
CHAPTER ONE

What Is the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning?

In this chapter, my purpose is to provide you with background on the concept and field of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). I begin with a brief review of some of the history of SoTL. I then offer a variety of definitions or conceptions of SoTL that exist in the literature, as well as some thoughts on variations in definitions by group and context. Finally, I offer a discussion of the meanings of related or overlapping concepts.

A Bit of SoTL History

Let's begin near the beginning with a bit of history and background on the concept and field of SoTL. My emphasis in this book is on SoTL in higher education. For a recent book on SoTL at the K–12 level, see Hatch (2006). As I have discussed elsewhere, the actual term the *scholarship of teaching* has been in existence in a public sense for about 15 years (McKinney, 2004), yet SoTL work in higher education has been around much longer. Many disciplines have long histories of interest in teaching and learning and the systematic study of these topics using a disciplinary perspective.

In my own discipline of sociology, for example, our pedagogical journal, *Teaching Sociology*, has been in existence for more than 30 years. Our professional organization, the American Sociological Association, has had a strong teaching movement since the early 1970s. Some other disciplines have similar, long histories of SoTL-like work. Salvatori and Donahue (2002) write, “over the past 40

years . . . because of specific historical, economic, and institutional contingencies, composition studies has witnessed a remarkable proliferation of research in writing pedagogy” (p. 70). The discipline of communication studies also has a long history of work in what we now term SoTL (Morreale, Applegate, Wulff, & Sprague, 2002). The field of chemistry has had a pedagogical journal, *Journal of Chemical Education*, dating back to the 1920s. Yet, there are other fields with much shorter histories and even in those with long histories, colleagues frequently note the gaps and problems in SoTL (Huber & Morreale, 2002; see Chapter 8).

Though Boyer’s (1990) work on, and coining of the term, the scholarship of teaching has probably been most often cited, many individuals have written about related concepts in the years before and just after Boyer’s seminal book. For example, in 1987, Lee Shulman highlighted the phrase *pedagogical content knowledge*. The scholarship of pedagogy was discussed by Pellino, Blackburn, and Boberg (1984) in their work on multiple forms of scholarship. Others have viewed teaching activities and products such as course content as a form of scholarship (Braxton & Toombs, 1982). Goldsmid and Wilson (1980) struggled to make sense of the similarities of and standards for research and teaching, arguing that “collaborative inquiry is at the heart of both activities” (p. 32). In the early 1980s, Baker proposed ideas about the relationships among the following: what we know about teaching as sociologists, our work as teachers, and our writing about teaching (Baker, 1980, 1985, 1986). Pat Cross’s discussions of classroom research go back to at least 1986 when she argued:

I believe that research on teaching and learning should be done in thousands of classrooms across this nation by classroom teachers themselves. What is needed if higher education is to move toward our goal of maximizing student learning is a new breed of college teacher that we shall call a Classroom Researcher. (p. 13)

In 1991 Rice argued that the scholarship of teaching had three parts: synoptic capacity, pedagogical content knowledge, and what we know about learning. Thus, there is a rich history of ideas related to what we now call SoTL that dates back several decades.

Skipping ahead to a sample of the many current conversations about the field of SoTL, Huber and Hutchings (2005) frame SoTL as “viewing the work of the classroom as a site for inquiry, asking and answering questions about students’ learning in ways that can improve one’s own classroom and also advance the larger profession of teaching” (p. 1). Kreber (2005) has written that “the scholarship of teaching is the intellectual, practical and critical work done by college and university teachers; that is, aimed at pursuing significant educational goals” (p. 393). Weimer (2006) prefers the term *pedagogical scholarship*. Consider whether these definitions make sense to you and in your context. I discuss other current conceptualizations of SoTL later in this chapter.

There are many indicators of the growing interest and involvement in SoTL in higher education. To mention just a few, there have been large investments of time, staff, and resources by national organizations in the United States and elsewhere, including by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching with the American Association for Higher Education or AAHE (before its demise) through the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning or CASTL program, the Carnegie Scholars program, and the AAHE Summer Academy and small grants to campus clusters. Campus clusters were groups of institutions formed around SoTL themes that worked together for a three-year period and were one part of the CASTL program. In 2002 we created the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) with a variety of opportunities for doing and sharing SoTL work. Disciplinary societies are also showing more interest in supporting SoTL work, for example, as seen in new association publications and new sections or groups, as well as by cooperative efforts between these societies and the CASTL program. Huber and Hutchings (2005) point to, for example, the new *Journal of Political Science Education*, as well as the new Association for Research in Undergraduate Mathematics Education, which is a part of the Mathematical Association of America.

In addition, there are many local, regional, national, and international conferences on college teaching and/or SoTL with more—it seems—each year. For example, there are the Lilly Conferences, the *Teaching Professor* Conference, the SoTL Colloquium, the ISSOTL

conference, regional conferences in the United States, and SoTL conferences in the United Kingdom (U.K.). Past and new SoTL journals abound. These are both online and traditional, both general and discipline based (see www.ilstu.edu/~sknaylor/sotl.htm for a list and links to the journal web pages; Chapters 2 and 6 provide more on conferences and journals). Thus, SoTL is clearly a growing international initiative in higher education that we can consider, in some ways, a limited social movement.

This social movement to enrich SoTL in higher education has characteristics of social movements more generally including the impetus to the movement such as increasing concern about the lack of knowledge and application of such knowledge for teaching and learning in higher education disciplines as well as frustration over the value and rewards for SoTL. Those active in the movement share some beliefs about the importance and legitimacy of SoTL. Mobilization and the strengthening of the movement are occurring through the leadership, funds, credibility, recruitment of members, and formation of new organizational structures at universities, the Carnegie Foundation, and disciplinary societies. We even have some outside allies such as supportive colleagues and administrators who are not directly involved in SoTL as well as funding agencies and donors (McKinney, 2004).

What is the context to this social movement? There are a number of factors. We have all seen and felt changes in higher education in recent years. These changes have included new technologies, more diverse (broadly defined) student bodies, greater understandings of learning and brain functioning, greater external pressures for accountability about learning, budgetary concerns, and a rejuvenation of interest in and the value of teaching across institutional types. The SoTL movement is a powerful force in helping us avoid “the great tragedy of teaching” which is the “collective amnesia” about what works and why in teaching and learning (Shulman, 2001).

Example Definitions

To move forward on our discussion of doing SoTL, we must all be on the same page (or at least the same chapter in the same book!) in our understanding of the meaning of SoTL. I cannot begin to cite

the burgeoning literature on the meanings of the scholarship of teaching and learning that exists. Such writings include discussions about Boyer's (1990) original idea of the scholarship of teaching, how more recent understandings differ from that idea, other conceptualizations of SoTL, disciplinary differences and similarities, comparisons to overlapping types of work, and related topics (see, for example, Braxton, Luckey, & Helland, 2002; Cambridge, 1999, 2000; Glassick, 2000; Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997; Healey, 2003b; Huber & Hutchings, 2005; Huber & Morreale, 2002; Hutchings & Shulman, 1999; Kreber, 2002a, 2002b, 2003a, 2005; Kreber & Cranton, 2000; McKinney, 2003b, 2004, 2006; Paulsen & Feldman, 2003, 2006; Rice, 1992; Richlin, 2003; Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin, & Prosser, 2000).

We need to recognize the diversity in definitions or understandings of SoTL that exist even among experts in the field (e.g., Kreber, 2002a). I believe such diversity is mostly a good thing in that it makes sense and can be functional that the meaning of SoTL would vary by disciplinary, department, institutional, and national context. In addition, the field will likely be stronger with as inclusive a definition and understanding of SoTL as possible (Huber & Hutchings, 2005).

Yet, communication and success in this social movement can also be hampered by the lack of shared meaning. For example, 90% of Carnegie Scholars (Cox, Huber, & Hutchings, 2004) agree or strongly agree that "confusion among faculty about what constitutes the scholarship of teaching and learning is an obstacle to greater faculty involvement in the scholarship of teaching and learning at my institution" (p. 148). Thus, I offer just a few example definitions for you to consider and discuss with colleagues. In addition, I propose some definitions of key terms for the purpose of delineating SoTL for the remainder of this book.

For your work with colleagues, staff, and students on your campus or in other appropriate situations, I offer the following discussion questions about the meanings of SoTL that are useful in workshops, planning sessions, and similar settings:

- How is SoTL defined or conceptualized in your discipline?
How do you "know?"
- Is SoTL different from scholarly teaching? How so?

- What aspects of a discipline and/or a department might affect the conceptualization of SoTL? In what ways?
- How do colleagues on your campus define SoTL?
- Is there or should there be a campus-wide, cross-discipline definition of SoTL? Why? Why not? What might that be?

In early work at the Carnegie Foundation and AAHE, the following definition has been used: “problem posing about an issue of teaching or learning, study of the problem through methods appropriate to the disciplinary epistemologies, applications of results to practice, communication of results, self-reflection, and peer review” (Hutchings & Cambridge, 1999, p. 7). Richlin (2001) proposes, “The scholarship part of the process involves composing selected portions of the investigation and findings into a manuscript to be submitted to an appropriate journal or conference venue” (p. 61). Martin, Benjamin, Prosser, and Trigwell (1999) argue that the scholarship of teaching is three related activities: engagement with the existing knowledge on teaching and learning, self-reflection on teaching and learning in one’s discipline, and public sharing of ideas about teaching and learning within the discipline. Weston and McAlpine (2001) describe a continuum of growth and development toward the scholarship of teaching. This has three phases: 1) growth in one’s own teaching, 2) growth in dialogue with others about teaching and learning in the discipline, and 3) growth in the scholarship of teaching—developing scholarly knowledge with substantial impact in both the disciplinary and institutional settings.

In Kreber’s work (2001c) using a Delphi study with various SoTL experts, there was high agreement and strong consensus on some statements defining SoTL. For example, this was the case for “Those who practice the scholarship of teaching carefully design ways to examine, interpret, and share learning about teaching. Thereby, they contribute to the scholarly community of their discipline” and “Engaging in classroom research is important but is not sufficient for the scholarship of teaching” (p. 15). Huber and Hutchings (2005) write:

In the face of the different images of the scholarship of teaching and learning, the two of us have come to embrace a capacious view of the topic, wanting to draw this movement in the broad-

est possible terms—as a big tent, if you will, under which a wide range of work can thrive. The core of that work includes the kinds of inquiry and investigation that faculty are most likely to undertake when they examine and document teaching and learning in their classrooms in order to improve their practice and make it available to peers. (p. 4)

Definitions vary by institution as I learned when I attempted to obtain some formal definitions of SoTL provided in various college and university documents. Colleagues from several universities shared these definitions with me. Many institutions appear to have no formal definition of SoTL. Others, such as Portland State University, have incorporated ideas from Boyer's (1990) work into campus documents. At Belmont University (2006), a handbook describes faculty who are engaged in SoTL as those

who consciously reflect on the goals, methods and strategies of teaching; who strive to create classroom communities where student learning is supported, encouraged and finely honed; and who strive continuously to refine their teaching methods and effectiveness and explore new methods. (pp. 57–58)

Personnel policy documents at Buffalo State College (2003) discuss SoTL in the following way:

The scholarship of teaching involves integrating the experience of teaching with the scholarship of research and producing a scholarly product out of those integrative activities. It is the ongoing and cumulative intellectual inquiry, through systematic observation and longitudinal investigation by faculty, into the impact of teaching on learning. Peer review is the evaluation of a scholarly product by an editor or editorial board, review committee, publisher, critic, established scholar or professional outside the scholar's institution but authoritative in the scholar's field. (§3, ¶s4–5)

Though not suggesting a specific definition, Sperling (2003) offers an interesting discussion of the view and understanding of SoTL at community colleges. Sperling writes “This new ‘scholar-

ship' encourages faculty to understand themselves both as practioners who can utilize research to enhance practice and researchers who can contribute to their profession through significant practice-based research" (p. 593). At Dominican University SoTL refers to "the scholarship of teaching which reflects on and systematically analyzes the learning process, then furthers an understanding of the process by communicating the scholarly results to the academy" (N. Carroll, personal communication, October, 2004). At Illinois State University, we have agreed to conceptualize SoTL as the systematic reflection/study of teaching and learning made public. This definition was written in an attempt to include a wide range of research (broadly defined) on teaching and learning in the disciplines that is presented, performed, or published. Additional ideas about SoTL in the context of different institutions are discussed in Chapter 8.

Definitions may also vary by who we ask. For example, in a comparison of the understandings of SoTL by regular academic faculty/staff to those of SoTL experts, Kreber (2003b) reports that regular academic faculty/staff related the scholarship of teaching primarily to effective and good teaching. The experts, in comparison, tended to associate the concept with ideas about peer review and scholarship. In a small questionnaire study on one campus, results showed significantly greater awareness and understanding of SoTL by tenured and tenure-line faculty than by nontenure-track faculty and academic staff (McKinney, et al., 2004).

Finally, often cited are the characteristics of scholarship and, thus, of SoTL. These are that scholarship is an act of intelligence that

possesses at least three attributes: it becomes public; it becomes an object of critical review and evaluation by members of one's community; and members of one's community begin to use, build upon, and develop those acts of mind and creation. (Shulman, 1999, p. 15)

I think you can see diversity as well as consistency or overlap in the many conceptualizations of SoTL. Perhaps most commonly shared are the notions of SoTL as involving some form of reflection on teaching and learning, and that this reflection or some product of the reflection is shared with peers.

Related Concepts

The diversity of views on the meaning of SoTL is demonstrated by even the small number of conceptualizations of SoTL and the brief discussion of related literature presented in this chapter. Definitions vary in terms of breadth, ranging from a narrow definition specifying SoTL as a specific type of empirical research published in peer reviewed journals to a broad definition including many kinds of activities that involve reflection on teaching and learning with some sharing of that reflection. Definitions also vary on whether they emphasize process and/or product. Is SoTL the reflection or the inquiry and/or is it the presentation or publication?

My definitional preferences, based on reading many others in the field (especially Hutchings & Shulman, 1999) and influenced by the contexts in which I work, are for the following distinctions among three related concepts: good teaching, scholarly teaching, and SoTL. These preferences are shared by many but certainly not all who are working in and writing about the field of SoTL. Though I recognize and accept the diversity of definitions, this book is written keeping these distinctions in mind.

Though good teaching has been defined and operationalized in many ways (e.g., student satisfaction ratings, peer observation judgments, self-reflective portfolios), good teaching is that which promotes student learning and other desired student outcomes. Good teaching will support department, college, and institutional missions and objectives. Decades of SoTL and other educational research provide us with a great deal of information on the practices that help promote learning (e.g., Astin, 1993; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Scholarly teaching involves taking a scholarly approach to teaching just as we would take a scholarly approach to other areas of knowledge and practice. Scholarly teachers view teaching as a profession and the knowledge base on teaching and learning as a second discipline in which to develop expertise. Thus, scholarly teachers do things such as reflect on their teaching, use classroom assessment techniques, discuss teaching issues with colleagues, try new things, and read and apply the literature on teaching and learning in their discipline and, per-

haps, more generally. Scholarly teaching is closely linked to reflective practice (e.g., Brookfield, 1995; Schön, 1983). This conception of scholarly teaching is related to what Boyer (1990) labeled the scholarship of teaching.

The scholarship of teaching and learning goes beyond scholarly teaching and involves systematic study of teaching and/or learning and the public sharing and review of such work through presentations, publications or performances. “Study” is broadly defined given disciplinary differences in epistemology and the need for interdisciplinary SoTL. SoTL, then, shares established criteria of scholarship in general, such as that it is made public, can be reviewed critically by members of the appropriate community, and can be built upon by others to advance the field (Shulman, 2001). SoTL focuses on teaching and learning at the college level, and is primarily classroom and disciplinary based. Ideally, SoTL also involves application and use. (McKinney, 2004, p. 8)

Thus, though we should all be good and scholarly teachers, not everyone will choose to do SoTL as defined here—it is a research agenda. The focus of this book is on the scholarship of teaching and learning as defined above.

There are, of course, other concepts and activities closely related to or overlapping with SoTL in addition to good teaching and scholarly teaching. Pat Hutchings (2002b) has noted that SoTL builds on many past traditions in higher education, including K–12 action research, classroom and program assessment, the reflective practice movement, peer review of teaching, traditional educational research, and faculty development efforts to enhance teaching and learning. Several books and articles on these topics are listed in the bibliography and additional resources pages of this book.

Cross and Steadman (1996), in their book on classroom research, discuss the overlap between classroom assessment, classroom research, and SoTL: “Classroom Research may be simply defined as ongoing and cumulative intellectual inquiry by classroom teachers into the nature of teaching and learning in their own classrooms” (p. 2). “Classroom Assessment is usually the more limited concept . . . usually addresses the ‘what’ questions about classroom behaviors . . .

whereas Classroom Research is concerned with the ‘why’ questions” (p. 7). Both are seen as part of, or related to, SoTL but Pat Cross (personal communication, February, 2006) notes that her “emphasis in classroom research has been—and I think continues to be—on the intrinsic motivation of ‘wanting to know,’ in other words on teacher as life-long learner.”

At workshops, I am often asked about the differences between SoTL and assessment (not assessment as in grading students but assessment as in gathering evidence of learning usually at the program level, often for formal purposes). I have made an explicit comparison between assessment and SoTL (McKinney, 2006), which I summarize below. It seems to me that there are differences in degree or emphasis on at least the following characteristics, though this is somewhat oversimplified. Obviously, this comparison depends on the general definitions of and assumptions about assessment and SoTL that you bring to the table.

The purpose of assessment is primarily for internal use for improvement and limited external use for accountability. SoTL, on the other hand, is for internal use for improvement (though, unfortunately, less so than it should be) but also for wide public external use in terms of adding to the literature and shared knowledge base and for faculty productivity (via presentations, performances, and publications; see Chapter 7). The audience for assessment is usually a local audience and is not public; SoTL, by definition, is public. It can be local, but also is meant to be widely shared with an external audience as is traditional disciplinary scholarship. Due to these differences, SoTL work is more likely than assessment to be traditionally peer reviewed.

In terms of a disciplinary base or focus, assessment may have either a disciplinary or broader (college, institution) focus. SoTL is very much discipline based though we now have increasing work across the disciplines (see Chapter 8). Assessment occurs at classroom, course, program/department, college, and institution levels but is often at the broader, more macro levels; SoTL is primarily at the classroom/course or program levels. In my experience, assessment work is much less likely than SoTL to draw (explicitly) on past research.

As assessment work is for local, internal improvement and accountability, it is often not considered research in the sense of

requiring Institutional Review Board (IRB) review related to use of human subjects. SoTL research must have IRB review at some level due to the intent to make the work public via presentations, publications, performances, and so on (see Chapter 5). Both assessment work and SoTL use a wide range of methodologies to gather and analyze data but I think assessment, much more often than SoTL, uses institutional data, large surveys, and measures about things other than learning (e.g., retention, satisfaction, graduation rates). SoTL less often involves this type of data. In addition, SoTL often uses the methodologies known, used, and understood in the particular discipline, perhaps somewhat less true of assessment. Finally, in terms of resistance, I believe that assessment has had (especially years ago) more resistance from faculty and more acceptance (albeit resigned) by administrators. SoTL, in comparison, has greater acceptance by faculty and, perhaps, somewhat less interest by administrators—an implication being that SoTL can sometimes be used to encourage and support faculty involvement in assessment.

Conclusion

SoTL has a long and growing history in higher education beginning, in fact, before the term SoTL was coined. Debates about how to define and understand SoTL continue and may never be resolved given different disciplinary emphases and institutional contexts. Yet, it seems to me that there is some agreement by those most involved in the SoTL movement and the differences that do exist are mostly a matter of degree. As I proceed in this practical guide to SoTL, my focus is on SoTL as the systematic reflection or study of teaching and learning made public.