Chapter 3
The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and Higher Education Research:
Boundaries and Implications

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, understandings of the scholarship of teaching and learning and of education research are reviewed, exploring the boundaries of each and the possibilities for overlap. Distinguishing these concepts has practical value in defining the components of academic work, and the form of credit given for academic activities. The conclusion reached is that an academic activity may involve both scholarship of teaching and learning and education research, provided that, inter alia, it involves systematically investigating a contentious issue or a gap in current understandings of education, in a form sufficient to warrant conclusions that have the potential to contribute to current understandings of pedagogy or other aspects of education. A sample of current publications concerning scholarship of teaching and learning is reviewed to illustrate possible relationships between writing related to the scholarship of learning and teaching and education research.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter understandings of the concept of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and the concept of education research are reviewed; exploring the boundaries of each and the possibilities for overlap. Reference is also made to the other forms of scholarship identified by Boyer (1990): the scholarship of discovery; the scholarship of integration; and the scholarship of application. Distinguishing between SoTL and education research is of consequence to academics and university managers in matters including tenure, promotion and workload allocation. Whether SoTL is an element of teaching or is a

form of research or can be both at once, can cause confusion. An article relating to faculty perceptions of SoTL in the USA for instance a claim is made that:

The majority of faculty considered the same examples of SoTL activities for both "research" and "teaching" sections of a promotion and tenure dossier. …Revising evaluation guidelines and making distinctions between what constitutes "teaching" and "research" could give faculty clearer direction and motivation. (Secret, Leisey, Lanning, Polich, & Schaub, 2011, p. 15)

In relation to promotion, a paper addressing practice in Australian universities stated

With several Australian universities now providing opportunities for teaching staff who do not engage in research to be promoted, it is important that the teaching criteria for promotion are demonstrably of equal value to promotion based on research. …The lack of clarity around what SoTL includes or excludes creates a risk for universities …[relating] to university probation and promotion processes." (Vardi & Quin, 2010, p. 3)

An issue is whether SoTL forms, or can form, some sort of nexus between teaching and research; being at once an aspect of sound teaching and a form of research, namely education research.

The purpose of the present chapter is to provide a definition of possible relationships between SoTL and education research. The question explored is whether SoTL constitutes a form of education research or can constitute a form of education research in some circumstances.

KEY CONCEPTS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

The obvious starting point is Boyer's (Boyer, 1990) definition of the scholarship of teaching. Boyer, then, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, dignified the teaching component of academic work by classifying it as one of four forms of scholarship in which the professoriate engages, the four being: the scholarship of discovery, "engaging in original research"; the scholarship of integration, "stepping back from one's investigation, looking for connections"; the scholarship of application "building bridges between theory and practice"; and the scholarship of teaching (Boyer, 1990, p. 16). Essentials of his definition of the scholarship of teaching were that teaching is informed by an understanding of the current wisdom in the teacher's discipline area, usually by direct involvement in research in the discipline (Boyer, 1990, p. 27). "As a scholarly enterprise, teaching begins with what the teacher knows. Those who teach must, above all, be well informed, and steeped in the knowledge of their fields" (Boyer, 1990, p. 23). It is a matter, as Healy (2000) put it, of "developing the complementary nature of teaching and research" (p. 177). Teaching should also be underpinned by a pedagogy "carefully planned, continuously examined, and related directly to the subject taught" and evaluated by the teacher in a form that includes feedback from students (Boyer, 1990, pp. 23 & 39).

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