

Chapter 4

Research Paradigms Underpinning Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Papers: A Comparative Analysis of Two Journals

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ABSTRACT

In this second edition of this chapter, the authors re-examine the question of paradigms underpinning contemporary Scholarship of Learning and Teaching (SoTL) research. Focusing on the same journals from the original sample, the authors applied the same methodological tools to the new sample which comprised randomly selected articles published in 2018. The authors identified the paradigm underpinning each article by looking at the stated or implied intent of the article's authors, the drivers of their research (axiology), the nature of the knowledge/understanding developed from their research (epistemology), the literature and methods used, and the outcomes of their work. Using the classification of research paradigms employed in this book, the neo-positivist, inductive mode emerged as the dominant paradigm in both journals, accounting for over half of the papers in both the individual and combined samples. The findings are discussed in terms of their application to future SoTL research.

INTRODUCTION

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 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, Martin, Benjamin, & Prosser, 2000, p. 164)

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Research Paradigms Underpinning Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Papers

Ernest Boyer first used the term “scholarship of teaching” in his book *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (1990). He argued that there were four equally important scholarships in academic work including the Scholarship of Teaching. The word “learning” was later added and the phrase became – Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL).

The authors of this chapter conceive of SoTL slightly differently from the way in which Ling P (Chapter 3) has defined SoTL. To discuss the differences, we will firstly distinguish between scholarly teaching and SoTL. In this chapter, we conceive of scholarly teaching as a process which includes two elements:

1. Being informed by colleagues and the literature (which may be grey, e.g. not only refereed articles, but blogs, wiki, newspapers, etc); and
2. Based on that information, enquiring into your own teaching and collecting data in order to make adjustments to your teaching in light of that feedback.

We conceive that through scholarly teaching an individual improves their own teaching and their students’ learning but they do not need to engage in SoTL to achieve that. In our view, SoTL includes and goes beyond scholarly teaching to make that inquiry public. In contrast to Ling P (Chapter 3), we see this feature of SoTL – making the inquiry into teaching public – as necessarily contributing to the knowledge of the discipline. Hence, a person engaging in SoTL engages in everything that is required in education research as specified in the Ling and Ling (Chapter 1): the research question(s) is/are based in the literature; the work contributes to current understanding; research paradigms and methodologies are consistent with each other; and the data produced, if there are data produced, lead to conclusions pertinent to the research question.

With respect to the Trigwell and Shale (2004) argument that such a definition would render SoTL the equivalent to the scholarship of discovery (Boyer, 1990), it is clear from Boyer’s 1990 paper that his classification was developed to better recognize teaching, including teaching research. We agree with Boyer’s original intent and believe that the way that we have conceived of SoTL remains true to that intent.

Based on our conception, for the purposes of our chapter we defined SoTL as comprising three elements:

1. Being informed about teaching and learning (by other people or the literature which includes grey literature i.e. not refereed articles, but blogs, wikis, newspapers, etc.);
2. Inquiring, seeking answers about teaching and learning (based on the literature) and collecting evidence; and
3. Making that inquiry public to contribute to the knowledge of the discipline. (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999).

SoTL therefore is tertiary learning and teaching inquiry that is made public, is grounded in the literature and is undertaken for a variety of reasons, such as: to improve one’s teaching practice, to contribute to the literature on ongoing SoTL issues and questions, and to build on or interpret theoretical foundations of SoTL (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999; Trigwell et al., 2000).

Institutions internationally have worked to develop policies, processes and systems that incentivize academics to engage in SoTL (Grossman, Haigh, & Jiao, 2009; Hamilton, 2014). This has been achieved, for example, through promotion requirements, professional development opportunities, the funding of teaching grants and the provision of teaching excellence awards both at institutional and faculty levels. The authors of this chapter have worked to improve both scholarly teaching and SoTL for many years. In

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