Chapter 15
Scholarship and Supercomplexity:
Policy Implications

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, links between the constructs of scholarship and supercomplexity in higher education are examined, along with policy implications. Boyer's holistic, joined-up conceptualization of scholarship is recognised as seminal, yet in many cases, application of his work has led to fragmentation of academic work in an already-fractured, supercomplex higher education environment. The scene is set by considering a range of dimensions of the scholarship construct within higher education. Particular emphasis is placed on scholarship as it relates to academic roles and identities. In this section, account is also taken of the challenges encountered by faculty, managers, and policy-makers alike in drawing connections and distinctions between scholarship and research in academic work. Consideration then shifts to implications for higher education policy and policy-makers at the macro – national and international, meso-institutional, and micro-departmental and individual levels.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of the research paradigms presented in Ling and Ling (2017a), consideration is given in this chapter to the notion of supercomplexity and its role as a principal paradigm in furthering education research. This is facilitated by examining aspects of supercomplexity as they relate to scholarship in higher education. For the purposes of this chapter, supercomplexity as a construct is distinguished from supercomplexity as a research paradigm, but the two are closely connected, as outlined towards the end of the chapter in Figure 1. For almost three decades, there has been a preoccupation with interpretations and applications of Boyer's (1990) conceptualisation of scholarship. Various dimensions of the scholarship construct are explored in this chapter, with a focus on what has come to be known as the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) as it relates to academic roles and identities.

While Boyer's (1990) four scholarships have stood the test of time as a focal point for higher education policy and practice, questions still arise on such matters as: should interpretations of "scholarship" be grouped together with 'research' in academic promotion policies? what is the relationship between scholarship and education research? should "scholarship", however defined, be limited to teaching-related aspects of academic work, or indeed might we consider dropping the term "scholarship" altogether because of the fuzzy definitions, understandings and applications of the term?

One consequence of not tackling some of these challenging questions explicitly is that "scholarship", particularly as it relates to teaching, risks being associated with academic work that some view as "second-rate" and not as prestigious as "research" in the minds of the academic community. In two recent studies (Fanghanel, Pritchard, Potter, & Wisker, 2016; Rawn & Fox, 2018) it is concluded that defining and operationalizing SoTL has proven particularly elusive, both conceptually and in terms of institutional policies and practice.

The first part of this chapter involves revisiting the Boyer (1990) vision of scholarship in order to test its relevance to the supercomplexity inherent in the current higher education environment. Focus then shifts to policy implications at the macro - national and international levels, at the meso - institutional level, and at the micro - disciplinary, departmental and individual levels of decision-making in universities. The discussion of policy implications takes account of the challenges encountered by faculty, managers and policy-makers alike in drawing connections and distinctions between and among the various forms and interpretations of scholarship in academic work. To assist those working in this environment, an approach is proposed in this chapter for the overall pursuit of scholarship as it applies to teaching and learning along a spectrum reflecting the range of education research paradigms (Ling & Ling, 2017c).

In a fractured, supercomplex higher education landscape, it is arguably more important than ever to address the question of scholarship, what it is, why it matters and the attendant policy implications for universities. Henkel (2009, p. 10) argues that university faculty in the 21st century, experience perpetual "construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction in the context of multiple and shifting collectivities and relationships". Reflecting on the postmodern workforce, Bauman (2000, p. 14) goes further, reflecting on the "falling apart, the friability, the brittleness, the transience, the until-further-noticeness of human bonds and networks" characterising the liquidity of the postmodern era.

Yet, despite the apparent fluidity of academic communities, Krause (2009, 2012) found that faculty continue to attest to the power of the discipline as a unifying force in shaping academic identity and providing a familiar place for sharing ideas and inducting new generations of scholars. While the discipline may be a powerful linking force, compelling questions arise regarding the identities of faculty taking on increasingly specialized roles (Krause, 2014; Whitchurch, 2009), such as teaching-focused roles, for example. The evolution of such roles in universities arguably exemplifies Barnett's (2000) notion of supercomplexity in which once familiar frames of understanding, identity and action are contested and in dispute.

In this chapter light is shed on some of the policy implications of scholarship as it applies to individuals, academic departments, universities and nations in a supercomplex world. The policy and management implications are particularly challenging for, by its very nature, supercomplexity cannot be "managed" or "controlled" in a traditional "set and forget" policy environment. Policy paradigm shifts are called for if educational policy-makers are to mirror Barnett's (2000) philosophical shift in focus from knowing to being, from epistemology to ontology in relation to scholarship in higher education. Such a paradigm shift demands that one take an ecosystemic approach to understanding the supercomplex interplay between scholarship – in its broadest sense, academic work and the contemporary university

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