the marginalized and different, and damaged our competence to deal with complex global problems” (Nussbaum, 2010).

**2010s:** In their article, “Closing the Assessment Loop,” authors Banta and Blaich (2011, p. 22) report a disturbing paradox: even though there can be strong campus engagement with a process of assessment there are but *few* instances of actual uses of the results, or any change in practices.

**2010s:** In his chapter, “The Uses of Evidence for Educational Policymaking” Alexander Wiseman asks, why is evidence-based educational policy *a global phenomenon*? Evidence-based usually means not based on intuition or belief, but on assessments of what works, using empirical, quantitatively based, randomized trial methodologies. Wiseman suggests, what works or can be called “best practices” and “often focuses only on what works in specific situations or with unique communities”. But frequently this approach does not address what may prevent another community from having these exact features.

Although evidence-based practices originated in medical research, many argue that schools and student learning cannot be evidence-based in the same way as the natural sciences. Yet the use of evidence-based policies are *the most frequently reported method* used by politicians and policy-makers. “But frequency of reporting does not necessarily mean that this is actually the method being used to make decisions about education and policy....often it has as much to do with legitimacy seeking as it does the actual evidence policymakers are provided.” (Wiseman, 2010, p. 2).

### **Summary Part 1: The Arguments & Emerging Issues:**

Embedded in this history are several important questions that need to be identified as well as a caution on how to proceed. George Kuh points to some problematic aspects of current systems. *A common reporting system has three main purposes: improvement of student achievement, transparency of information costs, financial aid, student performance, and accountability* providing policy makers with information about performance, etc. While these goals of transparency are important, it is also necessary to realize “data can always be misused and misinterpreted” (Kuh, 2007, p. 32). The challenge is significant.

**Formative and Summative Assessments:** Central to this discussion of assessment is consideration of the differences between formative and summative assessments. Assessments that come at the end of a course, a program, or even an organization's action are usually referred to as summative. These are usually one-time grades given to make an assessment of how well someone or something is doing. They offer no opportunity for correction or a second try. They are usually taken by policy makers to be measures of the quality of education. They do not, however, address causality, that is, why some phenomenon is occurring or will occur again. Critical questions of contexts, circumstances or unexpected changes are not addressed.

Formative assessments have a different purpose. They provide evidence from exams, portfolios, homework, internships, that are useful to student and teacher for seeing how things are going, what might need to be adjusted or changed. These assessments are used for purposes of *understanding*. They are rarely presented to policy makers. Formative assessments provide the key to deepening understanding of the how and what of student learning and meaning, especially over time.

**The Questions:** Other questions identified in the historical review are:

- *What are the purposes of higher education: jobs vs. liberal learning?*
- *What kind of knowledge should students be acquiring?*
- *How should this learning be assessed?*
- *What purposes are being served by assessment: Accountability/credentialing vs. advancing student learning?*
- *Who should assess student learning? Outside assessors or faculty themselves? How?*

There emerges at least one issue, compelling in its being identified again and again as a needed body of research.

- *What do students learn over time, over the course of a class, a course, a program? How can we find out?*



## Part II

### The Possibilities of a New Scholarship of Assessment:

**Introduction: A Scholarship of Teaching Foreshadows a Scholarship of Assessment:** A review of the phenomenal success of the Scholarship of Teaching project of the 1990s may reveal how it might foreshadow a Scholarship of Assessment. The Scholarship of Teaching projects had many contributors: foremost was Ernest Boyer and his provocative conceptualization of a new vision of the work of college professors. In his book, *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Boyer argued against the tired old formulation of teaching vs. research debate. He asked: “Is it possible to define the work of faculty in ways that reflect more realistically the full range of academic and civic mandates... and give the familiar and honorable term “scholarship” a broader and more capacious meaning...? For Boyer, scholarship means engaging in research. But he also saw that it “means stepping back from one’s investigation, looking for connections, building bridges between theory and practice, and communicating one’s knowledge effectively to students. Specifically Boyer concluded that the work of the professoriate might be thought of “as having four separate, yet overlapping functions: the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application and the scholarship of teaching” (Boyer, 1990, p. 16).

It was this innovative conceptualization of teaching as a scholarly activity which seemed to capture the imagination of college teachers. Boyer’s work confirmed what higher education faculty knew: teaching is a scholarly activity. To communicate to fresh new minds –or even tired ones--a body of knowledge had its own unique challenges: it demanded investigation and experimentation. As Shulman stated: “Indeed my argument is that every course is inherently an investigation, an experiment, a journey motivated by purpose and beset with uncertainty. A course, therefore, in its design, enactment and analysis, is much more an act of inquiry and invention as any other activity more traditionally called “research” or the scholarship of discovery” (Shulman, 1998a, p. 5).

The scholarship of teaching was also given life by the idea that one way to capture teaching was through a reflective portfolio process, created, documented and made open to the public by faculty themselves. Reformers recognized early that there would never be any lasting reform unless competent and caring teachers were at its center. But how would such teachers be

identified? Or certified? Portfolios emerged as a more possible medium. In a portfolio a teacher could gather entries of the evidence of their teaching: a syllabus, student work, videos of classes special projects and with reflections could identify their teaching philosophy and other valued practices. Shulman argues that portfolio-making is far from a casual activity. It is, he claims, a theoretical act:

It is important to keep in mind that the portfolio is a broad metaphor that comes alive as you begin to formulate the theoretical orientation to teaching that is more valuable to you...Your theory of teaching will determine a reasonable portfolio entry. What is worth documenting, worth reflecting on what is deemed to be portfolio worthy is a theoretical act (Shulman, 1998b, pp. 24-25)?

In colleges and universities all over the United States, Canada and world-wide, Scholarship of Teaching programs proliferated, largely supported by the American Association of Higher Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning (Becker & Andrews, 2004).

Here, to provide a sense of its features and dynamics at work, Nona Lyons describes the Scholarship of Teaching project of the University College Cork (UCC) Ireland, and relates what UCC faculty say they learned from participating in it:

The UCC Scholarship of Teaching Project began in 2001 with the challenge to faculty from UCC's president, Gerald Wrixon, to apply for a new award for "Excellence in Teaching at UCC." Faculty were to apply by documenting and presenting evidence of their teaching through the creation of a teaching portfolio. Because of my research and my ten years' previous experience coaching teachers through a portfolio process (Lyons, 1998), I was invited as a Visiting Research Scholar to introduce faculty to the portfolio process. I agreed and in May 2001, I sketched out three seminars, each with a broad purpose: to introduce the idea of the reflective portfolio process as a mode of inquiry into teaching and learning and a means to document it; to identify portfolio entries as consisting of *evidence, artifacts, and critical reflections* on teaching and student learning; and, to review how portfolio evidence would/could be assessed.

The conceptual framework for the project, the idea of advancing a scholarship of teaching at third level was a powerful starting place and became the conceptual context of the UCC project. It ushered in a new institutional culture, as it initiated a conversation at UCC about teaching and learning across faculties and disciplines. In the first year, 40 faculty members made presentations of potential portfolio entries and their reflections on their teaching and student learning to an audience of some 250 attendees at weekly seminars which were continued the following fall. In the spring of 2002, twenty three faculty members submitted reflective portfolios in which they documented their teaching and student learning for the President's Award for Excellence in Teaching. Five members of the faculty won the award. These conversations and presentations are still carried on today, as is portfolio development. In addition, UCC initiated a sophisticated set of programs of study for faculty to procure a certificate, or diploma or a Master of Arts in teaching and learning at third level. Individual departments launched portfolio projects to document student learning: for example, in the Social Work program a new course for social work supervisors and an innovative MA in Research by Portfolio, included portfolio processes for assessment and learning (Halton & Lyons, 2007).

**What Is Learned?** What do the faculty say they learned from engaging in these experiences? Results of an interview study carried out in 2002 with 20 of the 23 faculty members who in 2002 submitted teaching portfolios reveal several important observations. While most faculty commented that portfolio making was very hard work, more time consuming than they ever realized it might be, most acknowledge that the reflective process was critically important. The reflections, especially of the overall set of portfolio entries, gave them new knowledge. This seemed to happen through an emerging consciousness that had at least five elements and led to change (Lyons, 2002):

1. *Becoming more consciously aware of teaching practices through critical reflection—asking “What am I doing? Why?”*
2. *Making goals, concepts, and organizing ideas of learning more explicit to oneself and one's students. Asking, “Does this course fit together? How?”*

3. *Becoming aware of students' needs as learners, coming to know what they know and understand of the concepts and content under study, asking:* "What do students know and understand? How can I find out?"
4. *Interrogating practice to uncover patterns. Asking: What needs to change in one's practice; what needs continuing investigation?*
5. *Changing one's practice; Asking, "How can I make this course better?"*

This sample of portfolio users reveals that their engagement in a reflective portfolio process leads them to new hypotheses about their own teaching practices and about what their students are learning from them. Another aspect of this portfolio process is that others can read and review these portfolios. They have become public and open to scrutiny by others. The portfolio uniquely reveals both elements of formative and summative data and insights.

What made this program successful? Faculty identify several features: the continuing, on-going conversations in seminars across disciplines which they particularly found interesting and useful; the concrete examples of teaching issues and the evidence of student learning presented by faculty; and, the opportunity to take on systematic study of teaching and learning provided in new courses offered at the university as well as in the on-going seminars.

**Contributions to a Scholarship of Assessment:** There exists today, then, through the experiences of participants in Scholarship of Teaching projects, a body of knowledge and experiences at many institutions that can be drawn on to promote a new scholarship of assessment (Shulman, 2011). And assessment is not a new idea. It is important to remember that assessment is a key issue for any portfolio maker as they take up the questions of what students learn in their classes and how they know, that is, what evidence they cite. These experiences and evidence rooted inquiries are the link between the achievements of a Scholarship of Teaching and ones to come from a Scholarship of Assessment—a body of new inquiries by faculty in needed assessments of student learning.

Given the incomplete state of our current knowledge and available research of how and of what students learn and how it is to be measured, it may be most appropriate, as several suggest, to start with formative assessments carried out by faculty themselves. It is the brief of this chapter similarly to promote a program of formative assessment. Faculty must be involved, purposes

identified; projects defined and undertaken, reported on, written-up, published, exchanged and discussed.

### Part III

#### **Initiating a Scholarship of Assessment Project: Uncovering student learning over time, beginning with a Pilot Project**

This section outlines several features useful for developing a Scholarship of Assessment: a rationale with its organizing questions; a discussion of the role of teachers; and, the value of a pilot study and its sometimes unexpected results:

**Rationale: A program of formative assessment.** Organizing Questions: How do we know what students know and have learned? Stanley Katz provides a rationale for this work, especially for uncovering what students have learned over time in various contexts. He frames a critical question:

I have for some time advocated institutional acceptance of formative outcome assessments, since I believe that undergraduate education ought to amount to more than an accumulation of work in separate courses—it consists of the whole mosaic of learning experiences over the years of college enrollment: if that is true, *then we need to know what students have learned from the entire range of their learning experiences.* Simply put, we should try to learn what the students know they did not know when they entered college—and what they can do intellectually that they could not do when they completed high school (Katz, 2010, p. 20).

Katz's questions provide a robust set of ideas offering provocative approaches to several assessment projects.

**The necessity of the role of the teacher.** It is useful to recall that when Donald Schon first heard of the idea of a Scholarship of Teaching he saw that if Boyer's idea was to be taken seriously it must “produce knowledge that is testably valid, and [such] claims...must lend themselves to intellectual debate within academic communities of inquiry” (Schon, 1995, p. 27). Schon saw too, that the new scholarship of teaching implied a kind of action research, planned

and conducted *by faculty themselves*, not by some outside, objective observer of standard scientific inquiry.

It is also interesting to note that some 60 years earlier John Dewey had made a strikingly similar argument. Dewey insisted that the "...problems which require scientific treatments arise in actual relationships with students...[thus] it is impossible to see how there can be an adequate subject matter to investigate, unless there is active participation on the part of those directly engaged in teaching." (Dewey, 1929, p. 25). Teachers, Dewey believed, need to be part of, if not leaders of assessment.

**The Pilot Project: Exploring Learning Over Time:** One approach to getting started with a scholarship of assessment is to conduct a pilot project to test the feasibility of a larger enterprise. It can open a project to new possibilities as well as wrong turns (Maxwell, 2005). A pilot research project was initiated by the authors of this chapter to explore just how well individuals would respond to the question: What do people learn over time? The following outlines the original invitation to participate in the pilot to potential participants (Lyons& Halton, 2010-2011).

#### **Memo to: Interested parties to the "Learning Over Time Inquiry" Project**

Dear Friends: I write to tell you of a new project I am just undertaking with my colleague Carmel Halton of University College Cork *AND* to invite you to participate in it. I enclose: #1 Project Description; and, #2 the Activity I hope you will engage in.

**#1: Project Description: Learning Over Time inquiry** is a research project, specifically the design phase of a research project. Our question is: *What do people learn overtime?* Our interest in this is being provoked by the current assessment concern in higher education, spurred by the need to answer such questions as: What do students learn over their courses of study? What is learned over the college years? But many also want to know: What is learned over a class, or a course of study or over a whole program of study? What competencies do students acquire, especially for critical thinking, reflection and ethical understanding? It is generally agreed that there is little existing research on the subject.

**#2: Project Activity of the Pilot Study:** The task of the pilot study is to identify a Learning Over Time experience of one's own:

1. Identify something you know you have learned over time, something you did not know before. This could be a single or on-going event.
2. Describe the event with adequate detail.
3. Identify what you learned and when. Did the learning change over time? How would you characterize the process?
4. What would you say most fostered, promoted this learning?
5. How do you know what you learned and now know? What evidence do you use to confirm this?
6. Write-up this experience similar to an entry for a portfolio. Include a reflection on: what difference did this learning make to your work?

**What is learned?** Ten people participated in the pilot study. These respondents were solicited from colleagues or students of the authors, most are connected to teaching at several levels. Results revealed:

- all participants could easily offer examples of learning something over time;
- most were eager to do so and seemed intrigued with the question;
- most experiences were considered positive by their authors; but not all.

Examples offered represented both recent experiences and ones taking place over long periods of time—some 20 or more years, from childhood through adulthood. For example, one person talked of recently learning how to paint and re-discovering how important it was to be able to practice a new skill, to have the chance to learn overtime. Another teacher commented on her discovery of interviewing students, of asking them about what sense they made of their own learning and how surprised she could always be by what students reported. One person reported on how it was his mother who taught him to question which became a lifelong habit. And another person remembered the significance of learning how to phrase inquiry questions in order to teach teachers how to construct state-wide exam questions. Finally, a teacher educator reviewed long strands of her own learning in teaching elementary teachers to teach; and, a college junior talked of achieving learning how to manage her time to learn. These vignettes revealed powerful experiences that shaped lives, careers, and these individuals. Here are two examples, excerpts of full stories.

## PROJECT: LEARNING OVER TIME: TWO EXAMPLES

### # 1: Director of the Teacher Institute, a metropolitan school district

Project Activity: As we spoke about learning over time, the learning that seemed to apply is more a deeply personal and philosophical awareness rather than content knowledge, although, when you asked the question, my mind went to more specific events related to the field of history. However, as we talked I shifted to the power of realization that the learner is a meaning-making creature. I remember an intervention, years ago, through the social studies panel when the instructor had us reading and discussing Piaget. I must confess that up to that point in my career, I probably proceeded on the “empty vessel” theory of the student as a learner waiting for the teacher to pour in all that new knowledge. I should add that Piaget and developmental psychology were new to me, and that learning changed how I thought about teaching and about relationships in general. The instructor asked us, members of the panel, to devise our own research to test out how children might experience a topic differently at different stages of development, even within the same chronologically grouped class. The way I chose to carry out this project was to ask students to write what a movie or a picture or some other learning activity was about as a prompt after a viewing or participating. The results were quite stunning to me – they all wrote different things - and gave me insight into the multiple ways a student in a class could experience the most carefully planned lesson.

1. If 25 young people could possibly have 25 different ways of taking in new learning, what did this mean for me as the teacher? How do people learn new things? What accounts for the differences? Enter cognitive dissonance. I’m not sure I was able to answer that satisfactorily, but the change it did effect in me was to make classes more interactive; to develop ways to hear from students, to listen to them, to engage in conversation especially when helping individuals decide on a research question. I found it fascinating to listen to their interpretation of an historical event, to find out what interested them enough to spend time probing it, for example, the seventh grader who wanted to learn more about the relationship between Churchill and Roosevelt in a study of World War II. My awareness of the active mind of the student at work expanded and deepened, replacing the “empty vessel” assumption.
2. What did I learn? I’ll change that to what I am still learning about all of this. At the time, I was more focused on the stages of cognitive development described by Piaget. That was a start. That awareness has stayed with me over time. Some questions it has raised: what leads to different senses of the world? Psychology and brain chemistry; life experiences, some combination? Makes the study of biography fascinating.
3. The introduction of theories of development was the deciding factor.
4. How do I know that I know this: that’s a very difficult one to answer. It is intuitive at this point and it has guided me in how I think about people. There is a certainty in it that



feels solid. I also know that when I stray from this habit of mind, I can easily slip into becoming intolerant which is happening a lot these days. So, I have to remind myself of the wisdom available in trying to understand how we are all different.

## **# 2: Director of Social Work Practice**

I have been working for over 20 years as a lecturer and social work educator at the School of Applied Social Studies. In 1999, I was given tenure as a full time lecturer and Director of Social Work Practice. I came to teaching at the University directly from social work practice, in hospital based social work and later in probation. I have designed courses for social work practitioners.

### **My Learning History**

A few years ago, in preparing an autobiographical account of my own history of learning as part of the construction of my teaching portfolio, I revisited and brought to consciousness, recollections of my early education in a small local "Montessori" school. I now know this educational experience has had an enduring effect on me and on my approach to learning as a lifelong endeavor. Montessori education is learner centered and it provides a structured, experiential learning opportunity for the learner. The learning environment prizes the relational aspect of learning. Learning is central and both the student and the teacher are engaged in a shared endeavor. In contrast, my experience of education at second level was a more traditional, didactic educational experience. There I remember sitting in classrooms for hours daydreaming, inattentive and disinterested, becoming progressively more disengaged from learning. At Montessori school, I remembered my fascination with all things new and different. This fascination/curiosity was represented at home and at school by continuous questioning. In Montessori, questions were invited, welcomed and responded to with enthusiasm. However, in secondary school I began to experience my questioning ways very negatively and this was clearly represented in my report card from school when I was 14 years old, where a teacher commented '*You ask too many questions in class*'. I remember becoming self conscious in class because of this comment. I have a clear memory of being silenced.

On reflection, this experience transformed me as an adolescent learner. Questioning, my primary route to understanding had become unsafe. I became a learner in the sole pursuit of knowledge for receiving grades and external recognition. While I was a successful student, I had lost my enthusiasm for learning. I became what I have now come to understand as a 'receiver of knowledge'.

On entering university to study Social Work, I was confronted daily in class and in my social work practice with the big issues of life and living e.g. power, sexual abuse, poverty, and disadvantage. While encouraged in lectures to think critically and to engage actively in the learning process, I found

it difficult. I had lost trust in the learning process.

As part of my four year professional social work education and training I was required to undertake four practice placements in different agencies. It was in practicing social work on placement (doing the work) and examining that practice systematically, that I learned the skills of social work and began the work of constructing myself as a professional practitioner. It was in the **‘doing’**, **‘reviewing’** and **‘revising’** that I began to feel a real sense of what ‘being’ a professional social worker felt like.

On reflection, I have learned from an early negative learning experience to reconfigure this experience in a positive way. My role as an educator is to facilitate both the learning process and outcome. Investigating what students come to know and understand, as well as how this learning has been facilitated, is key to my own work and understanding.

### **What Else Is Learned from the Pilot Project?**

#### **Unexpected Results—A Hypothesis: Critical Characteristics of Learning Over Time Suggested**

The experiences people report in the pilot study of learning over time also suggest a critical characteristic: that is, *a sense of how the process works: by conscious and continuing layering of experience*. Learning experiences that capture the imagination of an individual are likely to be added to over time. The individual is conscious of the process and aware of their discovery, of something new about it; they can acknowledge it as important to them—in both their personal and professional lives; and seem to value the continued learning. Clearly the process creates a habit of mind. Dewey might call it a habit of reflective inquiry or of method (Dewey, 1916, 1944, pp. 173-179). The practice is initiated by some puzzle—such as, how to paint; or teach--and elaborated over time through continuing exploration and even “puzzlings over,” then new elements are revealed, new evidence added. The hypothesis of how the process of learning over time takes place is clarified: *how deliberate thought continues a process of evidence gathering as consciousness expands* (Lyons & Halton, 2010-2011). Of course, at least one puzzle remains: What is the original trigger of such processes? **How should we study and document learning over time of our students?**

**Questions Yet to be Explored in a Scholarship of Assessment:** There are a plethora of questions to be explored in trying to understand learning of students in any setting for any

segment of time. The foundational question is: What have students learned? And how do we know? How can we find out? By what methods? To what purpose?

### **Resources**

#### **Resources for a Scholarship of Assessment: ePortfolios and Assessment Communities:**

Today there are new technologies that offer new approaches to portfolio making. None is more attractive than the ePortfolio. Electronic technologies have been exploding and are likely today to be familiar at most colleges and universities as they are to most students. Electronic portfolios are especially attractive as assessments. Like the paper portfolio, ePortfolios contain samples of student work along with the important reflection. In teaching portfolios there is usually a statement of a student's teaching philosophy along with a selected set of entries about teaching or student learning occurring over time. A reflection usually accompanies each entry as well as one final summarizing reflection. The electronic portfolio is of course available for sharing with other students as well as faculty. This work is easily made public and open to scrutiny. Such portfolios are also available to potential employers as well.

It is clear that portfolios documenting the work of formative assessment by faculty of their students' achievements would be valuable documents not only for assessment but also for planning teaching programs. In their helpful article, authors Banta et al (2009, p. 9) report on a set of questions posed by Virginia Tech to consider if planning to adopt an ePortfolio approach:

- When and from where will student work be collected?
- Are there specific assignments that correspond to specific goals (i.e. learning outcomes)?
- Is there a grading rubric for this assignments that might help standardize grading?
- Who will evaluate student ePortfolios? Will there be external evaluators?
- Which faculty must adopt ePortfolios to ensure needed student data?
- Is there a need to have departmental consensus before the goals of the ePortfolio project can be enacted? How should that be done?

**Assessment Communities:** One other promising development is the idea of assessment communities. Assessment communities are gatherings of faculty who are engaged in some common enterprise like assessing ePortfolios. They gather to consider how student work is to be

assessed. Members analyze and score samples of student work, usually at an interactive computer site. They work to analyze and score student work with a high degree of agreement. Banta et al report, the inspiration of assessment communities comes from Lave and Wegner's (1991) work on situated learning, "of how learning occurs not as a process of acquiring facts but as a gradual induction into a community of practitioners where novices work alongside "adepts—observing their practice, learning the skills in a gradual progression from simple to complex, and internalizing the language and values of the profession" (Banta et al, 2009, p.18).

As Banta and her colleagues assert, when assessment is viewed as a professional practice—i.e.—as in a scholarship of assessment, "several shifts occur in the way we think about it...practitioners require learning and practice and will continue to develop expertise throughout a career. Second, assessment is central to the practice of teaching...and third, assessment is not a technical process that can be outsourced to minimally trained technicians; high levels of professional education and expertise are required" (Banta et al, 2009, p.18).

**Conclusion:** This chapter has put forward an argument for faculty of higher education to take up a program of exploration into how and what students in their programs are learning, especially over and across time. Some promising approaches and resources— ePortfolios and assessment communities-- are suggested and help to consider it in a new light: that is, for making assessment a scholarly act essential to teaching and learning.

***The Challenge:** How can we capture such learning over time of our students? Can we uncover how it happens for them? In what robust ways can we move assessment beyond the narrow conception of outcomes, of percentages, to capture the richness of human learning contributing to a truly vibrant, meaningful, and needed scholarship of assessment for teaching and learning?*

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#### Notes

There exist a large body of work on assessment and its rubrics. See Alverno College on programs; see National Research Council, 2008 on review of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards on the assessment of its several models of teacher assessments; Lyons 2010 on assessment of reflective teaching portfolios; and Pamela Moss et al on validity 2004, 2006.