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Peter Gossman

Glyndwr University, p.gossman@glyndwr.ac.uk

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Scholarly, Scholarship, Excellence – a model for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Author: Peter Gossman, Senior Lecturer in Post-Compulsory Education, Glyndŵr University

Abstract

The article presents some personal thoughts about Boyer's scholarship of teaching concept. It considers how the existing literature informs the notion of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and how it intersects with ideas of teaching excellence and expertise.

Key words: *Scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL),*

Introduction and some SoTL writers

The debate about what constitutes the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) continues and some clarity about the terminology has begun to emerge. This article seeks to consolidate some of the existing ideas and information in a coherent format – a diagram, and also to identify questions that still need to be addressed within this debate.

The model presented was developed during the course of a research investigation, undertaken with staff at a university in New Zealand, into their degree of engagement with SoTL. As this research progressed, it became apparent that an engagement process was at work and that it could be explained within a diagrammatic framework. The framework is presented here and neatly fits two of Boyer's (1990) three SoTL criteria. It is not a piece of SoTL research, since it does not provide any insight into 'pedagogic content knowledge' but it does, hopefully, provide a way for SoTL, as a concept to be accessed and discussed. The model provided illustrates the complexity of SoTL, but also highlights the need for the expansion of publication outlets and general acceptance of non-traditional SoTL outputs in order for them to be accessed by aspiring excellent / expert and scholarly practitioners.

The literature around SoTL is burgeoning and several studies have been undertaken to attempt to define Boyer's rather illusive idea. Kreber (2002) discussed the relationship between scholarly, scholarship (of discovery and teaching), experts and excellence. She revisited this in 2003 (Kreber, 2003) and reported how SoTL is conceived by experts and academics. Her conclusion was that SoTL is different depending upon the context in which it is considered. She also notes that SoTL is "based on values, beliefs and assumptions about what is good teaching and also about what constitutes scholarship in general." (p. 118).

Indeed, engaging in SoTL may be perceived as questioning the existing teaching and learning context (Roxå, Olsson, & Mårtensson, 2007). Roxå *et al* (2007) suggest that SoTL is a social activity and that individuals could engage with colleagues in a similar context to develop a community of practice. This notion tracks Shulman's (2000) requirement that SoTL work should be public and open to critique as well as being generative and Kreber's earlier writing (2003) suggests something similar with SoTL experts participating in discussions with their colleagues whilst being open to their ideas being contested. Boyer (1996, p. 25) has written "abundant evidence shows that both the civic and academic health of any culture is vitally enriched as scholars and practitioners speak and listen carefully to each other."

The issue of entry into SoTL is outlined by Connie Schroeder (2006), who identifies three strategies: programs of enquiry, events & artefacts, and informal dialogue, with the latter consisting of conversations related to planning, the curriculum, and assessment and other teaching acts. Throughout her article, Schroeder refers to SoTL as a zone within which people trade and she envisages in her conclusion a zone that is "accessible, welcoming, flexible and worthwhile, but most of all, intentional" (Schroeder, 2006, pp. 1).

This paper outlines an attempt to get to grips with SoTL definitions and to enter the SoTL trading zone. It maps stages in the development of a complex and refined model for accessing SoTL. By presenting it here, I hope to provide thought-provoking material for others, allowing them to enter the debate and consider how SoTL could and should be defined and implemented in their own professional context.

SoTL and excellent teaching

The thoughts behind this model (see Figure one below) stem from the work of Morehead and Shedd (cited in Kreber, 2003), who suggest that "SoTL is practiced by excellent teachers" (p. 95). There is, however, a suggested separation between a scholarly approach (Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997) and the scholarship of teaching that is "to treat teaching as a form of inquiry into student learning" (Huber & Morreale, 2002, p. 16). Kreber (2003) notes that it is possible for an excellent teacher to not be scholarly and for a scholarly teacher to not be an excellent one, although such an approach might move a teacher towards excellence. She also argues that the "the idea of excellence in teaching in and of itself is not very well defined" (p. 95). In fact, some of the characteristics of teachers who are excellent are hard to define enthusiasm (Cravens, 1996) and charisma (Duck, 1981) spring to mind. There are however, many authors who attempt to define teaching excellence: Bain

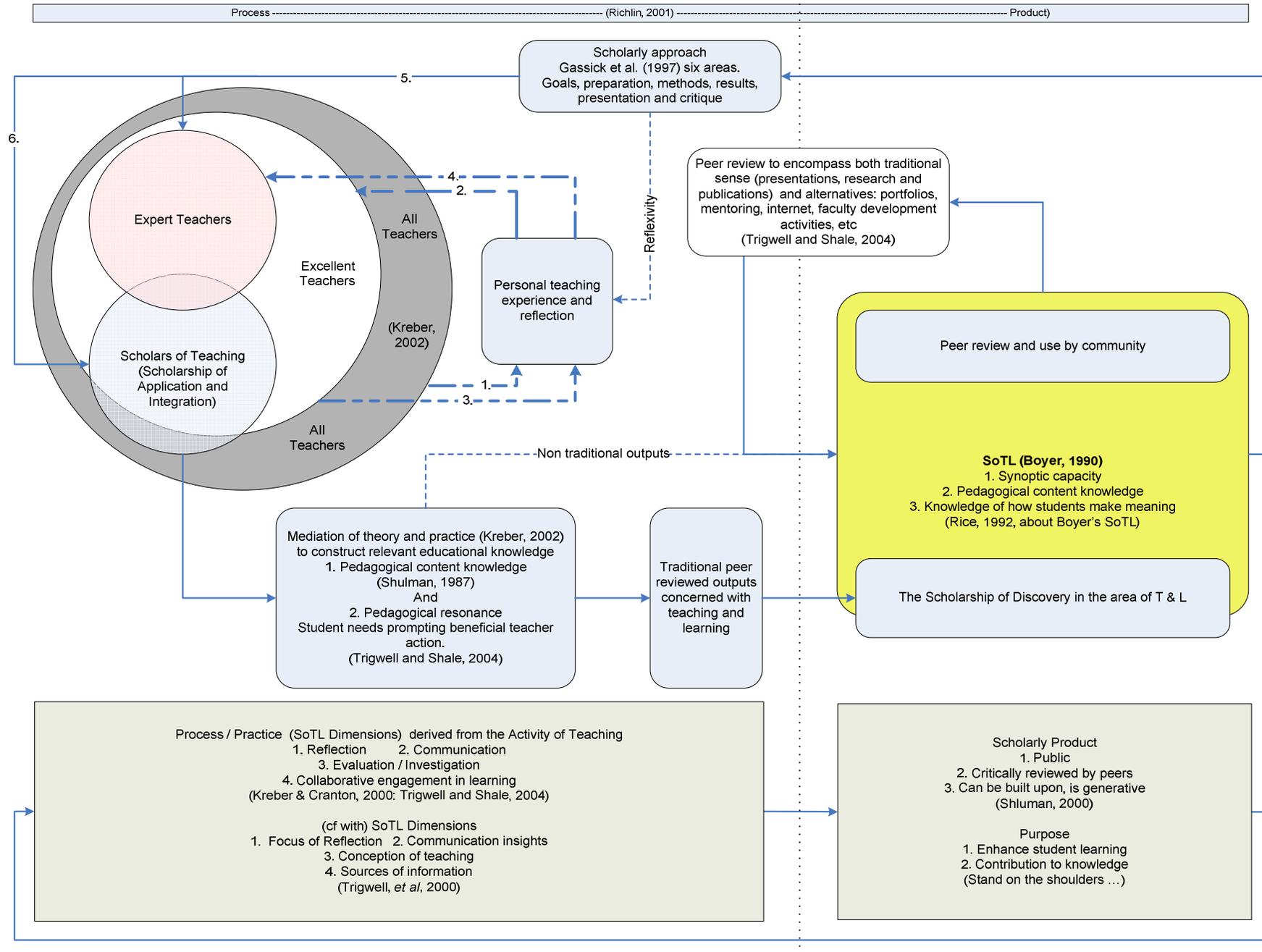
(2005); Hattie (2003); Pinsky, Monson, & Irby (1998); Training and Development Agency (2007), to list a few and on the diagram 'excellent teachers' form a subset within 'all teachers'.

A guide to the model (Figure one) – Part one

At the top left of the figure are 'all teachers' containing three sub-sets: 'excellent teachers', 'expert teachers' and 'scholars of teaching'. To the left of 'all teachers' is the process required to progress from regular teaching to teaching excellence, that is experience and reflection on that experience. Kreber (2002) argues that "excellence in teaching and the scholarship of teaching are perhaps different and require different evaluation criteria and rewards" (p .10) and her significant point is that teaching excellence can be derived from knowledge constructed exclusively from experience. However, experience is only useful if it leads to a change in approach. I have taught at an institution where fire destroyed a colleague's teaching materials and he claimed that he had lost 16 years of work. This may have been the case but he might also have only lost one year's work that he had repeated 16 times. In order to move towards excellence, a teacher follows arrows 1 and 2, reflecting upon their practice and improving it as the result of that process.

Excellence in teaching could be based exclusively on the knowledge that teachers construct as the result of their personal experience (Kreber, 2002). Many teachers would agree that they can identify colleagues who are excellent but who have perhaps neither read teaching literature (i.e. who approach teaching in a scholarly way) nor have engaged in research into their own practice. This is similar to suggesting that lessons do not need planning because some of the best ones are unplanned. It can be argued, however, that the best lessons are planned but deviate from the plan in response to student direction. By the same token engagement with SoTL literature is likely to improve teaching practice and therefore student learning, whilst limited or cursory engagement, for most teachers, will limit their development towards expertise.

Figure one: A model for SoTL



Excellence and Expertise

If a teacher is recognised as excellent and/or expert (by whatever criteria) should the academic community be raising the bar by demanding that excellence and expertise be made more widely available for critique, including meeting the requirements of SoTL criteria? Indeed, if excellent teachers are not engaged in SoTL, are they committing a crime similar to failure to publish research findings in the scholarship of discovery? In the field of archaeology, digs without write up and publication are akin to looting (Atwood, 2004). Obviously being an excellent teacher but not making your insights, methods and ideas available for evaluation by the teaching community cannot really be cast as looting (who is the lootee?), but does this represent a lost opportunity? Equally, in the medical world Winslow (1996), highlights the implicit contract between researchers and their colleagues to publish meaningful results. An excellent teacher then, by definition, must have some meaningful results about the process of teaching they ought to share with their colleagues and the wider teaching community. Excellent teachers, therefore, should be engaged in the scholarship of teaching. By recognising excellence but not then demanding scholarship, the academic community is not gaining access to a valuable pool of information that could contribute to the field of pedagogical content knowledge.

A guide to the model (Figure one) – Part two

An excellent teacher can become an expert if they continue with their reflective approach (arrows 3 and 4) and add engagement with scholarly literature (arrow 5). This arrow illustrates how a scholarly approach (defined by Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997 – see table one below) feeds into the development of expertise. This route to expertise is endorsed by Kreber (2002) who states “experts re-invest the mental resources freed by pattern learning in problems” (p. 13). In addition she highlights how this process is continuous with increasingly complex problems approached and solved, resulting in ever more sophisticated skills and knowledge (Kreber, 2002). So experts continuously seek to further understand their work which in turn provides them with more effective problem solving strategies and they are motivated by a desire to be even more effective. This manifests itself by the individual taking action, apparently without thinking, as they blend their combined declarative educational theory knowledge and their how to teach procedural knowledge with their reflection upon experience (see figure two).

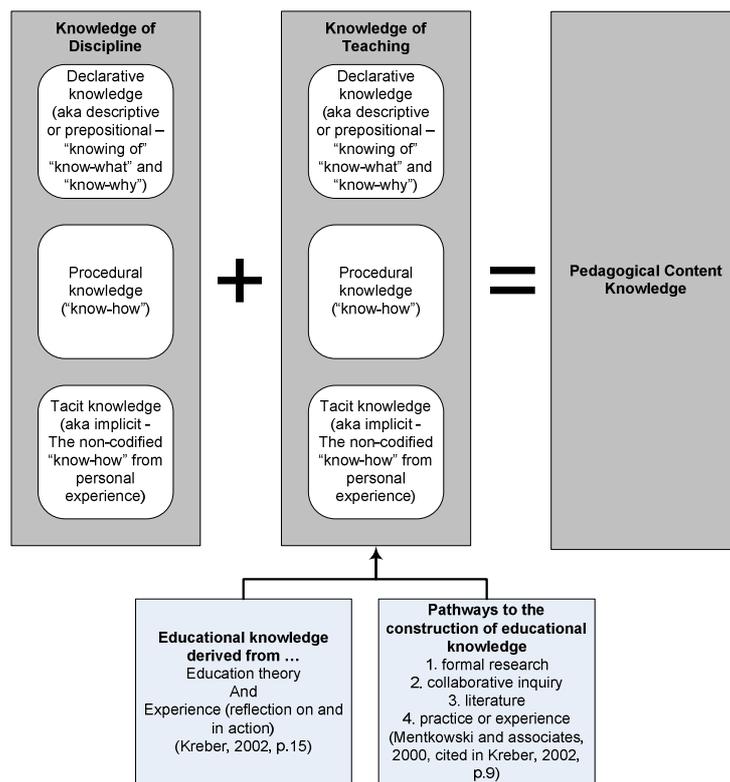
Aspects of scholarship that are common to the four categories; discovery, integration, application and teaching proposed by Boyer in 1990, according to Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff (1997).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear Goals - Does the scholar state the basic purposes of his or her work clearly? Does the scholar define objectives that are realistic and achievable? Does the scholar identify important questions in the field?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate Preparation - Does the scholar show an understanding of existing scholarship in the field? Does the scholar bring the necessary skills to her or his work? Does the scholar bring together the resources necessary to move the project forward?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate Methods - Does the scholar use methods appropriate to the goals? Does the scholar apply effectively the methods selected? Does the scholar modify procedures in response to changing circumstances?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant Results - Does the scholar achieve the goals? Does the scholar's work add consequentially to the field? Does the scholar's work open additional areas for further exploration?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective Presentation - Does the scholar use a suitable style and effective organisation to present his or her work? Does the scholar use appropriate forums for communicating work to its intended audiences? Does the scholar present her or his message with clarity and integrity?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflective Critique - Does the scholar critically evaluate his or her own work? Does the scholar bring an appropriate breadth of evidence to her or his critique? Does the scholar use evaluation to improve the quality of future work?

Table one: Common aspects of scholarship

Pedagogical content knowledge

The 'scholars of teaching' within 'all teachers', can include teachers from the 'expert' and 'excellent' subsets. These scholars of teaching, somewhat paradoxically, do not need to be experts. It is possible (although unlikely) that a teacher engage with scholarly literature and not make subsequent changes to their practice. Haigh (2006) sums up a scholar of teaching as, an individual who asks questions that arise about student learning. It is these scholars that mediate theory and practice (Kreber, 2002) from their discipline and from education to create pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987, see figure two below) and develop pedagogical resonance (Trigwell and Shale, 2004). Kreber (2002) also notes that "for too long we have conceived of relevant knowledge in the discipline as that which relates to the content of the field, paying little attention to how the knowledge is constructed and transmitted" (p. 18).

Figure two: Pedagogical content knowledge



A guide to the model (Figure one) – Part three

The SoTL can be separated into process or product (Richlin, 2001) and the left hand side of the dotted line through the diagram (figure one) represents the process side. This process, the identification of specific aspects of knowledge about teaching, has been subdivided by Kreber and Cranton (2000) into reflection (on content, process and premise), understanding others, and emancipation (knowledge providing freedom from constraints). The common aspects of SoTL practice have also been categorised by Trigwell and Shale (2004) into reflection, communication, evaluation / investigation and a forth element of the process; the collaborative engagement between teacher and student of learning together. McKenzie (2007) agrees and notes how the common features of SoTL include “pedagogic content knowledge, critical reflection, inquiry into the connections between teaching and learning in order to gain insights into and for the improvement of learning, and engagement with and evaluation by peers” (2007, p. 1). These processes can be compared and contrasted with Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin & Prosser’s (2000) dimensions of SoTL; a focus for reflection (what do I need to know? How do I find out?), the communication of insights, a conception of teaching that is on student learning, and an engagement with the scholarly contributions of others.

The two boxes at the foot of figure one, summarise moving from scholarly process (the process/practice box on the bottom left) to scholarly product (the box on the bottom right). Rice (1992) requires SoTL, as a product, to have three components; synoptic capacity, pedagogical content knowledge and a “what we know about learning” aspect. Schön (1995, cited in Trigwell et al., 2000, p. 157) adds that new knowledge about teaching is a requirement of SoTL. In contrast scholarship, according to Shulman (1993, cited in Trigwell et al., 2000) requires a product to be available for sharing, discussion, exchange (i.e. made public) and critique (review by peers). Trigwell and Shale emphasised this again in 2004 arguing that SoTL needs to be subject to public scrutiny and that it must have at its heart a demonstration of “how learning is made possible” (p. 525). In addition the product should be generative (Shulman, 2000) hopefully, allowing the next researcher to stand on the shoulder of others to see further.

This viewpoint raises a question. Is SoTL simply the scholarship of discovery in the field of education? The answer to this perhaps lies in the form in which the scholarship is made public. SoTL entails a public account of some or all of: vision, design, interaction, outcomes and analysis. It should also involve peer review and publication, in a broad sense, in a manner that can be used within the member’s community (Shulman, 1998). Scholarship of discover in teaching represents traditional peer reviewed outputs published in familiar forms; conference papers, books, chapters and journal articles. Such material provides food for thought for teaching professionals and supplies ideas about how to enhance the student learning experience. In addition, there is a place for less traditional outputs (mentoring, portfolios, curriculums, teaching plans, etc) which equally, have the potential to provide insights, contribute to theory and practice, and also comply with identified SoTL criteria (see Rice, 1992; Schön, 1995 and Shulman 1998). These types of outputs are available, or at least have been written, but struggle to find a level of recognition similar to the traditional ones. It is perhaps this recognition for teaching in a scholarly way that Boyer was advocating. Imagine what might be gained if communities of scholarly teachers could easily access ideas promoting learning in an area of their subject that they were refining or developing for the first time. Why does this not already take place? However, the problems of how to value and evaluate the traditional outputs of the scholarship discovery are well know (consider the Research Assessment Exercise in the UK or Performance Based Research Fund in New Zealand), but for SoTL processes and non-traditional outputs, such as a teaching

portfolios, curriculum documents or session plans, the journey is likely to be equally, if not more, complex.

Schulman (2000) strongly argues that university academic staff have a role, that they are required to undertake in a scholarly manner, to seek, critique and distribute knowledge, not only in their own field of research but also in their teaching. He notes the curious discrepancy between discovery research, where scholars stand on the shoulders of giants, and teaching, where there is highly limited material (curriculums, lesson plans, etc), in comparison, for scholars of teaching to draw upon. Boyer (1990) wrote “we need scholars who not only skilfully explore the frontiers of knowledge, but also integrate ideas, connect thought to action, and inspire students” (p. 77). We, as university staff, are faced with the challenge of professing advanced scholarship in our disciplines, or within the scholarship of teaching of our discipline.

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