

An institutional perspective on the scholarship of teaching and learning

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Abstract: *The premise that the development of tertiary teachers can be enhanced if they engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL) increasingly underpins associated policies and programmes. This is reflected in the increased*

- *attention academic staff developers give to SOTL in the agenda for their work,*
- *place that SOTL has in criteria for teaching excellence awards, professional accreditation schemes and promotion policies,*
- *national and institutional funding schemes to support such scholarship, and*
- *opportunities for dissemination of SOTL through conferences and publications.*

An obvious outcome has been a rapid increase in related publications. At the same time, concerns have been raised about aspects of this scholarship. While the increase is heartening, there is concern that it still originates from a relatively limited number of strongly committed tertiary teachers: Parker refers to “the need to move beyond the cogniscenti” (Parker, 2004). Limitations in dissemination and actual use at institutional and sector-wide levels are also highlighted (e.g. Chalmers, 2003; Haigh, 2004; Parker, 2004). These concerns have prompted my investigation of SOTL within my own institution. In addition to analysing features of the scholarship undertaken by staff during the 2000 – 2004 period, I am investigating the scholars ‘motives’ for their scholarship, conditions that have helped or hindered their scholarship, the place of SOTL in their overall scholarship agenda, personal and institutional impact, and continuing scholarship. In this report, I review relevant literature and present the main features of the project, including topics, questions and data-gathering methods.

Keywords: *scholarship, teaching, institutional initiatives*

The Context

This paper and the research project that it foreshadows have been prompted by several factors. In my previous role as the Director of the Teaching and Learning Development Unit (TLDU) at the University of Waikato, I had reviewed the record of staff research outputs over the previous 5 years and was both reassured and somewhat surprised by the number of conference papers and journal articles that represented evidence of staff engagement in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL). Also surprising was the diversity of staff involved which was evident in their discipline backgrounds, career status (early to late academic career) and the extent to which they had been exposed to the concept of SOTL and associated literature through use of TLDU services. In an effort to promote the scholarship of teaching and learning, I have publicized these research outputs in TLDU publications, offered a workshop on SOTL as a core component of an ‘Introduction to Teaching’ series of workshops, provided support for staff who are engaged in SOTL (including in the context of a Postgraduate

Certificate in Tertiary Teaching programme), advocated inclusion of SOTL-related criteria in 'teaching excellence' awards and generally endeavoured to heighten the profile of SOTL (Haigh, 2000). While the quantity and quality of SOTL was encouraging, I recognized the truth in Parker's observation that it still originates from a relatively limited number of strongly committed tertiary teachers and that there is a need to "move beyond the cogniscenti" (Parker, 2004, p.6) and to improve dissemination (Chalmers, 2003, Haigh, 2004). To achieve these goals, I decided that it would be helpful to undertake in-depth investigation of existing SOTL within the university. This would include a detailed analysis of the products of that scholarship and an investigation of a range of other factors associated with the decisions that staff were making in relation to their engagement in SOTL. An initial investigation of the SOTL literature suggested that while others may have made similar inquiries, there were few related reports that I could draw on and some of the findings from those investigations might not generalize to the University of Waikato context.

Subsequent to this decision, I was appointed to a new position in the Centre for Educational and Professional Development (CEPD) at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT). A key task associated with the position is – *to develop initiatives that will increase staff knowledge of, and engagement in, scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education.* At the time when this paper is being written, I have yet to take up the position. However, some 'start-up' activities are already underway. They include the establishment of a Working Group which is developing a strategy for initiatives that will encourage and support SOTL at institutional, faculty and individual teacher levels. Clearly, these moves signal a very positive environment. They also mean that the project that I had originally conceived would transfer readily to AUT and serve similar purposes. It would provide an ideal opportunity for me to get to know the AUT scene and guide the working group's planning of future initiatives. An application for project funding from the Government's Teaching and Learning Research Initiative Fund has also been prepared and the possibility of extending the project so that it includes some other New Zealand universities is also being considered. The latter would be beneficial given the Government's recent establishment of a Teaching Matters Forum (a tertiary education cross-sector group) which has a brief to (a) consult with the rest of the sector on possible specifications for a National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence and (b) obtain views about other national initiatives that might be taken to enhance tertiary teaching. SOTL is obviously one of those initiatives that should be considered. Thus, while my personal change in location has delayed the project, it has also provided additional time for planning the investigation and this paper is a report on those emerging plans.

The Literature

There is an extensive literature on aspects of SOTL, in addition to the literature that is a product of SOTL. Major strands in the former include the concept of a scholarship of teaching and learning, purposes and benefits associated with SOTL, possible discipline-related differences in such scholarship, methods for engaging in SOTL, and institutional strategies for enhancing SOTL. As noted, there is more limited literature that focuses on the experiences and views of teachers who choose to engage in SOTL.

The on-going attention to the concept of SOTL is understandable given critiques of Ernest Boyer's original statements about the scholarship of teaching (Boyer, 1990). For example,

Boyer's comments on the scholarship of teaching are eloquent but they are not analytical. They do not spell out exactly what constitutes the 'scholarship of teaching' (Martin et al, 1998)

Helpful reviews of current conceptions of SOTL and distinctions between excellent teaching, expert teaching, scholarly teaching and scholarship of teaching are provided by Healey (2003) and Trigwell and Shale (2004). Trigwell and Shale present their own model of the components of teaching that may be associated with these various distinctions and contend that what ultimately distinguishes teachers' engagement in scholarship of teaching is a concern to "make public the way in which they have made learning possible" (p531).

The scholarship of teaching is seen to be enacted when the actions and outcomes of a scholarly approach ... are made public for peer scrutiny. (p. 529)

They also emphasize that being made public does not have to mean being published.

A central construct in their model is 'pedagogical resonance' which I interpret as embodying a concern to use pedagogic content knowledge in a way that is thoughtfully attuned to immediate circumstances, including students' thoughts, actions and needs. As Trigwell and Shale emphasize, this requires a student –focussed orientation to teaching and an appreciation that learning will not eventuate unless both teacher and student are mutually aware of themselves as necessarily being in a partnership. The latter also means student as well as teacher perspectives must be taken when accounting for ways in which learning has been made possible. These views accord with my own stance.

A number of purposes and benefits for SOTL have been identified. Trigwell and Shale (2004) note three core aims that are commonly identified:

that it should be a means through which the status of teaching may be raised; that it should be a means through which teachers may come to teach more knowledgably, and that it should provide a means through which the quality of teaching may be assessed. (p524).

and add their view that enhancement of students' experiences of learning must be the 'first order' aim. Numerous other benefits are typically identified in the statements that institutions make to promote SOTL. For example, benefits that the University of Iowa has identified for their institution include:

1. builds new partnerships across campus through a common interest in teaching.
2. increases the level of engagement of faculty, students, and staff
3. enhances the institution's reputation.
4. documents the educational effectiveness of the institution and can change the culture of the institution.
5. contributes to student satisfaction and better student retention.

(Centre for Excellence in Teaching, University of Iowa)

Possible discipline differences have obvious relevance to a consideration of institutional initiatives. On the one hand, some commentators have emphasized that "the scholarship of teaching needs to be developed within the context of the culture of the discipline within which it is applied." (Healey, 2000, p169). Healey argues that this is a pre-requisite because

academics ground their sense of self in an allegiance to a discipline and a perception that there are significant discipline-based differences in what academics do and value. On the other, is the view that “growth in knowledge also comes at the borders of disciplinary imagination, and the scholarship of teaching and learning is no exception.... It is in this borderland that scholars from different disciplinary cultures come to trade their wares – insights, idea and findings – even though the meanings and methods behind them may vary considerably among producer groups.” (Huber and Morreale, 2002, p1). Institutional initiatives need to both acknowledge discipline differences and their implications for the methods, outcomes and relevance of scholarship and, as Huber and Morreale suggest, also encourage “reading – and raiding – across the fields” and provide “forums for cross-disciplinary conversations”. This consideration of possible discipline-related differences is likely to be extended by Lee Shulman’s recent introduction of the allied concept of ‘signature pedagogies’ which he defines as modes of teaching that have become inextricably linked with preparing people for particular professions (Shulman, 2005).

Literature on institutional initiatives is becoming substantial. Much originates from the US where such initiatives are usually undertaken under the auspices of the Carnegie Foundation for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) which supports a ‘Campus Programme’ designed for institutions that make a public commitment to the scholarship of teaching and learning. Many of the US institutions that are undertaking CASTL-supported activities have associated WWW sites that provide helpful details of their related activities and CASTL maintains an on-going record of developments on campuses which have signed up for the Campus Programme. Clusters of these institutions have also been established to work collaboratively on the development of strategies for enhancing SOTL (e.g. communities of practice to foster the scholarship of teaching and learning; mentoring new scholars of teaching and learning; organizing to foster the scholarship of teaching and learning; supporting scholarly work in learning-centred universities; the scholarship of teaching and learning in a research university). Details of the work underway in these clusters are available at http://www.aahe.org/projects/campus_program/. A helpful precedent for the stock-taking component of this project was undertaken in 2001 by some of the universities participating in the Campus Programme. They completed a ‘Mapping Progress’ review of their institutional support for SOTL and impacts of that support: an exercise that was intended to inform planning of further support by both the universities and CASTL. For an example of a progress report, see http://www.indiana.edu/~sotl/download/mpr_0202.doc .

While not overlaid by a comparable national infrastructure, many institutions in the UK, Australia and New Zealand explicitly endorse SOTL and provide a variety of forms of tangible support. Angelo and Asmar (2004) have developed a framework for comparing the goals, theory and approaches associated with SOTL programmes in Australia, New Zealand and U.S institutions and Andrews (2003) offers an interesting comparison and critique of the versions of SOTL that are evolving in the US and the UK. Again, while there is much to learn from the initiatives that other institutions take, we need to be able to sift out those that can be generalised, and to design others that are tailored to the distinctive features of our own institutions and the wider sector in which they are located.

The literature that concerns methods for engaging in SOTL addresses a range of matters and invariably emphasizes the variety of methods that are inevitable given the diversity of questions addressed and the discipline backgrounds of the scholars. A series of edited case study-based publications by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching provide helpful insights into approaches and methods being used and some of the associated

issues, including ethical (Hutchings, 2000; Huber, 2002 and Hutchings, 2002) Representative of other contributions to this strand of literature is a paper by Nelson (2000) that provides “Selected examples of several of the different genres of SOTL”.

The endorsement of SOTL is by no means uncontested and there are important critiques to consider. Some follow from the competing conceptualisations of SOTL. Others have been raised in relation to such matters as the weight given to engagement in SOTL when set alongside other scholarship that academics engage in, rigour of methods, the standards and status of publications, ethical issues that arise when everyday learning and teaching contexts are the focus of research and the place of SOTL in career decisions (e.g. deAngelis, 2003).

Most of the literature on the experiences and views of teachers who have engaged in SOTL takes the form of anecdotal accounts by these teachers of their own forays into SOTL. Again, a number of these accounts are provided in edited publications of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Hutchings, 2000; Huber, 2002; Hutchings, 2002; Huber, 2004). This literature is helpful because of the richness of the accounts which include views about the challenges as well as the opportunities that they encountered (see http://www.csub.edu/tlc/options/resources/handouts/scholarship_teaching/casestudies.html)

I have uncovered four instances of wider surveys of teachers’ views in relation to engagement in SOTL. Lynch et. al. (2002) gathered the perceptions of 85 teachers of Information and Communication Technology in 29 Australian universities about factors that would influence their decision to engage, or not, in SOTL activities. Factors identified related to their individual motivation towards, and capabilities for, SOTL activities and to elements of their organizations. Interactions between these factors were seen to determine whether a supportive or non-supportive environment existed. The researchers concluded that:

while some exceptions were noted, the participants generally agree that the organizational domain of Australian universities was largely unsupportive of the pursuit of the scholarship of teaching. Similarly, in general, university ICT teachers were not thought to have the backgrounds and capabilities necessary for pursuing the scholarship of teaching, such as familiarity with literature on teaching and learning and skills in educational evaluation. However, ... participants agreed that scholarly activities and innovation in university teaching and learning do take place, largely driven by the intrinsic motivation of individuals.

Career and reward risks that were associated with the pursuit of the scholarship of teaching included reduced time that could be allocated to more highly-valued and extrinsically rewarding activities and the view that being into teaching, rather than serious research, could inhibit career progression.

McKinney et. al. (2003) used an on-line questionnaire to obtain the views of a sample of faculty and administrative/professional staff at Illinois State University in relation to awareness of definitions of SOTL, involvement in SOTL, value and reward for SOTL and other attitudes towards SOTL. The university was a participant in the CASTL Campus Program. Approximately two thirds of respondents has used SOTL to improve learning and teaching, most held favourable attitudes towards SOTL but were neutral or negative about the extent to which SOTL was valued and rewarded on campus and most felt that engaging in SOTL would have a neutral or negative impact on their career. They believed that students could be co-investigators in SOTL work and saw funding as a key means to promote SOTL.

Sample (2004) has presented a preliminary report of a survey of staff who have participated in one of the elements of the CASTL Campus programme – the ‘Visible Knowledge Project’. Over 70 participants from 21 universities are engaged in SOTL projects which involve investigations of the impact of pedagogical and technological innovations on student learning (see <http://crossroads.georgetown.edu/vkp/about/today/>). The survey findings indicated positive results with respect to the motives of participants (increased concern to understand more about student learning), changes to course design and use of technology, awareness of SOTL and actual engagement in SOTL projects and related activities (e.g. public dissemination). The significance of financial support for projects and the continuing presence of institutional ‘roadblocks’ were also highlighted.

A Special Interest Group of the UK Centre for Education in the Built Environment (CEBE) has surveyed the views of the members of its associated academic community about pedagogic research. With academic department as the reference context, questions posed in questionnaires and semi-structured interviews focused on perceptions of potential barriers to research into pedagogy, the culture towards pedagogic research and support or encouragement for such research. Barriers identified included poor teachers and researchers not acknowledging the need for improvement, lack of incentives because positions were secure, number of students and workload, funding, the perception of pedagogical research as being second-rate research, career emphasis on research and an unwillingness to ask for and record feedback on how particular methods/techniques worked for students. Descriptors for the culture ranged from ‘sceptical and low priority’ to ‘islands of interest’ to ‘open and receptive’. Encouragement and support was available in the form of some funding, time, staff development and active teaching and learning groups.

While one might reasonably assume that many of the findings associated with these case studies and surveys could be generalized to New Zealand universities, they also highlight the need to take into account distinctive features of national environments, institutions, departments, disciplines, subjects and professions. Clearly, the planning of initiatives for these different contexts needs to be founded on detailed and accurate information about the existing situation. As yet, such rigorous stock-taking exercises have not been undertaken in New Zealand universities. This is one the primary purposes for the present project.

The Current Project

As noted, while the research project conceptualized here applies to one institution – Auckland University of Technology – it may be extended to some other New Zealand universities. Within AUT, the project will be widely publicized as a component of a broader institutional project intended to encourage and support SOTL. Concurrent with the project, a range of background materials on SOTL, including existing examples of SOTL at AUT, will be assembled on a dedicated WWW site and the concept and case for SOTL will be discussed in a range of forums.

The general aims are:

1. to identify current policies, provisions, activities, products, experiences, views and criteria associated with SOTL at AUT,

2. to plan, in the light of 1, new initiatives intended to promote and support teachers engagement in SOTL,
3. to evaluate the impact of these initiatives, using appropriate criteria.

Research questions associated with these aims include:

What policies, provisions and programmes are in place, or planned, at AUT that explicitly or implicitly indicate a commitment to encourage and support SOTL at institutional/faculty/centre levels?

What is the overall status of SOTL at AUT as manifest in (a) the number and background of staff who are active scholars of teaching and learning, and (b) the number and forms of SOTL activity and product that have been completed, are underway and are planned?

What features and trends are evident in SOTL at AUT, including topics, questions, generic vs discipline focus, methods, dissemination modes, publications?

How much variation is there is in SOTL across Faculties/disciplines/professions? What factors account for variation?

What views and experiences of the active scholars of teaching and learning at AUT account for (a) their decision to engage in such scholarship, (b) the place of SOTL within their research/scholarship agenda, (c) the relative 'ease' with which they have been able to engage in SOTL, (d) decisions made about methods of scholarship and dissemination, (e) perceived outcomes/benefits for teaching and student learning, (f) plans for further SOTL?

What views and experiences of teachers account for their decision to not engage in SOTL?

What data-gathering and analyses are appropriate and efficient when undertaking an institution-wide review of SOTL?

What criteria can be used to evaluate the impact on SOTL initiatives on teaching and student learning?

What is the impact of particular institutional initiatives intended to increase teacher engagement in SOTL?

The main data-gathering activities will include:

1. identify institutional and faculty documents on learning and teaching matters,
2. interview faculty leaders and other relevant centre leaders concerning past, current and/or planned SOTL initiatives/activities,
3. review (a) research outputs in AUT Annual Research Reports and (b) other documents that are provide evidence of SOTL activities and products,
4. gather interview and questionnaire based responses from staff who (do not) engage in SOTL.

Conclusion

At the time of writing this paper, a full proposal for the research is being finalized and a funding application is also being prepared. A successful outcome for the proposal and the application would obviously be an expression of support for the view that scholarship itself should be subject to scholarship.

Preparation of this paper has provided me with the opportunity to wander through a wide tract of literature. In the process, I have found myself frequently returning to the insightful and eloquent writing of Lee Shulman and his following observations have particular relevance to this project.

I believe that in the long run advances in the scholarship of teaching cannot be sustained by the efforts of isolated scholars working alone or in loose networks. Institutions in which these scholars work must develop more formal structures that merge the institution's commitments to both teaching and inquiry. These institutions can then serve as platforms for the work of scholars of teaching, as sanctuaries for their efforts, and as forums for their scholarly exchanges. (Shulman, 2000, p99).

What shall we call those institutions of higher education that take both teaching and inquiry into teaching seriously? Shall we call them "teaching universities" to parallel the concept of teaching hospitals? That seems rather redundant. Perhaps we ought to call them the "new research universities." Unlike the old research universities, their scholarship and sense of responsibility is both external and internal, both expressive and reflexive. Those would be institutions to which we could entrust the responsibility for educating the next generation of university and college faculty in Ph.D. programs. And in the case of institutions without graduate programs, they would be those we would turn to as places that support new and current faculty in their ongoing investigations of teaching and learning. We could then close ranks behind a conception of the new research university— an institution that takes its work so seriously that it makes that work the most important focus of its own investigations. (Shulman, 2000, p.105).

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