

# The Scholarship of Teaching & Learning

A PRACTICAL INTRODUCTION AND CRITIQUE

# *SOTL*



By Associate Professor Neil Haigh  
CENTRE FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING – AUT UNIVERSITY

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This short introduction to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) by Associate Professor Neil Haigh is published by Ako Aotearoa to encourage practitioners to consider the concept and how it might benefit their learners. As well as describing how SoTL can provide a frame for improving practice, Neil explains the development of the concept and outlines current debate about this form of scholarship and its relationship to pedagogical research.

SoTL is also examined in the context of current government and institutional policy and, in particular, its relationship with evaluative quality assurance and the performance-based research fund.

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# What is the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning?



## **The term scholarship of teaching and learning**

and its acronym SoTL have become familiar to many tertiary teachers. They are increasingly likely to encounter the term when they read literature and other resources on tertiary learning and teaching, and participate in professional development programmes. Their encounters are often the by-product of the efforts of professional development staff to prompt their colleagues to view teaching as a scholarly activity and to encourage them to engage in scholarship in relation to their teaching. So, what does it mean to engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning?

The first person to use the term scholarship of teaching was Ernest Boyer, a leading U.S. educator whose views have been very influential internationally. Boyer used the term when he advocated that:

*The time has come to move beyond the tired old teaching versus research debate and give the familiar and honorable term scholarship a broader and more capacious meaning, one that brings legitimacy to the full scope of academic work. (Boyer, 1990, p.16)*

By associating scholarship with teaching, Boyer sought to change conceptions of teaching and thereby the perceived value of teaching. He also offered a framework for thinking about the opportunities to enhance teaching practice through scholarship. Anyone seeking to improve the professional status of tertiary teaching needs to engage with Boyer's views about the scholarship of teaching and learning. As the next section shows, these views are not uncontested; the concept is still evolving – in some ways it would be of concern if it were not.

# SoTL

## *Boyer's Four Scholarships: an important context*

Boyer's differentiated four distinct, but also interrelated, scholarships: the scholarships of discovery, of integration, of application, and of teaching.

### *The Scholarship of Discovery*

This comes closest to what is usually meant by 'basic research'. It is scholarship that involves "commitment to knowledge for its own sake, to freedom of inquiry and to following, in a disciplined fashion, an investigation wherever it may lead" (Boyer, 1990, p. 17).

### *The Scholarship of Integration*

This is "serious disciplined work that seeks to bring new insight to bear on original work" (p. 19). Giving meaning to isolated facts, putting such facts into perspective, fitting research into larger intellectual patterns, making connections across the disciplines, placing the specialties in larger contexts are all activities that Boyer associates with this mode of scholarship.

### *The Scholarship of Application*

This work, which also requires rigor and accountability, constitutes service to others which calls for the application of special fields of knowledge and associated skills. In the course of this service, new understandings may also arise as "theory and practice vitally interact and one renews the other" (p. 23). Note: Boyer (1996) subsequently renames this type of scholarship, the Scholarship of Engagement.

### *The Scholarship of Teaching*

Boyer viewed teaching as a scholarly enterprise because the "work of the professor becomes consequential only as it is understood by others" (p. 23) and teaching serves to both educate and entice future scholars. "It is inspired teaching that keeps the flame of scholarship alive." (p. 24). He also observed that "pedagogical procedures must be carefully planned, continuously examined, and relate directly to the subject taught" and "good teaching means that faculty, as scholars, are also learning" (about teaching and learning).

Of course, all this presupposes some consensus on the meaning of the terms "scholarship". Lee Shulman, one of the leading proponents of SoTL, proposed that:

For an activity to be designated as scholarship, it should manifest at least three key characteristics: It should be public, susceptible to critical review and evaluation, and accessible for exchange and use by other members of one's scholarly community. (Shulman, 1998, p. 5)

This representation of scholarship, which has been widely adopted within the SoTL community, is reflected in other definitions of SOTL that have subsequently been proposed.

The scholarship of teaching is problem posing about an issue of teaching or learning, study of the problem through methods appropriate to disciplinary epistemologies, application of results to practice, communication of results, self-reflection and peer review. (Cambridge, B., 2001)

Teachers who are more likely to be engaging in scholarship of teaching .... seek to understand teaching by consulting and using the literature on teaching and learning, by investigating their own teaching, by reflecting on their teaching from the perspective of their intention in teaching while seeing it from the students' position, and by formally communicating their ideas and practice to their peers. (Trigwell et al., 2000, p. 164)

..... a kind of 'going meta' in which faculty frame and systematically investigate questions related to student learning – the conditions under which it occurs, what it looks like, how to deepen it, and so forth – and to do so with an eye not only to improving their own classroom but to advancing practice beyond it. (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999, p. 12)

# Why should we be interested? – the value of SoTL for practitioners and students

Tertiary teachers are increasingly likely to encounter an institutional policy, an academic developer, or a colleague advocating that they **become engaged in SoTL**. The stock-take of SoTL in New Zealand universities (Haigh, Gossman & Jiao, 2010) revealed some of the factors that New Zealand tertiary teachers take into consideration when deciding how they will respond to invitations to engage. Some factors concern their current circumstances, interests and capabilities; others push or pull them towards SoTL or act as obstacles. For example:

## *Personal circumstances, interests and capabilities*

- Is there some aspect of teaching and learning that I am really interested in and want to investigate further?
- Do I think I can change and improve my own and others' teaching through SoTL?
- Am I confident about my research capabilities, including 'doing' SoTL?
- Am I confident about my teaching but ready to investigate it?
- Given other demands in my academic and personal life, is there space for engaging in SoTL?

## *Pull Factors*

- Do other people expect me to be able to offer evidence to support my teaching decisions or to confirm I am teaching effectively?

## *Push Factors*

- Would this be another way of fulfilling PBRF expectations?
- Would this be another avenue for meeting postgraduate research expectations?

## *Obstacles*

- Personal pre-conditions (as above) are not present
- Would what I am interested in investigating be of interest to others?
- Would SoTL be given the same status as my other disciplinary research?
- Would my colleagues/department be supportive of my engaging in SoTL?
- Would I be able to do SoTL when there is limited funding?
- Would I be able to get some publications without too much delay?
- Would I be able to find relevant, useful, good quality literature on my interests?
- Would I be able to develop an acceptable proposal?
- Would I be able to handle the ethics considerations and make my way through the ethics approval process?





### *Why? – from the perspective of the teacher*

One of the most compelling and convincing answers is provided by Lee Shulman (2000). He presents three arguments for engaging in SoTL associated with professionalism, pragmatism and policy:

**Professionalism:** The most important reason for engaging in the scholarship of teaching is professional role and responsibility. Each of us in higher education is a member of at least two professions: that of our discipline, interdisciplinary or professional field ... as well as our profession as educator. In both of these intersecting domains, we bear the responsibilities of scholars—to discover, to connect, to apply and to teach.

**Pragmatism:** ... Such work helps guide our efforts in the design and adaptation of teaching in the interests of student learning. By engaging in purposive reflection, documentation, assessment and analysis of teaching and learning, and doing so in a more public and accessible manner, we not only support the improvement of our own teaching we raise the likelihood that our work is transparent to our colleagues who design and instruct many of the same students in the same or related programs. ..

**Policy:** We in higher education are also enmeshed in webs of national, state and local policy.... Unless we can provide relevant evidence of the processes and products of our pedagogies, we will find ourselves making empty claims and offering degraded arguments.... New forms of institutional research will be developed that are learning-focused, domain-specific, and oriented toward analysing the educative experiences and outcomes that institutions support or fail to support. (p. 49-50)

He also contends that “an educator can teach with integrity only if an effort is made to examine the impact of his or her work on the students” (Shulman, 2002, p. vii). That obligation he considers to be “the pedagogical imperative” (p. vii). Trigwell & Shale (2004) similarly state that enhancement of students’ experience of learning must be the “first order aim”.

While other benefits have been noted, they are secondary impacts or outcomes. Examples of the latter include raising the status and recognition of teaching, energizing and renewing enthusiasm for teaching, providing satisfaction and rewards through successful scholarship, widening and strengthening communities of teachers/scholars, strengthening professional development programmes, improving learning, and reaching related policies and procedures (e.g., Ciccone, 2008)

### *Why? – from the perspectives of students*

As stated above, the primary benefit students should experience is enhanced learning. Again, however, there are a number of potential second-order outcomes. For example, if students are participants in SoTL projects, they have opportunities to:

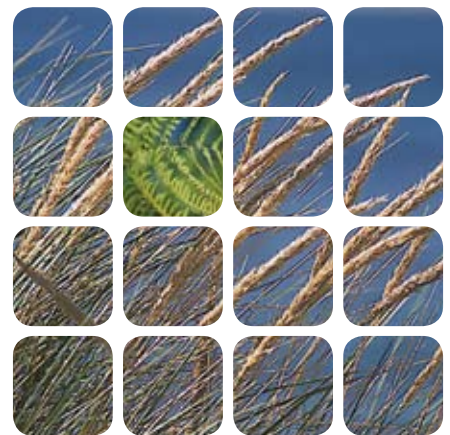
- communicate their experiences, thoughts and feelings about learning and teaching
- learn about reflection and research methods
- gain insights into other students’ learning experiences and approaches
- experience engaging in reflection and inquiry when they assume the role of co-inquirers
- develop insights into the practice of professionals, including in relation to continuing development and the related place of scholarship
- gain insights into the lives of academics
- appreciate a student-centred approach to teaching.

### **A Caution**

Many factors in addition to a teacher’s engagement in SoTL and application of SoTL-derived knowledge will obviously determine whether students’ learning is enhanced. As Waering (1999) observed, it is “possible for teaching skills to go backward temporarily while scholarship goes forward: people ...[may] get self-conscious and confused as their knowledge increases, and take a while to digest new learning and put it usefully into practice” (cited by Healey, 2000).

Scholarship may lead to new insights but their implementation is confounded by old ‘habits’ which continue to function. Benson (2001) similarly conceded that “In my own attempts at the scholarship of teaching, not all of the ideas and things I have tried resulted in increased student learning. Many have had an effect, others have had no effect, and some even resulted in less student learning.(p. 2)”

# *What is the relationship between the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and pedagogical research?*



As Elaine Martin et al. (1998) noted, while “Boyer’s comments on the scholarship of teaching are eloquent ... they are not analytical. They do not spell out exactly what constitutes the scholarship of teaching”. Many of the variations in current definitions reflect different points of view about the relationship between SoTL and educational or pedagogical research.

For some, despite Boyer’s distinction between different forms of scholarship, the activities that define SoTL fall firmly within the parameters of ‘research’ (e.g. Gurung et al., 2008). One of the drivers for this might be the greater value placed on research. Gurm (2009), for instance, observes that despite SoTL being explicitly endorsed by many institutions, the concept of ‘research’ remains in ascendancy.

For other commentators the distinction between SoTL and research is (or should be) clear.

## *1. The critical reflection component of SoTL*

For some, it is the critical reflection dimension (Schön, 1983) of SoTL that makes it a distinct activity. This stance is taken by Prosser (2008) who defines SoTL as “evidence based critical reflection on practice aimed at improving practice” (p. 1) and differentiates SoTL from research, investigations and evaluations, and literature reviews. The same emphasis on critical reflection is evident in Caroline Kreber’s conceptualization of SoTL:

SoTL involves a deep knowledge base, an inquiry orientation, critical **reflectivity**, peer review, as well as sharing or going public with the insights and innovations resulting from the inquiry process. (Kreber, 2007a, p. 4)

Kreber draws on earlier work (Kreber, 1999; Kreber & Cranton, 2000) in which she developed a taxonomy of reflective processes associated with SoTL. She proposes that teachers can reflect on three knowledge areas:

- curriculum (the goals and purposes for higher education and our teaching),
- psychology (how student develop and learn towards these goals) and
- instruction (teaching and instructional design processes that optimize learning and development).

Reflection related to these areas can address three questions:

- What’s really the problem here and what do I need to do?
- How do I know I am effective (or was conscientious) with what I do?
- Why do I choose to attend to this problem? Is there an alternative?

She argues that it is through reflection that existing assumptions, conceptions and practices are questioned and validated, and emphasizes that these processes can be peer reviewed (Kreber, 2006).

Kreber also contends that teachers should direct their reflection both to their own teaching experiences and to theoretical knowledge derived from research.



Reflection on experience can generate knowledge that will be useful for the teacher's immediate situation and circumstances. And, if teachers engage in reflection when they try out practices that are informed by theoretical, research-based knowledge, they can determine whether that knowledge is also applicable in their context.

### *2. SoTL focuses on specific rather than generic teaching and learning contexts*

Gurm (2009) concludes that one of the emerging commonalities in definitions of SoTL is "an understanding that this scholarship is about the teaching-learning process, it is about improving the teacher's understanding of the process within a context" (pp. 7–8).

Gilpin (2009) echoes this view: "...it is the contexts of SoTL that set it apart from general research on teaching and learning, with regards to the clarity and understanding that it brings to individual situations" (p. 2). Prosser (2008) also argues that educational research is focused on generic rather than specific contexts, and that SoTL ensures that the latter (e.g. individual classrooms, individual teacher practices) are addressed.

For me the main point of engaging in the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education is to work towards improving our students' learning. To do this we need to systematically reflect upon evidence of our own students learning within our own classes and disciplines. (p. 3)

### *3. SoTL does not emphasize generation and evaluation of general theory.*

Other commentators differentiate educational/pedagogical research from SoTL in terms of the relative emphasis on theory generation and evaluation in the former contrasting with the emphasis in the latter on improving students' learning in particular contexts. For example, Hutchings & Huber (2008) state that while "at the 'high end' at least, [SoTL] aspires not only to build on existing theory but also to generate new theory that feeds back into practice" (p. 236):

...its purpose is not to generate or test theory. The purpose is to improve student learning. For that purpose, the 'big tent' holds. There is room for more and less ambitious in this tent. For work with more or less sophisticated designs. For work with more or less polish. For work with more or less theoretical background and import. (p. 241)

They continue to emphasize the practical and 'on the ground' character of SoTL focused on improving teaching practice and student learning in specific contexts.

### *4. SoTL can have a mutually beneficial relationship with pedagogical research.*

Some commentators emphasise that those engaging in SoTL can and should concurrently take into account the processes as well as outcomes of pedagogical research, and that SoTL projects can be a foundation for pedagogical research.

We need to draw upon the more generic research, but carefully situate that within our disciplines. (Prosser, 2008, p. 3)

This view is endorsed by Kreber (2007b) who states that:

SoTL involves inquiry into particular questions relating to teaching and learning that often originate within one's own disciplinary context ... some of this work **may eventually evolve into full-fledged pedagogical research.** (p. 5)



# Concerns about SoTL as a concept

A range of concerns continue to be expressed about current conceptions of SoTL. For example, the view that context specificity is a distinctive and important feature of SoTL has been qualified by concern that those engaging in SoTL should address a broader range of teaching and learning contexts and take into account insights gained from varied contexts.

Thus, while a proponent of embedding SoTL in disciplinary contexts, Healey (2008) sees the potential for those contexts to become silos for scholarship with the resultant neglect of other discipline and interdisciplinary perspectives. As Huber & Morreale (2002) have observed:

Growth in knowledge also comes at the borders of disciplinary imagination... 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. (p. 1)

There have also been calls for a broader focus for SoTL work:

Although there is a tendency, at least in some quarters, to view SoTL exclusively as discipline-specific pedagogical inquiry into how students learn, it is increasingly recognized that it is equally important that SoTL engage with broader agendas and consider questions relating to the larger learning experience of students. (Kreber, 2007a, p. 1)

Huber & Hutchings (2005) observe that while a focus on the “pedagogical particulars” of distinctive contexts is a beneficial feature of SoTL and may distinguish it from most general or basic research on learning and teaching, there is also a need to categorize projects in terms of similar contexts, themes, and questions so that a navigational map can be created and “a wilderness of unrelated projects and efforts” (Huber & Hutchings, 2005, p. 36) is avoided.

More recently, Boshier & Huang (2008) contend that:

The ‘L’ part of SoTL is stalled because advocates are too focused on the classroom in institutions. A broadened understanding of learning requires going off-campus. SoTL advocates need to get out of the office, descend from the hills and examine learning in natural settings. (p. 647)

Boshier (2009), in a stringent critique of the current status of SoTL, states that continuing issues associated with its definition are a primary factor contributing to it being a hard sell to tertiary educators and to difficulties operating the construct so that it can inform institutional and individual decision-making.

The issues he identifies include vagueness and variability in definitions, lack of consideration of all the range of contexts within which teaching and learning occur (including non-formal), inappropriate attempts to disaggregate the four scholarships in Boyer’s model that were originally conceived as having complex interrelationships, and a pre-occupation with commodification, application and impact of outcomes that “reeks of performativity” (p. 8).



Others note that the apparent emergence of a new field of research/scholarship has also served political purposes: it has been a strategic move to address the widely and strongly held view among many academics that teaching had less status than research. In 1996, Menges & Weimer concluded that:

Scholarship of teaching has become part of our educational jargon, used most regularly by those interested in upping the ante with respect to teaching. It has become an amorphous term, equated more with commitment to teaching than any concrete, substantive sense of definition or consensus as to how this scholarship can be recognized. (p. xii)

While advocacy for SoTL should rest on more than political imperatives, it has undeniably provided an opportunity and some leverage for moving beyond the teaching vs research debate. It has also provided one perspective on how the legislative requirement in New Zealand for a close interdependence of teaching and research in degree teaching might be realised.



## *SoTL in the Context of New Zealand Tertiary Education*

Boyer's views about the forms of scholarship that are central to academic work, including the scholarship of teaching, have been very influential internationally. Evidence of that impact is apparent in the widespread incorporation of his views in statements tertiary education institutions make about their fundamental mission and the nature of academic work that they value and support. They have also influenced conceptualizations of the relationship that can exist between teaching, learning and research and have become an important foundation for the work of academic development staff.

The pervasive impact of Boyer's views is clearly evident in New Zealand tertiary education, from the level of Government policy and plans to the everyday activities of individual tertiary teachers. A brief summary and critique of the present status of SoTL in New Zealand follows.<sup>1</sup>

### *Government policy, plans and provisions*

The first explicit reference to scholarship of teaching in a Government policy document occurs in the Tertiary Education Strategy 2007–2010 under the heading *Supporting Links between Research, Scholarship and Teaching*:

Research provides for the development of ideas, and teaches students to think using research methodologies and analytical reasoning. The scholarship of teaching, and links between research and teaching more generally, must be strengthened and the government will support this, particularly through the distinctive contributions of universities. (Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 25)

While there is no explicit mention of the Scholarship of Teaching or SoTL in the new Tertiary Education Strategy 2010–2015 (Office of the Minister for Tertiary Education, 2009), this may reflect a taken-for-granted view about the value of use-driven research designed to improve teaching and learning practice (e.g. the Ako Aotearoa and Teaching & Learning Research Initiative Funds).

<sup>1</sup> This summary and critique draws on findings from a stock-take of SoTL in New Zealand universities (Haigh, Gossman & Jiao, 2009, 2010)



### *SoTL and the Performance Based Research Fund*

In the documentation for the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF), there is no reference to scholarship of teaching and learning as an area to be considered by the Education research panel. However, the areas listed include teaching and learning and tertiary education and it is noted that cross-referrals to this panel will come from other panels, which anticipates discipline-related research within the field of education.

The PBRF guidelines acknowledge that much work in education is designed to inform professional practice and that such work may be deemed research if it accords with the definition of research adopted for the PBRF scheme.

The introduction of this scheme has evoked controversy and debate within the education community, prompted, in part, by the relatively poor performance of education researchers in the initial round of PBRF (2003). The range of issues and concerns raised by education researchers included (a) a definition of research that was too confining and exclusionary, in particular for research that had an applied or practice character, and (b) negative impacts on teaching commitment and quality (Smith & Jesson, 2005). Some of these concerns were addressed in the 2006 round of PBRF, including clarification of what constitutes (excellent) research in applied and practice-based research; and Education researchers recorded significant gains across the main indices. However, Smart (2008) observed that Education (along with Nursing) still performed more poorly on average than other subjects. He associated this with the professional training agenda of the discipline and its relative newness as a research discipline.

Specific concerns about assessment of research on teaching, including disciplinary research on teaching (Rowe & Bold, 2006; Middleton, 2006) and scholarship of teaching and learning outputs (Willis, 2009) have been voiced. Willis contends that:

The PBRF illustrates how a national policy designed to enhance the quality of research in the broadest sense has been interpreted by disciplinary experts and institutions in ways that run counter to an inclusive view of research and in particular stunted the growth of SoTL. (p. 3)

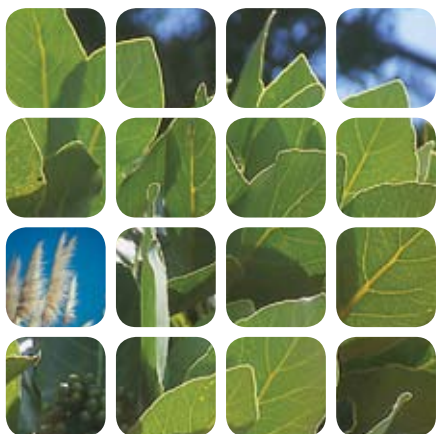
In a submission on the draft Tertiary Education Strategy (2010–2015), Ako Aotearoa registered a similar concern:

...work on tertiary education in specific disciplines tends to sit uncomfortably between the discipline area in which the academic teaches and the research field of education. As a consequence, it risks being undervalued by both assessment panels under the present PBRF processes. We are not confident that current PBRF assessment processes of this type of research support the imperative to build our research capabilities in this area. (Ako Aotearoa, 2009).

An independent reviewer of PBRF lends some support to these views about practice or applied research, noting that the most frequent criticism of panels was that they “followed the ‘rules’ too rigidly....The TEC guidelines had been interpreted as a rigid framework rather than a template against which the culture of each research field might be set” (Adams, 2008). He concluded that there was a “need for panels to be more sophisticated in ... assessing practitioner outcomes as well as academic outcomes (p. 67).

### **PBRF Definition of Research**

For the purposes of the PBRF, research is original investigation undertaken in order to contribute to knowledge and understanding and, in the case of some disciplines, cultural innovation and aesthetic refinement. It typically involves enquiry of an experimental or critical nature driven by hypotheses or intellectual positions capable of rigorous assessment by experts in a given discipline. It is an independent, creative, cumulative and often long-term activity conducted by people with specialist knowledge about the theories, methods and information concerning their field of enquiry. Its findings must be open to scrutiny and formal evaluation by others in the field, and this may be achieved through publication or public presentation. In some disciplines, the investigation and its results may be embodied in the form of artistic works, designs or performances. Research includes contribution to the intellectual infrastructure of subjects and disciplines. It also includes the experimental development of design or construction solutions, as well as investigation that leads to new or substantially improved materials, devices, products or processes. (Tertiary Education Commission, 2006, p. 20)



In the meantime, I believe that if practitioners engaged in SoTL fulfil the scholarship criteria and standards Glasser et al. and Shulman propose and their work is interpreted with due regard for “the culture” of the discipline field(s) within which it is located, most SoTL outputs should be able to fulfil PBRF criteria. We need to avoid exaggerating obstacles and rise to the challenge.

### *SoTL and institutional policy, plans, provisions and practices*

Tertiary education institutions signal their position on SoTL in policy and planning documents and through provision of resources that enable SoTL activity. A recent stock-take of SoTL in New Zealand universities confirms that it has a well-established presence that is reflected in institutional documents such as strategic plans, learning and teaching plans, teaching awards, appointment and promotion policy (Haigh, Gossman & Jiao, 2010).

In relation to institutional ‘rhetoric, the authors of this stock-take conclude that

While we acknowledge some scepticism about the impact that rhetoric can have on the everyday realities of practice, undeniably it legitimates particular practices and can provide invaluable leverage when change is promoted. (Haigh, Gossman & Jiao, 2010)

Other data from this comprehensive stock-take indicate that an appropriate agenda for initiatives to increase staff engagement in SoTL will include:

- continued consciousness-raising about the nature and benefits of SoTL
- encouragement and support for SoTL in localized contexts
- alignment of policies and provision of resources so that rhetoric can become reality and SoTL becomes embedded
- planned efforts to engender ripple effects so insights from SoTL projects that focus on the practices of one teacher and their students’ learning are upscaled
- continued monitoring and evaluation of the impact of initiatives associated with the preceding actions.

### *SoTL, Academic Audit and External Evaluation and Review*

If engagement in the scholarship of teaching is considered beneficial for students’ learning, this should be reflected in quality assurance policies at national and institutional levels.

Quality assurance for New Zealand universities is provided by the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU). The New Zealand Qualifications Authority provides a comparable provision (External Evaluation and Review – EER) for other tertiary education providers, with responsibility being delegated to Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality (ITPQ) for institutes of technology and polytechnics.

Both schemes attend to institutions’ fulfilment of those legislative requirements specified in the Education Act (1989). For universities, these include the requirement that “their research and teaching are closely interdependent and most of their teaching is done by people who are active in advancing knowledge” (Education Act, 1989, s162(4)).

Despite a repeated focus on the relationship(s) between teaching and learning and research, a review of the publicly accessible reports for each university indicates that NZUAAU audit panels have varied considerably in the quantity



of their commentary on the teaching-research nexus and in their qualitative and evaluative comments.<sup>2</sup> In only one report was there explicit reference to research on teaching: it was noted that University of Otago considered that “Research informed teaching can also refer to teaching processes – as opposed to disciplinary content that is delivered – that are researched and empirically informed” (New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit, 2010, p. 23).

It is, perhaps, surprising that more attention during audits is not given to the extent to which research/scholarship on learning and teaching is being engaged in and drawn on as a rigorous means of evaluating and enhancing learning and teaching.

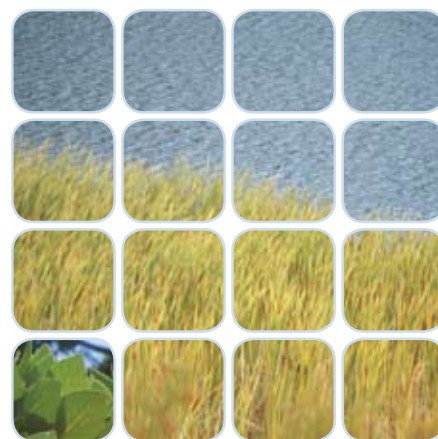
### *External Evaluation and Review*

The NZQA has recently adopted a new quality assurance policy (NZQA, 2009) based on external evaluation and review. Central to the policy is the concept of evaluative quality assurance that focuses “on the outcomes of tertiary education and the key processes that contribute to these outcomes.” If these processes are appropriate, effective quality is assured. EER retains an interest in processes but “from the perspective of the utility or impact of these processes on what is done and achieved – the ‘valued outcomes’ of tertiary education. External evaluation and review focuses on and involves judgments about both educational performance and capability in self-assessment.

Self-assessment capability is defined as “the on-going processes a TEO uses to gain evidence of its own effectiveness in providing quality education” (NZQA, 2009). Key features of effective self-assessment are deemed to be the use of comprehensive, authentic, transparent and robust processes that focus on:

- needs assessment – the extent to which TEOs systematically determine and address the needs of learners, employers and the wider community
- processes and practices – the processes and practices that help to achieve outcomes
- learner achievement – the impact of educational provision on learner progress and achievement
- outcomes – what is being achieved and the value of that for learners, employers and the wider community
- using what is learned – self-assessment should result in evidence-based conclusions and decision-making that will feed into strategic and business planning leading to positive change
- actual improvement – the extent to which improvements are relevant and worthwhile.

These features, including the concern for transparency and robustness, resonate with the hallmarks of scholarship (e.g., Glassick et al., 1997; Shulman, 1998) and the ‘outcome’ and ‘process’ questions that are addressed during external evaluation and review represent the questions likely to be pursued in SoTL inquiries. From this perspective, engagement in SoTL/pedagogical research/institutional educational research can be perceived as forms of self-assessment.



2 Reports are available at [http://www.nzuaau.ac.nz/nzuaau\\_site/publications/reports/audit\\_reports\\_index.htm](http://www.nzuaau.ac.nz/nzuaau_site/publications/reports/audit_reports_index.htm)



## A Future for SoTL

Notwithstanding the significance of these criticisms, I believe that there are sufficient common elements in current definitions to ensure that SoTL remains a concept that can be operationalised to the benefit of teachers and their students. I note that a study by Kreber (2003) confirms that both ‘experts’ in SoTL and mainstream academic staff associate both inquiry and critical reflection with SoTL and more recently Gurm (2009) concluded that commonalities that are now emerging in definitions of SoTL include:

an understanding that this scholarship is about the teaching-learning process; it is about improving the teacher’s understanding of the process within a context. It is reflective and it involves communication of understandings ... This communication of new understandings need not be through peer reviewed journals, for it can occur through less formal means of communication as conversations, the Internet, presentations ... it is context specific, and that discipline is just one part of the context. (pp. 7–8)

From my own perspective, I believe that common to definitions is the notion that:

teachers engage in some form of systematic inquiry into, and critical reflection on, aspects of their own teaching and their students’ learning with the primary intention of improving students’ learning in particular contexts. Such inquiries and reflection processes embody features that give them the status of scholarship: that is, they are made public, subjected to critical review and communicated to a wider community of scholars and practitioners and they fulfil other criteria and standards associated with strong scholarship within disciplines.

This position means that I see overlap, rather than clear-cut difference, between pedagogical research and SoTL, in particular when the former involves such approaches as practitioner action research and teacher self-study.

The primary or initial purpose of SoTL projects may be enhancement of teaching and learning practices in specific contexts, but this does not preclude ‘findings’ having relevance to other contexts. The expectation of “exchange and use by other members of one’s scholarly community” implies potential relevance and SoTL projects often involve efforts to assess generalisability. Integration of the insights from varied projects (integrative scholarship) is also necessary if SoTL is to have a terrain that is coherent and able to be navigated readily, and the development of more generic theory may arise out of such scholarship.

While the size of the SoTL tent (Huber & Hutchings, 2005) may remain an open question, the position adopted by conveners of SoTL conferences certainly seems to endorse this accommodating stance. If the strictures of scholarship are maintained, angst over terminology may ultimately prove irrelevant or unhelpful.



# Resources and Opportunities for SoTL Practitioners

Several national and international organisations promote and support SoTL conferences that focus on SoTL, and/or academic journals that are defined as outlets for SoTL publications.

## Organisations

### *ISSoTL – The International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*

<http://www.issotl.org/>

The mission of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSoTL) is to foster cross-disciplinary and intercultural inquiry into the character, conditions, and possibilities for powerful learning and teaching at the post-secondary level and to disseminate application of these educational practices.

### *Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL)*

<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/scholarship-teaching-learning>

As stated on the Academy's website:

“CASTL represents a major initiative of The Carnegie Foundation. Launched in 1998, the program builds on a conception of teaching as scholarly work proposed in the 1990 report, *Scholarship Reconsidered*, by former Carnegie Foundation President Ernest Boyer, and on the 1997 follow-up publication, *Scholarship Assessed*, by Charles Glassick, Mary Taylor Huber, & Gene Maeroff (1997).”

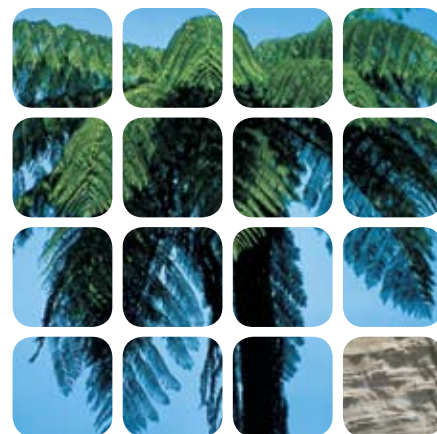
A number of other regional and national bodies endorse and support SoTL:

- Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australia (HERDSA)
- The Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE)
- Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher education (POD)
- Staff and educational Development Association (SEDA)
- Higher Education Academy (HEA)
- Ako Aotearoa: National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence
- Australian Teaching and Learning Council (ATLC)

## Conferences

Numerous conferences provide an outlet for the products of SoTL work. Some are generic in terms of disciplinary/professional focus; others are associated with specific disciplines or professions.

For New Zealand tertiary teachers, the Annual Conference of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) is always relevant and accessible.





Other conferences that focus on SoTL include:

- Annual Conference of International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL).
- Annual Midwest Conference on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.
- The London Scholarship of Teaching & Learning (SoTL) Annual International Conference.

A conference that specifically focuses on pedagogic research has also been established recently:

- International Pedagogical Research in Higher Education (PRHE) Conference.

## *Journals*

**Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (JoSoTL):** a forum for the dissemination of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in higher education for the community of teacher-scholars. The journal is published under the auspices of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) and promotes SoTL investigations that are theory-based and supported by evidence. <http://www.iupui.edu/~josotl/>

Note: ISSOTL also publishes *The International Commons*, a newsletter that contains a range of articles, announcements, brief articles and reports etc.

**International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning:** an open, peer-reviewed, international electronic journal published twice a year by the Center for Excellence in Teaching at Georgia Southern University. The journal publishes articles, essays, and discussions about the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and its applications in higher/tertiary education today. <http://academics.georgiasouthern.edu/ijstol/>

**MountainRise:** an open, peer-reviewed, international electronic journal published twice a year by the Coulter Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning at Western Carolina University as an international vehicle for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning (SoTL). <http://www.wcu.edu/facctr/mountainrise/index.html>

Numerous other journals are potential publication outlets for SoTL.

# SoTL

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