



Defining and supporting the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL): A sector-wide study

International case studies

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The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Australia

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In Australia, there have been a number of recent initiatives that provide details on the ways in which SoTL is being interpreted and applied to reward and recognise excellent teaching. Two examples are:

1. SoTL in career development and promotion in universities;
2. SoTL in teaching awards.

SoTL's place in career development and promotion can be illustrated by the Australian University Teaching Criteria and Standards (AUTCAS) project which developed a framework and produced indicative criteria, evidence and standards. The AUTCAS project has been facilitating over 24 of the 39 Australian universities through a process of creating or reviewing their teaching criteria and evidence expectations, and embedding these into the policies, processes and practices of the universities. This alignment process is necessary so that university leaders, HR, policy writers, academic supervisors and promotion committees together can ensure that **career progression** is not only possible but being enacted and evident to the wider community of scholars.

The seven AUTCAS teaching criteria were identified through a rigorous process, drawing on reviews of the literature, empirical research on effective teaching, Australian university criteria, and the UKPSF. While the criteria do not specifically refer to SoTL, all are underpinned by expectations that teachers should be able to demonstrate their scholarly understanding of teaching, pedagogy, learning, assessment, and curriculum development. Each criterion prompts the teachers to detail their application of SoTL understanding through the indicative evidence and standards. Criterion five specifically provides an opportunity for teachers to detail the ways in which they utilise SoTL (taking a broad definition of ways in which SoTL can be demonstrated), including researching and evaluating teaching and learning, publishing, contributing papers at conferences and forums, mentoring colleagues, supporting communities of practice and progressively taking a leadership role in the university, sector and/or the discipline.

The expectation that SoTL will be demonstrated rises through the career promotion levels, but with no requirement for explicitly researching into teaching and learning. The framework, examples and case studies detailing how different institutions and individuals have used the **AUTCAS framework** are located on the website.

The second example is that of teaching awards. Teaching awards were introduced in some Australian universities in the early 1990s. This was followed by the introduction of national teaching awards in 1997, which in turn prompted the remaining universities to establish university awards. The majority of universities use the five national teaching award criteria. The first award applications were largely practice focused and drew on a limited range of evidence. As the prestige of university and national awards has grown, so have the standards and expectations. While it still may possible to be awarded a university-based award with limited evidence of SoTL, the national teaching awards increasingly require that SoTL be demonstrated (**OLT Awards**).

In both examples, the definition of SoTL that is most commonly applied is that the "scholarship of teaching should first be about improving student learning (primarily as it is carried out through teaching) and second about scholarship (a systematic, peer supported, research-like scholarly processes, which together lead to higher quality teaching" (Trigwell 2013, p. 54).

Despite improvements in the clarity of expectations and standards and detailed policies for promotion, Australian teachers, in common with their international academic colleagues, remain persistently sceptical that their teaching contributions will be recognised and rewarded with career progression. This scepticism will continue until significant progress has been made towards embedding the teaching criteria and

establishing standards within the majority of universities' systems and policies. More importantly, teachers need to see consistent evidence of career progression and promotion of excellent teachers (not just of the exceptional teachers).

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The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Europe

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The development of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) in Europe has been influenced by the work of Boyer (1990), and developments in Australian higher education (HE) and the US. In Europe a number of initiatives, including the annual **London SoTL International Conference** (2001-10), have facilitated developments.

The complex and changing 'European region' consists of 50 countries, with a subset of 28 making up the European Union (EU). The issues worthy of consideration include language, governmental drivers and professional development.

In 2014, the **ISSOTL conference** in Quebec, attracted 43 European participants (around 10% of the total), from 11, mainly EU, countries. In 2015, the inaugural **European SoTL Conference** attracted abstracts from Ireland (88, host country), UK (44), Sweden (18), Hungary (4), Germany (3), Denmark (2), and one each from Belgium, Finland, Poland, France and Spain (EU countries), and Switzerland and Norway. This event was publicised through European and national networks and not restricted to SoTL networks. Visible activity has essentially remained limited to 11 EU countries.

What factors contribute to this apparently limited participation? Within the EU alone, there are more than 24 officially recognised languages, and more than 60 indigenous regional languages. A current survey suggests the **language** of SoTL acts as an inhibitor to theory and practice, and to the mapping of SoTL across national boundaries. To date, the survey has not found one European language, apart from English, that has an equivalent term in its vocabulary. Renc-Roe (2011) noted that in many European countries the word scholarship is associated with a monetary award (stipend or bursary). In Sweden, SoTL was adopted into the language in its English form because there is no Swedish equivalent (Mårtensson 2015). SoTL **training** was compulsory from 2002 (Lindberg-Sand and Sonesson 2008), though is now designated non-compulsory.

A search of the literature for dominant themes in SoTL in Europe did not prove particularly useful. However, it highlighted the large number and diversity of **journals and networks** that include research that could be deemed SoTL or considered to impact on or inform SoTL practitioners. It also uncovered a broadening of the geographic spread to countries such as Croatia, Greece, Turkey, Italy and Portugal. It highlighted champions within centres of teaching and learning, and within disciplines. It revealed multi-ethnic collaborations, with SoTL initiated by European HE faculty, in a non-European setting, or initiated by non-European faculty, with collaborating partners in Europe.

The Bologna and subsequent declarations influenced government strategies and the nature of SoTL particularly in 2000-10. For example, funding in Ireland and the UK saw many higher education institutions set up teaching and learning centres, encouraging SoTL through informal and formal staff development. There was a focus on curriculum design, assessment of learning outcomes, widening participation, and mobilisation. Countries that were early adopters now work with later adopters in the European Education Area. These networks, addressing the needs of EU enlargement, have potential to impact on SoTL engagement.

Key **European reports** refer to the importance of SoTL and act as drivers for change, as well as sources of information for SoTL projects (EU 2014). Nationally funded bodies such as the Irish NAIRTL (2007-12) and NFETLHE (2013-present), and the UK Higher Education Academy (HEA) (formerly Institute for Learning and Teaching in higher education (ILThe)) have encouraged embedding of SoTL in the wider teaching and learning culture.

National priorities now encourage investigations of the effect of the digital landscape on teaching and learning. In a bottom-up development (though initiated by Bologna) students as collaborators in SoTL are helping to shape HE policy and practice. A welcome trend is that **disciplinary networks** are growing in

importance and complementing the work of central support units. This incorporates the culture and value base of the discipline as a key element of SoTL research.

The UKPSF in the UK requires HE practitioners to carry out an enquiry into an area of their teaching, reflect on it and report outcomes, to gain professional recognition. The UK PDF has is being emulated by other European countries, and resource-sharing has been influential. This is one driver influencing the development of SoTL. Lindberg-Sand and Sonesson (2008) give an account of a parallel evolution in Sweden which has influenced European partners.

Greater impact of SOTL can be leveraged by:

- > broadening terminology, to include research and creative enquiry, to capture scholarship that has undoubtedly taken place without intentionally using the term SoTL;
- > facilitate local affordable collaborative activity and use technology to share resources;
- > highlight funding such as Erasmus+ 'Capacity Building in Higher Education' to grow innovative teaching practice informed by scholarly reflection on student learning.

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The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the US

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Often spurred by the challenges and opportunities familiar to higher education everywhere – demands for greater accountability; changing student demographics; the availability and even the imperative of online teaching and learning; an evolving understanding of how students, as well as faculty, develop as learners – many of the 3,500 US post-secondary institutions have engaged in wide-ranging conversations about how better to understand and improve student learning, faculty/staff professional development, and the relationship between these two missions. In the 25 years since *The Scholarship of Teaching*, these conversations have turned in many places to the principles and practices of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) as a way to frame and respond to this challenge.

Perhaps SoTL's greatest effect in the US has been on the way institutions conceptualise faculty **professional development** and how they have come to understand its connection to student learning. SoTL provides a way for faculty to take teaching seriously that resonates with their professional identity. In emphasising Boyer's (1990) notion of teaching as a scholarly act and Bass's (1999) crucial distinction between teaching problem and teaching problematic, reinvigorated teaching and learning centers have helped institutions move away from a **deficit model** to an **inquiry model** of professional development (CITL at IU¹; WTFS at UW System²); CATL³ at Elon) Consequently, faculty and teaching staff are considered sources of important questions about student learning and as resources for gathering information about this learning in disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts. Many centres now house programmes that develop faculty as scholars in teaching and learning, in addition to providing the usual workshops on pedagogical practices (McKinney 2013). At one institution, however, SoTL work is housed in its own office, a unit responsible for systematic investigation of student learning for the entire campus (Buffalo State⁴). Whatever the reporting lines, faculty and teaching staff now play greater roles in advancing institutional agendas such as programme re-design, assessment, and the intelligent examination and implementation of 'high impact' practices. **Programmes** to develop these scholars, and to integrate their work at institutions and in disciplinary societies, have been local, statewide, and national, in the latter case, most notably the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL)⁵.

Valuing this work within **tenure and promotion** policies and practices has always been a particular challenge. Many institutions continue to refuse to recognise scholarly work in teaching and learning as legitimate research unless performed by faculty and teaching staff trained and credentialed in educational research. At the other end of the spectrum, a small number of institutions have actually taken advantage of the challenge SoTL work raises – what are the characteristics of scholarship? – to broaden their definition and ultimately change the guidelines for promotion and tenure (Buffalo State⁶, Elon⁷, Dominican⁸, UW-Green

¹ <http://citl.indiana.edu>

² <https://www.wisconsin.edu/opid/wisconsin-teaching-fellows-scholars-program/>

³ <https://blogs.elon.edu/issotl13/an-introduction-to-the-scholarship-of-teaching-and-learning/what-is-sotl-foundations-and-key-characteristics/>

⁴ <http://sotl.buffalostate.edu>

⁵ For a summary of campus SoTL work based on a survey of 59 active institutions in 2009, see Appendix A in Hutchings *et al.* 2011.

⁶ <http://bscintra.buffalostate.edu/dops/policysect6/060405.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.elon.edu/e-web/academics/teacsch.xhtml>

⁸ https://jicsweb1.dom.edu/ICS/icsfs/Faculty_Handbook_2011-2012.pdf?target=a0e7c243-17d9-4b4c-a701-a9c964f0ac12

Bay⁹). Taking this tack often results in guidelines that incorporate Boyer's 'four scholarships' in various combinations (1990). Between the two extremes we find many creative responses to characterising and valuing SoTL work: as additional evidence of **teaching excellence** (required or provided at the discretion of the individual); as **part of a research profile** (required or provided at the discretion of the individual); as research if published in peer-reviewed journals (sometimes only in certain fields or only in certain journals of the field); as evidence of (required) professional development in teaching.

In summary, then, the principles and practices of the scholarship of teaching and learning continue to find fertile ground in the fields of faculty/staff development and institutional change at US institutions. They have only marginally affected tenure and promotion policies, however, and only where institutions take student learning serious enough to value systematic inquiry into it.

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