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Exploring a New Model and Approach to the Scholarship of Teaching: The Scholarship Teaching Academy

Abstract

The Scholarship of Teaching (SoT) has been researched and investigated over the decades from multiple perspectives. When accessing and engaging the SoT discourse, one has to understand both what the scholarship of teaching is and how it evolved. It is through a critical examination of the diverse range of models and approaches to SoT that one may begin to understand the complex factors involved in shaping the discourse. The plus side to all this is that even though we have multiple definitions and working descriptions of the scholarship of teaching, it remains an evolving area of study. In this paper, I examine several models and approaches and propose a new model: the scholarship teaching academy. Within the broad context of the discussion on SoT, pertinent issues related to access to the scholarship discourse and empowerment of early to mid-career academics is assessed. The scholarship teaching academy responds to the needs of a growing diverse demographic population and to the changing culture of institutions by granting access to early and mid-career academics and also empowering them through the provision of resources and support structures such as mentoring programs.

Depuis des dizaines d'années, l'avancement des connaissances en enseignement (ACE) a fait l'objet de recherches et d'études utilisant des perspectives multiples. Lorsqu'on aborde le discours sur ce sujet ou lorsqu'on y participe, il faut comprendre de quoi il s'agit et comment cette discipline a évolué. Pour comprendre les facteurs complexes qui façonnent le discours, il faut procéder à un examen critique des divers modèles et approches du concept d'avancement des connaissances en enseignement (ACE). L'aspect positif est que malgré les multiples définitions et descriptions de travail existantes, cette discipline continue à être un champ d'étude en évolution. Dans cet article, j'examine plusieurs modèles et approches et propose un nouveau modèle : l'institut de l'ACE. Dans le cadre élargi de la discussion sur cette discipline, j'évalue les sujets pertinents liés à l'accès au discours portant sur ce sujet et au renforcement des capacités des enseignants universitaires qui sont au début ou au milieu de leur carrière. L'institut de l'ACE répond aux besoins d'une population croissante et diversifiée sur le plan démographique et à la culture changeante des institutions en garantissant un accès aux enseignants au début ou au milieu de leur carrière et en renforçant leurs capacités par l'entremise de ressources et de structures de soutien comme les programmes de mentorat.

Keywords

scholarship of teaching, inclusiveness, empowerment, interdisciplinary

Establishing a position in the ongoing debate on the scholarship of teaching is rather daunting. A review of the current literature suggests that there is ongoing critical reflection among scholars and researchers (Brew, 2007; Kreber, 2003; Nicholls, 2005) on several components of the scholarship of teaching: identifying a suitable institutional model, an unrelenting emphasis on peer-reviewed publications and research grants, vagueness of the concept, access to the discourse, and the shift from a teacher focus to a student-learning focus. According to Nicholls (2005, p. 30), the increased interest in the role of teaching and learning in higher education “has been concentrated in America, Australia and the United Kingdom,” with each bringing its own unique perspectives and understanding to the academic and political arena. Given the current fluid nature of the scholarship debate, Boyer’s (1990) insightfulness in establishing an open agenda for ongoing scholarship discussion, and Shulman’s (1999) thought-provoking paper on possible models, it is encouraging to know that there could be any number of unique models and approaches to the scholarship of teaching.

Using Boyer’s (1990) text and Shulman’s (1999) presentation on possible models of scholarship as a departure point, and considering the ongoing remarkable efforts of Brew (2007) and Kreber (2003) to promote creative forms of the scholarship of teaching, this paper proposes the *scholarship teaching academy* as another feasible model. The scholarship teaching academy model draws on relevant aspects of Shulman’s possible models and responds to a 21st-century need to include and empower academic professionals. It also illustrates the social justice commitment of academe to provide a fair and open opportunity for early- to midcareer academics to engage confidently within scholarship.

For purposes of consistency and clarification, in this paper, the scholarship of teaching (SoT) is defined as a combination of ongoing critical reflective practice about teaching, public scrutiny, and an exchange of ideas on an interdisciplinary level. Enhancing learning through effectively designed teaching is an important goal. SoT focuses on the teacher’s responsibility and role in effectively designing the teaching activity in order that meaningful learning can take place. This definition of the scholarship of teaching is teaching centred, and the teacher’s goal is to facilitate and enhance student learning. It endorses the principle that teaching and learning are intricately linked and that unless the teacher has effectively designed teaching that inspires learners, the student may not reach full academic potential. SoT emphasizes the role of the teacher in thinking about how teaching will enhance learning for both the student and the teacher. After all, the scholarship of teaching cannot underestimate the impact it has on developing the teacher’s knowledge about teaching, about the student, and about learning. According to the Illinois State University website (“Scholarship,” 2010), SoTL is defined as “systematic reflection on teaching and learning made public,” with an emphasis on engaging in a public domain. Both SoT and SoTL have learning as a common goal, but SoT emphasizes the responsibility and role of the teacher in effectively designing the teaching activity so that meaningful learning can occur.

First, the author examines general aspects of scholarship and scholarship models that respond to current institutional needs and demands through a critical review of the scholarship of teaching literature since Boyer (1990). Next, effective and acceptable components of scholarship approaches and models are identified and combined into the proposed new model, the scholarship teaching academy, and a rationale is provided for developing the scholarship teaching academy through an integration of desirable attributes of Shulman’s (1999) possible models. Finally, the scholarship teaching academy is proposed as an appropriate model for the new century to encourage inclusive participation among academics, to maintain interdisciplinary and collaborative academic engagement, to promote the use of blended delivery formats in teaching, and to enable early- to midcareer academics to participate in scholarship with confidence. I approach the scholarship debate from an

academic developer perspective, and the paper includes a brief critical review of concerns raised within the academic development framework in teaching and learning centres (TLCs) and academic development units (ADUs). The language of scholarship has developed a new meaning within TLCs and ADUs in an attempt to shape their academic agendas and profiles on an institutional level. Scholarship frameworks are adopted to improve visibility and credibility.

Literature Review

The literature review suggests that the scholarship of teaching has maintained an exclusive flavour, with high-profile academics enjoying the limelight and continuing to win research awards and grants, increasing the volume of publications to make their mark as researchers, and claiming celebrity status as “distinguished scholars.” Publication records and research grants remain a significant measure of scholarship, according to Nicholls (2005) and Lygo-Baker (2005). One reason may be that the scholarship of teaching discourse found support in research-intensive universities, such as Illinois State University:

K. Patricia Cross endowed the Cross Chair in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning at Illinois State University in honor of her father, Clarence L. Cross, a beloved teacher of physics at ISU for over 30 years. The office of the Cross Chair supports and enables the demonstration of Illinois State University’s commitment to the promotion of scholarship and research in teaching as a discipline. (“Cross Chair,” 2010)

Another reason may relate to how those in power who command large research grants also influence the shape, content, and direction of the discourse by virtue of who they are and where they are situated in the academic hierarchy. The scholarship of teaching may be regarded by some as elitist in design, because it excludes those who are not familiar with the language of the discourse. Language is “the least visible, least measurable and least understood aspect of discrimination,” according to Roberts, Davies, and Jupp (1992, p. 366). Language is a powerful medium, and it can provide or deny access to individuals and groups. In this case, it is possible that the language of scholarship excludes some academics. Nicholls (2005) claims that “power in academia is built around disciplines and power struggles take place within and around these bodies of knowledge” (p. 83). Often power struggles are covert and they revolve around issues of access to information about the scholarship of teaching and the language used to discuss it. It is for this reason that the new scholarship teaching academy embraces inclusiveness as a desirable attribute, making it accessible not only to a demographically diverse population, but also to early- to midcareer academics.

Although it is uncertain what SoT should be in design and content, there is a growing critical reflective movement across institutions globally to interrogate the concept and to respond in innovative ways. According to Brew (2007), a review of current research suggests that several theoretical models and examples of models have become available for consideration since Boyer’s important publication, *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990). Brew’s model, presented at the University of Sydney, Kreber’s (2005) vision of scholarship, posted on the University of Edinburgh website, and Hixon’s (2004) news report on Indiana University Northwest, which she claims “has established itself as a leader locally, nationally and internationally” (p. 6), even though SoTL “is a relatively new movement in higher education,” are examples of varied approaches and models. Kathleen McKinney, holder of the Cross Chair, claims that there is growing evidence of the move among higher education institutions globally to engage in the scholarship discourse on several levels (2007). In her

opinion, various conferences and online and traditional journals attest to the rising interest in scholarship (McKinney, 2007).

A number of factors must be considered when introducing the notion of SoT on an institutional basis, but ultimately an understanding of the scholarship of teaching will be embedded differently in different institutions. In fact, the models and approaches adopted may even vary within and across departments and faculties (McKinney, 2002; Shulman, 1999), depending on where the scholarship of teaching discourse begins and who shapes it. For example, in institutions where the discourse begins in the academic development units and centres, the discussion may take on a different character than in institutions where the discourse begins within the faculties, schools, and colleges and is discipline based.

The literature review illustrates that while scholars continue to grapple with the scholarship concept, their inquiry into scholarship requires encouragement and support. Often, within institutions there may be barriers to engaging in the discourse. As Nicholls (2005) reminds us, “academic power struggles within disciplines can be framed around closure, that is, cutting off of a ‘fringe’ perspective or individuals by demanding adherence to a particular core of knowledge” (p. 90). Individual, group, and institutional power may all contribute in overt and covert forms to both influence and shape this elusive concept. Again, early- to midcareer academics might fall prey to such hidden practices, which may obstruct their participation in the debate, leave them outside the debate, or push them to the margins. There is an imperative to provide fair and open access to the scholarship discourse in higher education.

In Australia, one of the most significant studies was conducted by Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin, and Prosser (2000) to establish what academics in the country understood by the scholarship of teaching. The study categorized responses into several streams, finding that student learning was favoured over teaching and that it was important to present the teacher’s work instead of focusing on the work of others alone. But once again, no consensus was reached on a specific description of the scholarship of teaching. Much of the literature suggests there is no general agreement on what is meant by the scholarship of teaching and how it should be designed and delivered. Two decades have passed since Boyer (1990) introduced his perspectives, but there has been no progress on this front. Perhaps a lack of consensus is a good thing, as it illustrates scholarship in its finest form. As a result of the uncertainty on SoT, inquiries are ongoing, innovative models are emerging, scholarship is increasingly being integrated within and across institutions and regions, the application of newly acquired knowledge remains significant, and SoT focuses on the process of teaching as a catalyst for enhancing student learning. While this is all excellent practice, it is important nevertheless to examine how the scholarship of teaching has evolved over the years since Boyer’s ground-breaking work and to present alternative models that respond to the needs of a new century, particularly granting access to a wider group of academics, including those in early- or midcareer, to engage their thoughts both creatively and with greater depth.

Boyer’s (1990) vagueness about SoT should be regarded as a strong point. By keeping the concept vague and undefined, Boyer either intentionally or unintentionally ensured that (a) scholars will launch enquiries into scholarship in order to discover what it means (scholarship of discovery), (b) relationships and connections (scholarship of integration) will be explored within and across disciplines, and (c) a creative design (scholarship of application) of knowledge is gained. Furthermore, what has been discovered through reflective investigation, integrated through synthesis as effective teaching and learning, and designed creatively to inspire good teaching and learning can be implemented in innovative and exciting ways as the scholarship of teaching. This may be what Boyer (1990, p. 24) intended when he said “inspired teaching keeps the flame of scholarship alive.”

In 2002, McKinney highlighted several challenges facing the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and among these are defining the term, seeking consensus on what SoTL means, and deciding whether SoTL can be regarded as a field of study. This view is also shared by Nicholls (2005), who claimed that SoT remains open to interpretation because there is little consensus on what it means and what the parameters of academic exchange are within this framework. References to scholarship vary, with each one placing emphasis on different aspects of the teaching and learning paradigm. For example, in a North American context, reference to scholarship in higher education includes both teaching and learning, highlighting the reciprocal relationship, yet in other contexts, the term places emphasis on teaching, thereby either assuming an established reciprocal relationship with learning or stressing the teacher's responsibility and role in designing effective learning environments as the focus of scholarly inquiry. Shulman (1999) claims that one of the reasons why the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) includes both teaching and learning in its focus is that it is "hard to imagine a viable scholarship of teaching that does not ask about learning and the kind and quality of learning that occurs" (p. 3). In the definition of SoTL, the emphasis is on public enquiry and systematic reflection on both teaching and learning. Prosser (2008) subscribes to the view that the scholarship of teaching and learning refers to the cross-disciplinary collegial academic exchanges to improve student learning, with the emphasis on collegial exchange. It is in this way that components of Boyer's (1990) model have been creatively applied to suit diverse institutional contexts in response to the specific needs of teaching and learning design and delivery.

Teaching and learning preparation and delivery is a cyclic process without clearly defined boundaries. It involves reflective practice from conceptualization to delivery and assessment. Critical reflection at every phase of design and implementation must meet what Biggs (1999) calls the "constructive alignment" principle of the curriculum, which requires the harmonious balance of and agreement between all components. The teacher is responsible for ensuring the alignment of all components, from learning outcomes to appropriate activities and assessment strategies. This means that if a single component (e.g., outcomes, activities, or assessment strategy) is misaligned, then learning enhancement is seriously compromised.

Framing this paper within the ambiguous context of SoT dialogue provides the ideal opportunity to explore an appropriate model for engaging the scholarship of teaching in a new century. It is with this in mind that I approach the scholarship of teaching as a flexible and critical academic space within which to suggest a new model as an appropriate response to the demands of the 21st century.

Overview of Models

In this section, I review Shulman's (1999, p. 1) four proposed models of scholarship of teaching and learning and propose a new one: the scholarship teaching academy. The scholarship teaching academy embraces the desirable attributes of Shulman's models and adds a new dimension, a special focus on the inclusiveness and empowerment of a demographically diverse academic population. Inclusiveness refers to the extension of the scholarship teaching academy not only to graduate students, as Shulman proposed, but also to academics in early to midcareer. Empowerment refers to the provision of a supportive environment, mentoring program, and resources to build capacity among new members of the scholarship academy, allowing them to excel with confidence.

Shulman suggests that institutions may want to explore the potential of the different models that he presents and to modify them to suit institutional goals. Since institutional cultures change along with their demographic populations, it is important to critically review

the preferred SoT model and to reflect upon ways it might be modified to suit increasingly diverse staff populations. Shulman (1999, p. 1) proposes that “organisational entities” or “teaching academies” be established on campuses to ensure that SoT can thrive through collegial relationships. Desirable attributes from Shulman’s models are useful in establishing a more holistic model of scholarship, namely, the scholarship teaching academy, which I see as transcending both Shulman’s models and Boyer’s vision of SoT by expanding the traditional scholarship approach and vision to include the increasing diverse population of academic professionals globally. Furthermore, the scholarship teaching academy opens up the scholarship landscape to early- and midcareer academics, providing a supportive environment for professional growth and development. The scholarship teaching academy welcomes aspiring early- to midcareer academics, who may be struggling scholars or novices, thereby adopting the social responsibility ethic of social inclusion in the academic environment. This means those scholars who have established innovative practices, those who have been unsuccessful in winning grants and awards, and those who have had negative experiences can share the same academic scholarship space with dignity and respect on the basis of their common understanding of scholarship and their passion for teaching and learning. Further discussion on the selection of desirable attributes of the newly proposed scholarship teaching academy follows.

Shulman’s first model considers the teaching academy as an *interdisciplinary centre* where academic staff from across disciplines come together to engage in scholarship of teaching and learning by focusing on their individual contributions to enhancing student learning. Merits of this model are that it engages the Boyer model of integration across disciplines and provides a safety net for interdisciplinary scholars. However, as Shulman points out, one weakness is that rewards for scholarship must still go through the parent department. Although centres and institutes inspire cross-disciplinary scholarship, unfortunately, they remain disempowered to function as fully fledged entities in their own right. The *interdisciplinary approach* in this model can be incorporated into the proposed scholarship teaching academy to retain the collaborative and collegial component.

The second proposed model is the *graduate education teaching academy*. In this model, the emphasis is on nurturing scholarship among graduate students. Shulman points out that this model does not focus on academic staff, and unless graduate education restructures to include academic staff in a mentoring and modelling role, this model does not meet the broad framework of scholarship. An adapted version (namely, the mentoring and modelling role recommended by Shulman) of the second model could be considered, and particularly if framed within an *inclusive approach* to the scholarship teaching academy.

A third, more popular, model of scholarship, according to Shulman (1999), is the *teaching academy organized around technology*. Shulman claims that one of the great advantages of the advent of technology in education is that concerns about the use and the impact of technology create a space for endless possibilities in inquiry, integration, application, and teaching. Shulman highlights three key features of the technology teaching academy that exemplify scholarship: public discourse, open review and criticism, and catalyst for change and expansion. They can be easily adopted by the scholarship teaching academy, thereby introducing a *blended approach* as a desirable attribute.

The fourth model advocated by Shulman is the *distributed teaching academy*, which emphasizes capacity building across various levels and streams, rather than establishing a centralized structure. The goal is to create critical mass, thereby creating a community of scholars within and across disciplines who have a commitment to scholarship and will carry the torch for embedding scholarship with a passion across academic and institutional boundaries, leading by example. The capacity building of the fourth model is a desirable attribute of my model, and would add an *empowerment* focus to include supportive

structures, mentoring programs, and resources for diverse staff populations to enable them to engage in scholarship on a fair basis. Empowering diverse staff populations would meet the needs of the rapidly changing institutional demographics in the 21st century. This approach would raise the self-esteem and confidence levels of all members of the scholarship teaching academy through capacity-building strategies. In this way, increasing the number of empowered scholars within and across disciplines and demographic staff populations would establish a critical mass for the scholarship teaching academy. A brief review and discussion of the notion of scholarship from an academic-developer perspective follows; it is based on the manner in which the term scholarship is bandied about in teaching and learning centres and academic development units.

TLCs and ADUs are continuing down a rather bumpy path to find a place within institutional frameworks and hierarchies as bastions of scholarly activity and SoTL advocates. However, they seem to be on a collision course, because aside from their primary business of enhancing teaching, they do not have the required essential attributes of SoT: public scholarship activity, collegial exchange, and interdisciplinary focus.

Nicholls (2005) contends that in the United Kingdom, the Institute for Teaching and Learning, educational development units and staff training and development units “have linked the word ‘scholarship’ to teaching as a means of raising the status and credibility of the programmes that are run or accredited” (p. 56). According to Nicholls, using the language of scholarship does not enhance teaching and learning, but it confuses the “academic community’s understanding of scholarship and its role within teaching and learning” (p. 57). TLCs are found on many campuses in Australasia, North America, and elsewhere, but they remain teaching support units. For example, the Learning and Teaching Unit at the University of South Australia (2010), the newly formed Centre for University Teaching at Flinders University (2010) (formerly the Staff Development and Training Unit), and the Centre for Teaching and Learning at the University of Newcastle (2010) are all defined on their websites as teaching and learning support centres within their institutions, but many of them offer “scholarship of teaching” certificate courses, “scholarly teaching” workshops, and “leadership in the scholarship of teaching” as subcategories of their services. Their primary role and responsibility is to support and provide teaching and learning support to teachers, so teachers can enhance learning through appropriate academic interventions. However, it is true that academic development units and centres are not teaching academies, even though some of them sometimes have staff committed to cross-disciplinary scholarship. It is the absence of rigorous scholarship within these centres and across their networks that have historically placed them on the periphery of mainstream scholarship and academic activity. They continue to be seen as appendages to other, “more important” organizational structures (e.g., the office of the deputy vice-chancellor, academic) and are considered by institutional planners for piecemeal handouts, such as conservative budgets, out-of-the way offices, and low-quality facilities. Managers of these centres and units are given semiautonomous roles, depending on the culture of their institutions, and they are micromanaged or macromanaged accordingly. They suffer a high degree of burnout, mainly because they spend a large part of their lives within institutions struggling for recognition and fighting big wars and winning small battles. By the time they succeed at changing policy and practice and achieving recognition, it is either time for them to move on or for new policy and practice to be enacted. Often, these academic centres remain orphaned, because nobody wants them in the academic mainstream—not because academics do not know how to engage with them, but because academic development staff cannot engage in scholarship on the same level as mainstream academics. There is such an academic centre or unit on every campus, and each suffers a different fate, depending entirely on the institutional culture and vision.

Shulman's (1999) proposed models, based on the North American context, serve as a good starting point for exploring a suitable model for any institution and one that is in tune with institutional culture. In Australia, the University of Queensland (USQ), launched its Teaching Academy in 2008 as a response to institutional needs. An analysis of the policy and practice goals of that academy makes it clear that the academy falls within the elitist notion of scholarship: "membership of the Academy is by invitation only to distinguished academic and professional staff who have demonstrated a positive influence in the university and have evidence of teaching excellence" (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2008, p. 4). Other institutions should exercise caution in emulating the USQ model, because it is an exclusive approach to scholarship. It is difficult enough to explore the rough terrain of SoT globally without adding one more barrier for those who are already skeptical of the scholarship of teaching and those who are eager to join, but are left on the margins. The USQ model is better suited to the label of "distinguished teaching academy," and it is questionable whether Boyer, or Shulman, for that matter, ever envisioned such an academy.

Contexts differ and institutional cultures are complex, so models will have to suit institutional context and culture in order to be flexible and open to change. Models must build into their design and delivery the fundamental principles of scholarship as espoused by Boyer, Shulman, and others (e.g., enquiry, public scrutiny, collegial exchange of scholarship, and critical review of teaching and learning). Yet they must also be inclusive, so that institutions can respond to the changing demographics of the global landscape to ensure that no aspiring scholar is excluded from the discourse; interdisciplinary, so that scholars across disciplines can enrich their horizons; blended so that teachers and learners can access and navigate through multiple media; and empowering so that scholarship knowledge, skills, and attitudes will give confidence to the next generation of scholarship activists around the globe.

Conclusion

The scholarship teaching academy model will encourage empowered SoT professionals to engage in a way that will allow them to attract a critical mass within and across their faculties and institutions by virtue of their scholarship. It will meet the needs of demographically diverse staff populations, bringing them full circle to investigate, openly examine, and engage in collaborative partnerships and critically dissect teaching and learning.

As we move through the undergrowth of the scholarship of teaching and attempt to find a clearing, we must keep in mind that the scholarship teaching academy and various other models share a common goal: enhancing student learning. Academic autonomy allows us to approach the scholarship of teaching in diverse ways. Yet the quest for scholarship must be imbued with a spirit of open inquiry and a sense of justice that gives demographically diverse groups access to the SoT network, and this is another goal of the scholarship teaching academy. It should also encourage the involvement of scholars from a range of disciplines, allowing academics the freedom to apply their knowledge for the common good and ensuring excellence in teaching inspired learners.

For now, academic development units and teaching and learning centres must do what they can to promote SoT. In the absence of scholarship teaching academies, the ADUs and TLCs at many higher education institutions will have to carry the torch for the scholarship of teaching, no matter how the flame may flicker and wane every now and again.

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