

Interrogating the Role of Academic Developers in the Promotion of Scholarly Teaching and the Scholarship of Learning and Teaching

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ABSTRACT In this paper the researchers sought to examine the role of academic developers in universities in the promotion of scholarly teaching (ST) and scholarship of learning and teaching (SOLT). The concepts scholarly teaching and scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education are explained and their differences outlined. The researchers further discuss the significance of SOLT in the enhancement of teaching and learning in higher education. In the paper the researchers also examine the role academic developers should play in ensuring the nurturing and development of SOLT among academics by suggesting practical activities academic developers should engage in ensuring the promotion of SOLT. Possible hindrances and challenges in academic developers' role in promoting SOLT are also evaluated and solutions suggested.

INTRODUCTION

The core functions of a university are teaching and learning, research and community engagement. Institutions of higher learning are increasingly giving attention to teaching and learning practices (Clark et al. 2009). Universities in South Africa, like other universities the world over, continuously seek to improve excellence in teaching and learning. This has been seen by a number of universities introducing excellence in teaching awards to reward excelling lecturers. Teaching excellence is shown by, among other things, subject matter and pedagogical expertise (Bain 2004). Of importance in the enhancement of teaching is for teachers in the university to engage in both scholarly teaching (ST) and the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL). Martin (2007) states that the scholarship of teaching and scholarly teaching are closely related activities which differ in intent and outcome.

What is Scholarly Teaching?

There are different authoritative views of scholarly teaching. Richlin (2001) cited in Vajoczki et al. (2011: 1) state that;

Scholarly teaching involves consulting the literature, selecting and applying appropriate

information to guide the teaching and learning experience, conducting systematic observations, analyzing the outcomes, and obtaining peer evaluation of classroom performance.

In scholarly teaching the teacher does not just engage in teaching as routine business. Teaching is informed by what obtains in literature as constituting good teaching. Teaching is informed by existing theory, research, and practical ideas about student learning and teaching, instructional design, teaching and learning styles, and methods of assessment. One's teaching is also exposed to critique from students and peers and the teacher uses evaluation feedback to improve practice. McKinney (2007) notes that scholarly teachers professionalise teaching and the body of knowledge on teaching and learning is taken as a discipline on its own which requires to be pursued and developed. This means that a teacher who is a discipline expert is further initiated into the field of teaching and learning by training.

Over and above the principles of good teaching which include the use of active learning techniques, prompt feedback, high expectations, and use of diverse ways of learning (Chickering and Gamson 1987), scholarly teaching is based on reflective practice. In talking about reflective practice Moore (2005: 1) states that:

Reflection is a form of mental processing that we use to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome. It is applied to gain understanding of relatively complicated or unstructured ideas and is largely based on the re-processing of knowledge, understanding and possibly, emotions that we already possess.

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It is clear from the above observation that scholarly teachers do not take their everyday practice for granted, hence they reflect on what they do to gain clearer understanding of how they do things with the view to improve on any deficiencies. In a university set-up the university teacher ceases to rely on a single approach to teaching but interrogates how he teaches by referring to literature and theories. Teaching becomes a scholarly activity. Scholarly teachers are armed with the skills and expertise in curriculum adaptation, teaching, learning, assessment, among others and they have sound understanding and appreciation of the diverse needs of students. Such teachers become expert teachers and Rollet (2001: 27) observes that:

Experts rely on a large repertoire of strategies and skills that they can call on automatically, leaving them free to deal with unique or unexpected events...The wealth of knowledge and routines that they employ, in fact is so automatic that they often do not realise why they preferred a certain plan of action. However, when questioned, they are able to reconstruct the reasons for their decisions and behaviour.

The fact that scholarly teachers draw on that wealth of skills and knowledge to deal with any classroom situation shows how important it is for all university teachers to develop a scholarly approach to teaching. One will not just have different ways of dealing with classroom situations but will have informed ways that are justifiable. Allen and Field (2005) state that among other things, scholarly teaching is developed by reflecting on teaching and learning, use of evidence, informed approaches to teaching and learning, attendance at conferences and workshops on teaching and learning, discussion with colleagues about teaching and learning and their engagement with the literature on teaching and learning. This shows that deliberate efforts and programmes are required to nurture and develop scholarly teachers.

Scholarly teachers also keep Reflective Teaching Portfolios since portfolio development is a popular method of encouraging critical reflection and evaluation. One is made to record reflections and evaluations in order to keep a dossier of teaching experiences and meaning made of such experiences. Brockbank and McGill (1998: 34) describe the reflective teaching portfolio as:

...a compilation of learning intentions, accounts of learning activities, learning outcomes,

records of reflective dialogues. It includes evidence from a variety of sources including your private learning journal/diary/log, and most important of all, a reflective document detailing your learning process.

Documenting one's teaching and learning activities in a reflective teaching portfolio are a hallmark of scholarly teaching. It is through such documentation that one makes critical appraisal of practice and in a way develop, refine and evaluate their own teaching philosophies. Martin (2007) states that evidence for scholarly teaching could include the ability of teachers to develop and redesign courses and the keeping of teaching and course portfolios.

What is Scholarship of Teaching and Learning?

There are numerous scholarly definitions of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) since the term was coined by Boyer (1990). Allen and Field (2005) state that the scholarship of teaching and learning goes beyond teaching in an effort to understand how students learn effectively and how teaching influences this process. This alludes to the systematic examination of teaching and learning processes, which is research. This is consistent with Cambridge's (2001) definition of scholarship of teaching as work that entails posing a problem about a teaching or learning issue, studying the problem using methods appropriate to the discipline, applying the results to practice, communicating the results, self-reflecting, and participating in peer review of the work. The whole research process is captured in Cambridge's (2001) definition as scholarship of teaching involves problematising issues, applying appropriate research tools to investigate the problem, coming up with findings and applying the findings to improve practice as well as publishing the findings for wider consumption by the academic community. Hutchings and Shulman (1999) also reveal that one's research work into teaching and learning should be subjected to critique by fellow scholarship. Such is peer evaluation which is an integral component of every research and publication endeavour.

Shulman (2001) also states that there are several ways of communicating research findings and presentations and publications are such ways. It is, therefore, clear that SOTL is further

development of scholarly teaching. It takes scholarly teaching further by engaging in research-based on-going learning about teaching and the demonstration of such knowledge (Kreber and Cranton 2000). Student learning is improved by investigating learning of one's own students and one's own teaching (Brookfield 1995). It is also important to note that teachers who engage in SOTL are experts in their disciplines and they research and communicate findings of teaching and learning in their disciplines. SOTL, therefore, has three important elements namely engagement, reflection and communication (Martin et al. 1999). In engagement the teacher looks at literature and theory to establish the contributions of others to teaching and learning. In reflection the teacher critiques own practice within the context of the discipline and how literature and theories inform and research is conducted to answer problems. In communication, findings are disseminated for the improvement of practice.

Martin et al. (1999) further argue that teaching can only be accorded high esteem in higher education if it is publicly seen to be a scholarly pursuit. This is in contrast to common sense discourse that teaching is normally associated with in university. Academics by virtue of their high discipline qualifications often believe they can teach and that they have no problem with teaching, delivery, facilitation or assessment issues (Henshaw and Kareva 2013). Any problem in teaching and learning is attributed to students. In summarising the difference between ST and SOTL, Smith (2001) argues that teaching is about activities to promote student learning and scholarly teaching is a reflection of one's knowledge about and approach to teaching and learning while on the other hand scholarship of teaching and learning is about the contributions to a developing body of knowledge about teaching and learning. In the university today there is need for "learning managers who are reflective practitioners and who apply their analytical skills to the important activity systems with which they are engaged (Knight and Trowler 2000: 79). This is only possible through scholarly teachers who further engage in SOTL.

Importance of ST and SOTL

The importance of scholarly teaching is that it improves student learning by ensuring that

students are active participants in the learning process. This is made possible through improved student centred teaching methods. Barr and Tagg (1995: 13) suggest that a new paradigm for institutions should be "to produce learning" rather than "to provide instruction." In knowledge production students are masters of their own learning and university teachers should possess useful facilitation skills to ensure that meaningful learning takes place. Such facilitation enables students to develop advanced concepts and life-long learning commitment (Hutchings and Shulman 1999). This is only possible through scholarly teaching.

Scholarly teaching allows university teachers critically engage with the scholarly literature and this enables them to view where their work practices are situated within the scholarly domain. Quinnel et al. (2010) observe that as disciplinary experts university teachers are best placed to identify best practices in scholarly teaching in the context of their disciplines. Discipline-specific teaching approaches will be developed by the discipline experts themselves as they link theory, as espoused in literature, with practice. Clegg (2008) argues that it is the discipline expert who is the key in reconciling theory and practice.

Scholarly teaching ensures a professional approach to teaching which displaces the textbook centred pedagogy without consideration for students' understanding. In scholarly teaching teachers are able to reflect and criticise their own practice and that of peers. Teaching is done as informed by best practices and workable theories. Teaching also becomes a public domain with teachers open to inspection and observation and finding platforms to converse about teaching and learning and exchange ideas about best practices. In scholarly teaching, teaching ceases to be an isolated activity.

Engagement in SOTL results in the creation of new knowledge on teaching and learning. This body of knowledge shared within communities of practice is very important resource material for further inquiry into teaching and learning. Through research and publication as well as conference presentation on teaching and learning issues, university teachers advance knowledge in discipline. SOTL also assists in recommending solutions to felt teaching and learning problems. Such recommendations are a result of empirical investigations. Koshy

(2005) observes that research findings filter into practice to refine it through evidence. Scholarship of teaching and learning, therefore, provides university teachers with evidence of researches into teaching and learning from which they learn to improve own practice.

Through engagement in SOTL university teachers grow to be scholars in teaching and learning of their disciplines. Their work is subjected to rigorous peer review processes which gives them important feedback to improve research techniques and teaching and learning issues. Being scholars in teaching and learning issues positions university teachers to be experts in teaching who continuously question issues to seek solutions to improve practice.

THE ROLE ACADEMIC DEVELOPERS' ROLE IN PROMOTING ST AND SOTL

Academic developers are responsible for co-ordinating teaching and learning functions in universities by way of academically supporting university teachers to enhance practice. There are various ways academic developers should consider in promoting ST and SOTL as shown in Figure 1.

Professional Development Programmes:

Academic developers should mount regular and periodic professional development workshops on teaching and learning to academic staff in the university. In buttressing the need for carefully planned and effective professional development

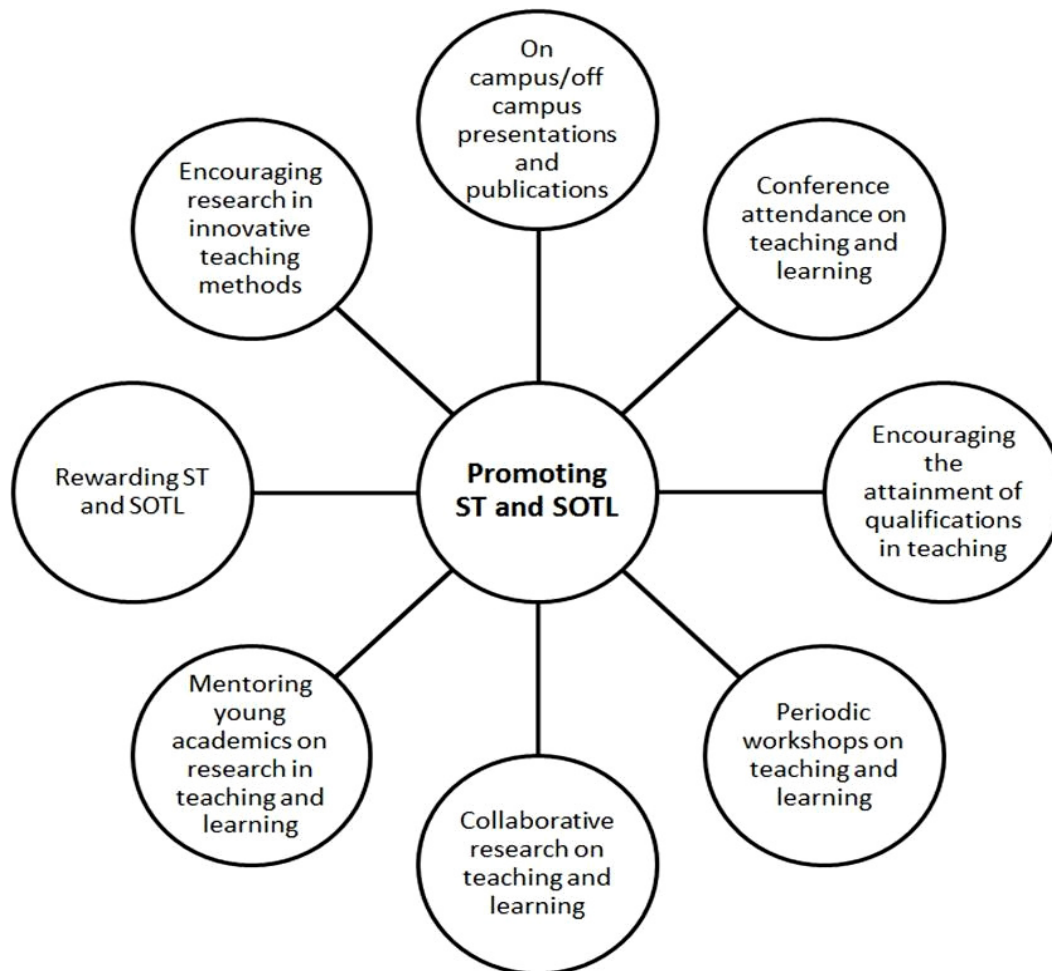


Fig. 1. Promoting ST and SOTL

programmes for university teachers, Harwell (2003: 45) states that “we cannot expect students to change what they do if we are content for teachers to continue doing what they have always done.” It is clear from the foregoing assertion that to improve student learning academic developers should engage the teachers first. It is only when the teachers are prepared for teaching, learning, assessment and curriculum development that universities can guarantee enhanced student learning and attainment. Adequately professionally developed teachers ultimately reflect on their practice thereby developing into scholarly teachers.

Conversations about Teaching and Learning: Academic developers should also provide platforms on which academics in the university engage in conversation about teaching and learning. This could be by use of seminars and colloquiums in which academic staff members meet to share ideas on teaching and learning. Knapper (2008) observes that academic staff members need to reflect on their own experience as informed by relevant research about effective practices. Seminars and symposiums that are well organised and periodically offered allow interaction between and among lecturers and important exchange of ideas leading to reflection of practice and, invariably, improved practice through scholarly teaching.

Recognition and Rewarding of Excellence in Teaching: In promoting both ST and SOTL, academic developers should also advocate for the recognition of academic staff members who excel in teaching and learning. In most universities for a very long time recognition has been given to best researchers and the university’s best teachers may not have been rewarded. The university should address a balance in all its focus areas namely teaching and learning, research and community engagement. Knapper (2008: 7) observes that:

For teaching to change, and good practice to take hold, there must be a climate of recognition and celebration of teaching efforts and successes, both within the department and usually beyond.

In this regard, excellence in teaching awards and departmental, faculty/school and university level will go a long way in promoting ST and SOTL. Academic staff members will be prepared to invest time and effort on teaching and learning issues with the realisation that they would

be given due recognition and rewards for their efforts.

Collaborative Research Promotion: Academic developers should also assist academic staff members to research into teaching and learning issues. This promotes both ST and SOTL. Knapper (2008: 2) argues for evidence-based teaching which is “based on sound empirical evidence about the sort of teaching methods and approaches that produce particular learning outcomes”. Collaborative research teams on teaching and learning issues should be encouraged and funding made available so that academic staff members can research on teaching and learning issues as well as try out innovative teaching methodologies and the use of different technologies. Once academic staff members develop a culture of questioning their practice and seek research-led solutions to their teaching it will culminate in reflective practice necessary for ST and SOTL.

In-house Conference and Publication Opportunities: In-house conference and publication opportunities assist in the promotion of both ST and SOTL. Academic developers should organise in house conferences and encourage staff members to prepare and present papers on teaching and learning. This prepares especially young academics to participate in larger conferences. In-house research publications also assist young academics to grapple with writing for publication in teaching and learning. They are encouraged to write papers that are subjected to peer review processes within the university and are assisted to develop as they participate in research and publication at a global scale.

It is therefore important for academic developers to have deliberate programmes in place to assist and support teaching staff in the nurturing and development of scholarly teaching and scholarship of teaching and learning. This will ensure that teaching in the university is based on reflective practice. The ultimate aim is to improve learning and learner attainment.

Challenges in Promoting SOTL

The problem is, SOTL is built on unsteady foundations and overly dependent on orthodoxies of higher education. Experience has shown that inside the House of SOTL, teaching lives upstairs and learning in the basement. According to Boshier (2009), there are a number of

factors that make SOTL a hard sell as shown in this section:

Scholarship of Teaching is Used as a Synonym for Other Activities: Boshier (2009) asserts that the first factor making SOTL a hard sell is the persistent tendency to use it as a synonym for other activities. He argues that an example is the idea SOTL is the same thing as scholarly, exemplary or good teaching. Furthermore, given the career-crushing (or enhancing) importance of what distinguishes scholarly (or good) teaching from SOTL, it is important to have crisp definitions of both. But, from the start, SOTL proponents had difficulty distinguishing them. It is true that the vagueness of SOTL is reflected in terminology describing it. Kreber (2002) used a Delphi procedure to see if there was a developing consensus concerning it. The concept SOTL may mean a lot of different things to academic staff members and this should be clarified especially the differences and links between ST and SOTL. According to Kreber (2002) within the House of SOTL the following are all in use:

- ‘Scholarship of teaching’; ‘Scholarships of teaching’; ‘Teaching as scholarship’; ‘Scholarship in ... teaching’; ‘The idea of scholarship of teaching’; ‘Scholarly approach to teaching’; ‘Scholarly teaching’; ‘Developing scholarship within ... one’s discipline’; ‘Excellent and scholarly teaching’; ‘Teach in a scholarly way’; ‘Scholarly discourse on teaching and student learning’; ‘Scholarly teaching practice’; ‘Teaching as scholarly work’; ‘Scholarship related to teaching and learning’; ‘Scholarly enquiry into student learning’; ‘The improvement of teaching and so forth’; ‘Discipline-specific pedagogical inquiry into how students learn’; ‘Authentic practice’; ‘Systematic reflection on teaching and learning made public’; ‘Ongoing learning about teaching and the demonstration of such knowledge’; ‘Scholarly inquiry into the teaching and learning process’; ‘Scholars of our teaching’; ‘A new concept of academic work’; ‘Shorthand for a strong commitment to teaching’; ‘A rallying cry for educational reformers’; ‘Process of transmitting perspectives, skills and knowledge’ (Kreber 2002; Rollet 2001; Smith 2001; Brockbank and McGill 1998).

This is evidence enough to show that academics still struggle or rather grapple with the meaning of SOTL and related terms. In support of our assertion, McKinney (2002) argues that

is there a “best” definition? Do we need consensus on a definition? Is SOTL a “field?” How is SOTL related to traditional educational research? The challenge here is to both continue this conversation and to find a common ground that allows understanding and collaboration. Referring back to Kreber’s (2002) study, that used Delphi methodology, participants were asked to identify issues surrounding the scholarship of teaching which they considered unresolved to date. The participants agreed that clearer definitions were needed to distinguish the meaning of the concepts such as teaching expertise, teaching excellence, and the scholarship of teaching.

Negotiate Distinctions between Related Key Terms: A challenge closely related to the first is to negotiate distinctions between related key terms: distinctions that impact support, evaluation and rewards. According to McKinney (2002), though there are close connections among them, it is important to distinguish good teaching from scholarly teaching from the scholarship of teaching and learning. Briefly, good teaching is that which promotes student learning and other desired student outcomes (McKinney 2002). 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 (Astin 1993; McKinney 2002; Kreber and Cranton 2000). Scholarly teaching involves taking a scholarly approach to teaching just as we would take a scholarly approach to other areas of knowledge and practice. 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, perhaps, more generally. The scholarship of teaching and learning involves systematic study of teaching and/or learning and the public sharing and review of such work through presentations or publications (McKinney 2002).

SOLT is Difficult to Operationalize: The other factor making SOTL a hard sell is the difficulty of operationalizing it. Boshier (2009) postulates that although Boyer was keen on application, his concepts were difficult to apply. This becomes apparent when administrators resort to Boyer in efforts to promote some people

and decline others. According to Boshier, not all blame should land on Ernie Boyer. He didn't want elements disaggregated. The biggest problems arise when users disaggregate elements. An example is Louisville where faculty were 'required to demonstrate proficiency in four separate areas ... to be defined and assessed independently of each other' (Schweitzer 2000, Boshier 2009; Kreber 2001). Contributing to the same challenge in respect of operationalizing SOTL, Kamanja (2009) argues that academics have the challenge of synthesizing what they know, what they don't know, and what they need to know. The point he is trying to drive home is that academics have the challenge of setting appropriate SOTL research agendas both within and across disciplinary boundaries.

Much Discourse Concerning SOTL is Anti-intellectual: The other reason why SOTL is a hard sell is because the preoccupation with impact is anti-intellectual and located in a narrow neoliberalism (Boshier 2009). It mostly ignores the socioeconomic context in which universities operate (Davis and Chandler 1998; Boshier 2009; Martin et al. 1998). It is an open secret that many universities have adopted the language and modus operandi of business. As a result, Boshier (2009) argues that the twenty first century stress on evidence, best practices, benchmarks, outputs and deliverables, competencies, impact or – most naïve and troubling – excellence, arises from detaching universities from their socioeconomic context and constructing education as a commodity to be sold.

Barriers to Doing and Applying Quality SOTL Work: It appears that there remain many barriers to doing and applying quality SOTL work. According to McKinney (2002), these barriers include, for example, conflicting institutional messages about the value and rewards for SOTL, insufficient training and development, lack of funding and other rewards, lack of knowledge by peers about how to evaluate SOTL work, colleagues who are "hostile" to SOTL work, and isolation of faculty doing SOTL from faculty members doing "traditional" research. The authors of this study implore other researchers to conduct research in an endeavour to find ways over and around these barriers, as well as to remove them. Related to this is the need to maintain a balance. That is, for most faculty members, SOTL would not and should not replace their traditional disciplinary research

and scholarship nor does it replace actual teaching or service. Thus, how do all these fit together? What are the priorities? How does someone do work in all these areas? How does this balance vary by institutional or department type or mission? We also must increase collaboration and sharing of SOTL work, including bringing new players in to the field. For example, we need to target future faculty, new faculty, and staff involved in student learning. We have the challenge of involving students themselves in SOTL work (McKinney 2002, 2004).

Kamanja (2009) argues that higher education institutions need to think critically how the status of SOTL can be restored and promoted alongside other forms of scholarship and how the institutions can support SOTL work. However, a major challenge that faces SOTL is how to relate it to traditional educational research (McKinney 2002; Martin and Ramsden 2000). The dilemma that we are faced with as academics is, is it possible to find a common ground that allows understanding and collaboration between SOTL and traditional research? This could be another fertile ground for research.

The Difficulty in Pursuing this Endeavor: A major concern often raised in the scholarship of teaching discourse is the difficulty academics may have in pursuing this endeavor (Kamanja 2009). Kreber (2002) agrees that while programmes that support and foster the scholarship of teaching now exist on many campuses and the implications for staff development have been recognized, for scholarship of teaching to be granted equal recognition to research in future, both practitioners and policy makers recognize that very little progress has been made in the support and promotion of this form of scholarship (Kamanja 2009). Bain (2004) for example argues that research dominates and will probably continue to dominate higher education at the systemic level and at most higher education institutions around the globe mainly because research implies greater prestige and more income, and hence professors and other academics will continue to pursue their status and rewards through research and publications (Kamanja 2009; Moon 2005).

Finally, these challenges imply another, more general challenge. According to McKinney (2002), we must remind or inform others about why SOTL is so important. For example,

changes in the higher education climate, including a renewed focus on teaching across all types of institutions, increasing diversity of the student body, rapid adoption of new instructional technologies, new knowledge about learning and the brain, and additional pressures for the use of assessment data to determine student learning outcomes, have reminded us that we need to know much more about how, why, and when our students learn. In addition, many of us have come to realize that we cannot afford what Lee Shulman, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, calls “the great tragedy of teaching,” that is, the “collective amnesia” about what works and why in teaching and learning (Shulman 2001; McKinney 2002; Randall 2004).

Witman and Richlin (2007: 3) contend that ‘the sad truth is that many departments, disciplines, and institutions do not count ‘pedagogical scholarship’ as part of a faculty member’s scholarly production’. McKinney (2002) concurs by arguing that for most faculty members the focus is to get published and hence no reason to pursue a rigorous process that will be without rewards or recognition. For scholarship of teaching to be granted equal recognition to research in future, discussions now need to continue and perhaps focus at the level of disciplinary associations. If teaching is to be valued equally with research, then like research, teaching must open itself to the scrutiny of theoretical perspectives, methods, evidence and results (Martin et al. 1999, McKinney 2002; Rollet 2001). We must change the status of teaching from private to community property (Shulman 2001; McKinney 2002).

CONCLUSION

Scholarship of teaching and learning has been touted as an instrument of salvation, a movement that can transform the nature of society towards our ideals of equality and justice. It signals a paradigmatic change in higher education or rather a paradigm shift from the pedagogy of the oppressed to an andragogy with a new relationship between the teacher and the student. There are so many challenges faced in promoting SOLT but what is important is for us as academics to change the status of teaching from private to community property. Both ST and SOLT are important shifts towards reflec-

tive practice and improvement of teaching practice and learner attainment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the challenges faced in promoting SOLT, this study advances the following recommendations:

- Recognising excellence in teaching through research led initiatives
- There must be a common ground that allows understanding and collaboration between SOTL and traditional research
- Pedagogical scholarship must be counted as part of an academic’s scholarly production
- SOLT should not be limited to refereed publications

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