

Chapter 2

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Chinese Teacher Education: An Approach to Evidence-Based Improvement

Jianmei Xu

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9786-9145>

Hangzhou Normal University, China

ABSTRACT

As a teacher educator, the author has always believed that the primary goal of the university is to cultivate talents. The author's experience in SoTL practice has made her realise that this is a possible way to change the current problem of emphasising research over teaching in Chinese universities. The author believes that reflection is the impetus of SoTL practice . Through reflective reports and focus group interviews, the authors emphasised the development of teacher trainees' reflective awareness and skills. As an associate dean of the school, the author has formed a community of practice by organising SoTL workshops and SoTL research projects. SoTL research and practice in China has made breakthroughs, but still faces insufficient individual faculty commitment to SoTL practice. In order to change this situation, SoTL needs to be explicitly used in national policy texts, and the formation of a national SoTL society should be used to facilitate the development of SoTL.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between teaching and research has long been a contentious issue in higher education, presenting a genuine dilemma for university faculty who must navigate the inherent value choices. In Chinese universities, where managerialism predominates, the persistent critique of emphasizing research at the expense of teaching has prompted some policy-level countermeasures(Wang et al, 2023). However,

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the prevailing trend of prioritizing research over teaching remains largely unaltered and, in some cases, has even led to a systematic separation between these two core academic activities.

The concept of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), which has gained traction in Europe and the United States, was developed precisely to address the narrowing of academic definitions and the division between teaching and research. Currently Chinese universities, too, are facing a situation similar to that of American higher education at the time. A survey of 6,334 faculty members at 56 universities, found that in terms of time allocation, the higher a faculty member's title, the more research is invested and the less teaching is invested. (Yan, 2012) The results of scientific research are not only related to the social status and educational resources of universities, but also directly linked to the promotion of teachers' titles, benefits, etc., which leads teachers to make the choice of focusing on scientific research instead of teaching. As a faculty member and associate dean at a university in a critical phase of development, I have witnessed firsthand challenges posed by the separation of teaching and research, exacerbated by various policy pressures. I firmly believe that the primary responsibility of university faculty is cultivating talent and that the university's foremost role should be as a center for nurturing students.

Given this belief, I see SoTL as a critical bridge to overcome the dichotomy between teaching and research. By treating teaching as a legitimate field of inquiry, faculty can address pedagogical challenges through reflective practice and rigorous research methodologies. This process not only facilitates the evolution of teaching philosophies, the enhancement of teaching skills, and the optimization of student learning outcomes, but it also allows for the publication of scholarly work, thereby resolving the teaching-research paradox.

It is this understanding and these convictions that have driven me to engage actively in SoTL after 15 years of university teaching. In this chapter, I will explore the challenges, reflections, and rewards encountered during my journey as an experienced university teacher venturing into the field of SoTL in a Chinese public University. This university is a municipally funded comprehensive university that specializes in teacher education. It has nearly 2400 staff members and 1700 full-time teachers, and more than 30,000 full-time students, including more than 24,000 undergraduates, over 6,000 graduate students. Through this chapter, I aim to present a case study illustrating the effort of Chinese university faculty to engage with SoTL.

My Identity as a SoTL Practitioner

Answering the question of who I am as a SoTL practitioner involves a systematic review of my educational journey, my teaching career, and the values that have been shaped along the way. I am currently serving as an associate dean of the School of Education at Hangzhou Normal University, responsible for undergraduate education and teaching. Since graduating from the doctoral program, I have been engaged in teacher education at the university for 16 years. In the process, my research interests have come to focus on the field of teacher education. So, I consider myself a teacher educator as well as a teacher education researcher. My educational experiences led me to define my role as a teacher early in life, and the pursuit of becoming a “good teacher” has been a central focus of my professional life ever since. My doctoral degree in the history of foreign education and my experience as a university teacher have exposed me to the ideas of some of the world's greatest educators and the latest educational theories. These experiences, combined with my teaching practice, have deepened my awareness of the challenges

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