

Chapter 5

Nine Elements of the Scholarship of Discovery: A Starting Point

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the focus is on higher education research or what Boyer has called the scholarship of discovery. The concepts of higher education research and the scholarship of discovery may have similarities or differences – such comparisons are not the subject of this chapter. The chapter outlines nine elements of the scholarship of discovery for consideration as a starting point and offers an example to illustrate one application of these elements drawn from the field of higher education research.

INTRODUCTION

The concepts of higher education research and the scholarship of discovery may have similarities or differences – such comparisons are not the subject of this chapter. Rather, the chapter contains an outline of some possible elements of the scholarship of discovery for consideration. The aim of the chapter is not to define the scholarship of discovery but to start a conversation about what the scholarship of discovery might look like. To that end, the thoughts of three scholars are articulated and combined to create an initial collection of elements.

POSSIBLE ELEMENTS OF THE SCHOLARSHIP OF DISCOVERY

The elements of the scholarship of teaching, the scholarship of discovery, and educational research, have been variously described and articulated. The elements of high quality educational research outlined by Devlin (2008) over a decade ago include that there should be: appropriate preparatory groundwork; the formulation and use of clear research questions; ethical research conduct; the appropriate use of

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conceptual and theoretical framework(s); the use of relevant and appropriate methods and methodology and choosing the highest quality dissemination outlets.

More recently, the “principles of good practice in SoTL [scholarship of teaching and learning]” outlined by Felten (2013) include that the work is: focused on student learning; grounded in context; methodologically sound; conducted in partnership with students; and that it is appropriately public. While not focusing specifically on the scholarship of discovery, his thesis provides useful food for thought.

In this current publication, in discussing the difference between the essentials of scholarly teaching and those of educational research as a process, Ling P. (Chapter 3) suggests that the latter include: an investigation of a research question or questions informed by current understandings in education, and an appreciation of gaps and/or contentious issues; a systematic investigation aligned to a research paradigm; systematic investigation of the question at scale and across sufficient instances to warrant conclusions with a potential to contribute to current understanding; appropriate data generation or collection; appropriate data analysis; and evidenced, logical conclusion(s), specifying the contribution made to current understanding in education.

Devlin (2008) is focused on higher education research *elements*; Felten (2013) on scholarship of teaching and learning *principles*; and Ling P. (Chapter 3) on education research *essentials*. This chapter does not include a critical review of the literature to determine the definition of the scholarship of discovery. Instead, these three articulations, spaced over about a dozen years are used, to start a conversation about what the scholarship of discovery looks like – what its elements might be. The conversation starts by examining the elements (or principles or essentials) of the scholarship of discovery. To illustrate the elements found by these three scholars, focused on different aspects and looking for slightly different things, a case study of a small evaluative investigation undertaken by the author in the higher education context is used. Whether education research, or the scholarship of discovery, the aim is to provoke thought about the endeavour and the reasons for it.

The elements (or principles or essentials – hereafter known as elements) of the scholarship of discovery inherent in the three selected understandings are summarised in Table 1.

Together, these articulations lead to nine elements of the scholarship of discovery that might serve as a useful starting point. Each element is outlined further below. Following that, an example of their application using a case study of an application of an intervention to improve higher education teaching is used to illustrate each element before a few concluding remarks are made.

Preparatory Groundwork / Situated in Context and Literature / Gaps Identified

The first element of the scholarship of discovery is that the necessary preparatory groundwork should be undertaken to properly situate, contextualise and guide the work. Like all research fields, the higher education field has a body of literature related to the theory, policy, practice and various other aspects of the field in which those engaging in the scholarship of discovery should be well versed. Devlin (2008) suggests any research or scholarship of discovery should be based on a thorough study of the current literature, including relevant previous studies. As in many fields, a literature review is likely to be very helpful in determining the gaps, contradictions, areas that warrant further investigation and suggested future research, all of which can contribute to formulating the area for investigation (Devlin, 2008). Felton (2013), citing Glassick et al. (1997), notes that scholarship “builds on what is known, using relevant theory, practice-based literature, and prior research to establish a firm foundation for inquiry” (p.

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