

The Conceptual Changes and Interpretations with Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

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Abstract: Since Boyer proposed SOTL in the 90s of the last century, the connotation of SOTL has been continuously developed. The conceptualization process can be summarized into three phases: emphasizing the teaching of knowledge and valuing the output of teaching, supporting the conceptualization of SOTL with the help of an existing research base in the discipline, and seeking recognition from an institutionalized or methodological perspective. However, in this process, SOTL has also fallen into a crisis whirlpool, including the limitations of teaching academic connotation, the dilemma of interdisciplinarity, and the confusion of teaching academic identity. In order to get out of the crisis whirlpool, many scholars are actively looking for solutions.

1. Introduction

Since Ernest L. Boyer, former president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, coined the term scholarship of teaching (SOTL) in the 90s, the academic community has responded strongly to it. And many scholars have carried out a series of studies on the connotation of this concept and its specific directions. However, how to define and operate SOTL has always puzzled the development of this field. Some scholars have even neglected to explain the relevant basic concepts in an attempt to avoid the development dilemma caused by the dispute over definitions. This paper summarizes the development and crisis of the conceptualization process of SOTL, and tries to explore and summarize the possible ways to improve the crisis of the conceptualization of SOTL.

2. Tracing and Development of SOTL

As we all know, the term SOTL was coined by Boyer in order to harmonize the relationship between teaching and academic research in the American university field. With the rise of a large number of American research universities from the end of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, the tendency of American universities to emphasize research over teaching has intensified. Many American universities even regard publication as the sole criterion for faculty promotion and reward, and scholars have debated this endlessly, with some scholars even jokingly saying that “Socrates himself would be denied tenure for failing to publish (Groshong, J. W, 1956).^[1]

In the 80s of the 20th century, the scholar Glenn M. Glenn R. Pellino expands the concept of scholarship beyond the publication of specialized books and papers. He interviewed about 1,000 faculty members from 24 colleges and universities and 55 administrators from five of them, and revealed six dimensions of scholarship based on actual frequency and role characteristics: Professional Activity, Research/Publication, Pedagogy, Community Service, Engagement with the Novel, Artistic Endeavor. When it comes to the pedagogy dimension specifically, Pelino points out that it is the scholarship that revolves around the teaching process, whether it is the preparation of new materials for use in the classroom, the new syllabus, or the holding of an academic lecture or a new test, which is an important part of this dimension (Pellino, G. R, 1984).^[2]

In 1990, Boyer formally introduced the concept of Scholarship of Teaching. In Boyer's view, the United States attaches too much importance to the status of academic research, and in order to improve the status of teaching quality and teaching work, it is necessary to reform the incentive mechanism for teachers' work (Boyer, E, 1990).^[3] That is, like academic research, teaching becomes a form of capital that can obtain value, and then stimulates the enthusiasm and motivation of teachers for teaching work.

It should be noted that Boyer's book mainly emphasized the importance of university teaching activities and the responsibilities of teachers, but did not elaborate on the connotation of the concept of Scholarship of Teaching, which also led to a heated discussion on the definition of the concept of Scholarship of Teaching among many scholars in the late 90s of the 20th century. Such as scholars Morehead, J.M. and Shedd, P.J.(1996), who believed that teaching scholarship is equivalent to the evaluation results of teachers' teaching contribution. ^[4]Scholar Menges, R.J.(1997) also points out that Scholarship of Teaching has become an amorphous term that involves more commitment to teaching.^[5]

It was the scholar Shulman, L. who really had a major impact on the definition of the concept of Scholarship of Teaching. He made it clear that Scholarship of Teaching is neither excellent teaching nor scholarly teaching, but rather an academic that involves both teaching and learning (Pat Hutchings, 1999). ^[6]That is, institutional research that focuses on learning, targets specific areas, and is oriented towards the educational experience and results that are supported or not supported by the analysis institution. In other words, in Schulman's view, the connotation of Scholarship of Teaching (SOT) should increase the emphasis on student learning, which is essentially a kind of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning scholarship (SOTL) (Shulman, L, 2001). ^[7]Since then, more scholars can adopt Shulman's view and use more SOTL to refer to the previous SOT.

3. The Conceptualization Process of SOTL

Shulman, L. has expanded the scope of SOTL, but there is still no unanimous view. How to conceptualize pedagogical scholarship is still an important and unsolved research question in this field. Explanations for this research question have evolved over time.

3.1. Emphasis the Teaching of Knowledge and the Output of Teaching

At the turn of the century, Kreber and Cranton summarized the views on SOTL at that time into the following three aspects: SOTL emphasizes teaching research, SOTL emphasizes teaching excellence, and SOTL advocates teaching scholars through academic methods (Kreber, C, 2000).^[8] First of all, scholars who believe that SOTL attaches importance to teaching research regard teaching research as an important aspect of SOTL and attach importance to the output of teaching. That is, the output of the teacher's research, such as journal articles, participation in academic conferences and presentations, or publication of textbooks related to subject teaching, is the indicator that can prove the identity of a scholar.

Secondly, scholars who believe that SOTL emphasizes teaching excellence equate SOTL with teaching excellence and attach importance to teachers' teaching knowledge. Teachers are evaluated based on awards or evaluation content through student grading or peer review. Finally, scholars who agree with the view that SOTL advocates that teaching scholars teach through academic methods focus on acquiring knowledge about teaching through reflection and research on teachers' own subject teaching, and do not care too much about how to prove and evaluate scholarship.

The SOTL of this period emphasized the teaching of knowledge and the output of teaching. Scholars argue that the concept of SOTL has been conflated with its act, questioning whether there is a difference between academic teaching and SOTL (Richlin, L, 2001).^[9] But one thing is certain, teaching can only be valued in the academy if it is recognized as academic (Atkinson, M, 2001).^[10] In order to better distinguish the difference between SOTL and academic teaching activities, some scholars have subdivided the terms of teaching excellence, teaching expertise and SOTL. And raised concerns that thinking of SOTL in the academic world will dilute the value of academic researchers' work on the one hand, and dilute the possibility of teaching excellence on the other hand (Kreber, C, 2002).^[11]

3.2. Conceptual SOTL is Supported by the Discipline Foundation

In the 21st century, in addition to distinguishing between SOTL and pedagogical activities, scholars have also tried to support conceptual SOTL by drawing on the existing research foundation in the discipline. Malcolm Tate has used SOTL as a keyword, and by retrieving and counting the number of relevant articles and disciplines. It clearly shows that SOTL can be carried out in multiple disciplines and interdisciplinarity positively. That is, scholars in many majors have shown active interest in SOTL (Tight, M, 2018).^[12]

Different from the previous emphasis on the conceptual connotation of teaching output and knowledge teaching, scholars at this stage have redefined SOTL. For example, some scholars have argued that SOTL is the systematic study of teaching using established or validated academic standards to understand how teaching maximizes learning, or to develop a more accurate understanding of learning, resulting in publicly shared products for criticism and use by appropriate communities (Michael K, 2011).^[13] However, some scholars use conceptual analysis to clarify the attributes and connotations of SOTL. That is, SOTL is a series of academic behaviors in the teaching process, which are dynamic, metadisciplinary, learning-centered, critical-based, situational, critical, and open, including continuous deep reflection and firm participation (Mirhosseini F, 2018).^[14]

3.3. Seek Recognition from an Institutionalized or Methodological Perspective

At the same time, SOTL no longer only enriches itself theoretically, but also tries to describe the connotation of teaching scholarship from the perspective of institutionalization and methodology. On the one hand, SOTL promotes the conceptualization process from the perspective of disciplinary methodology. For example, some scholars have proposed the method of "decoding disciplines", that is, to help teachers identify researchable questions that meet their subject interests, and encourage teachers engaged in subject research to participate in teaching and learning (Middendorf, J, 2008).^[15] On the other hand, SOTL is also constantly integrated into the policy field, providing an operational path for SOTL through institutionalization, clarifying the connotation and improving the visibility and perceived value of SOTL.

During this period, the selection of disciplinary elements by SOTL helped them clarify the conceptual connotation and gain the recognition of scholars, and inclusiveness and interdisciplinarity became the conceptual basis of SOTL. The metaphor of the "big tent" is also the

most vivid summary of the scholar's vision of teaching at that time. SOTL has a unique and strong introspective tendency (Poole, 2022).^[16] Scholars also recognize the negative effects of disciplinary paradigms when they use disciplinary elements to help themselves gain academic recognition.

4. The Current Situations: SOTL in a Crisis

The emergence of SOTL is seen as a tool to save teaching from danger, and it bears a great responsibility to bring teaching from the periphery back to the core of higher education institutions. Over the past three decades, the SOTL has been identified as encompassing a range of teaching-related activities and practices. While there is a growing body of literature in the field, the concept of SOTL and the vision it embodies seem to be mired in a fog. More and more scholars are concerned about the further development of SOTL. It is undeniable that SOTL is in a crisis.

4.1. Limitations of the Connotation of SOTL

First of all, the development of SOTL has been plagued by the vagueness of concepts. The conceptual ambiguity is mainly manifested in two aspects. On the one hand, SOTL has a diversified connotation. It is undeniable that in the process of the development of SOTL, there are differences and differences in the eyes of different scholars, showing the characteristics of diversity. The connotation of pluralism is not conducive to the subsequent promotion, evaluation and institutionalization of SOTL, and will hinder its development to a certain extent. The lack of consensus on the definition of SOTL not only poses challenges for newcomers to pedagogical research, but also exposes SOTL to external criticism.

On the other hand, the concepts and connotations of SOTL are diverse, and they are often contradictory to academic teaching and teaching excellence. Roger Boshier (2009) argues that the reason why SOTL has not grown with the length of research is partly due to the fact that SOTL is used as a synonym for other activities and that there is conceptual confusion.^[17] In the process of conceptualizing SOTL, scholars often entangle the term SOTL with research forms related to teaching excellence and academic teaching since its inception. This means that to conduct in-depth research on SOTL, it is first necessary to clarify the differences and connections between various related concepts. To a certain extent, the connotation of over-complication has posed a difficult problem for emerging scholars who have entered this research field, and at the same time, it has made the development of this research field more and more difficult.

Secondly, there is no clear scope division and type attribution of SOTL. SOTL is considered to be a large tent without borders, and its interior can contain everything related to it. As an open field, the inclusiveness and diversity of SOTL itself is considered a unique advantage. However, some scholars have found that the novelty and inclusiveness of SOTL often make it difficult to find a popular home in the architecture of higher education and its traditional disciplines (McSweeney, J, 2023).^[18] The diversity and complexity of research methods, research contents, research perspectives, and evaluation criteria make the conceptualization and dissemination of SOTL lack coherence, and it is not easy for scholars to understand and gain recognition from the academic community. In the eyes of John Canninga and Rachel Masika (2020), a tent without walls is not much better than no tent at all, and being too inclusive becomes a burden, useless and cumbersome, and it is better to give up altogether.^[19]

4.2. Lost Across Disciplines

SOTL is considered to be a unique form of research conducted within a multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary context (Hubball, H. T, 2010).^[20] While a disciplinary perspective helps scholars

understand the context of SOTL and identify key kinds of knowledge, it is risky to exert unfettered disciplinary influence on SOTL, like a ship navigating the straits of scholarly inquiry, squeezed between the multi-headed beast Thira (discipline) and the deadly maelstrom Charidis (educational research)(Löffgreen, Jennifer, 2023).^[21]

In recent years, with the continuous strengthening of the breadth and depth of research, the dilemma of interdisciplinary disorientation has emerged in SOTL. The so-called interdisciplinary disorientation mainly includes two aspects. On the one hand, the legitimacy of SOTL is questioned during the period when it is rooted in the context of the discipline. First, some scholars argue that the standards of SOTL are not sufficient to be considered an academic contribution (Kanuka, H, 2011).^[22] Second, SOTL is just a manifestation and label of the current ongoing focus of universities and colleges on the quality of teaching, and there is obvious confusion and overlap with teaching research and higher education research in general, and it will soon be forgotten. Finally, SOTL not only restricts the heavy burden of teaching and learning research, but also threatens serious scholarship in higher education teaching practice, so it needs to be thrown into the ashes of educational history (John Canning, 2022).^[23]

On the other hand, SOTL has fallen into the trap of self-justification. Since the end of the 90s of the 20th century, in order to further clarify the value and vision and promote the development, SOTL has been concretizing its paradigm and disciplinary elements. Lacking the theoretical basis and methodological support, SOTL attempts to legitimize the application of this emerging field of study by relying on the methods and theories of other disciplines to establish its legitimacy in the field of education. Andrea (2019), for example, adds universal credibility to the pedagogical field by applying phenomenological methods.^[24] However, in the process of conceptualization, SOTL do not take the time to explicitly explore or bridge disciplinary differences when conducting research, but simply focus on the disciplinary problems they face. It not only exacerbates the fragmentation of academic work, but also enters a dilemma in teaching and learning.

4.3. Academic Silos: Confusion of Academic Identity

First, the institutional culture is not fully embracing SOTL. Academia has long been synonymous with research, and teaching is at a disadvantage compared to academic research. The idea of SOTL is to improve the status of teaching by leveraging academic cultural capital. In contrast to the career track of teaching or academia alone, SOTL does not gain the same status as teaching and academia in institutions. In the eyes of institutions and peers, SOTL is still marginalized and cannot be treated with the same respect as traditional scholarship. Although it is recognized within the institution that policies such as promotion and performance related to SOTL are the same as disciplinary research. SOTL has not been fully recognized by the institutional culture. Because the link between disciplinary practice and SOTL has not yet been established (Webb, A. S, 2019).^[25]

Second, SOTL lacks sufficient policy support and is not regarded as a real research. SOTL staff often experience the following situations when they are involved in research: lack of funding, lack of institutional support, loneliness, a sense of overload, and their sense that the work is not valued by their institution. All of this can lead to a loss of motivation for them to participate in SOTL.

Finally, the segmentation of academic work makes SOTL staff have certain concerns about their own identity. As the landscape of higher education continues to change and the knowledge function of universities is gradually weakened, institutions continue to name and subdivide knowledge, so that the field of learning research and educational development will become more and more fragmented. Knowledge segmentation exacerbates competition, isolation, and emotional insecurity among academic staff. Scholars pay more attention to their academic roles and academic positions.

On the one hand, they may fear losing their disciplinary identity or status, or they may be afraid of giving up their expertise. On the other hand, the blind distinction between SOTL and academic research has led to confusion among scholars about the identities between them. They question whether they are teachers, researchers, or academics.

5. The Way Forward for the Conceptualization of SOTL

5.1. Forming a Conceptual Framework for SOTL

The continuous accumulation of literature provides a basis for the diversified development of teaching and scholarship. However, when faced with the diversity of SOTL, how to define or try to conceptualize has become a major problem in this research field. Scholars have attempted to conceptualize the boundaries between SOTL and other relevant fields of study in the higher education system. However, none of the existing conceptual attempts can accurately describe the SOTL based on the Great Tent concept. It has been argued that the proliferation of definitions and concepts may hinder the progress of SOTL as a tool to strengthen and facilitate teaching, and that rather than providing a precise definition, a conceptual framework for understanding the breadth and diversity of pedagogical scholarship has been formed (Fanghanel, J, 2015).^[26]

5.2. Change the Institutional Culture and Establish a SOTL Commons

SOTL provides an inclusive way for higher education to support and engage in research, teaching, and innovation in its projects and practices.^[27] In order to promote the further development of the field of SOTL, there needs to be a conscious multi-level support within and outside the higher education system. From the perspective of institutional development, it is necessary to build an effective supervision mechanism and provide structured institutional support for SOTL staff. By changing the institutional culture, scholars will recognize the value of SOTL. Part of the reason for the slow development of SOTL is that staff do not have the sense of identity and pride they have gained as students. In order to increase the motivation and self-confidence of academic staff, institutions implement policies and actions to provide academic recognition to scholars pursuing careers in SOTL through performance evaluations, clear promotion paths, or financial incentives. When academic requirements, recognized types of research, and expected deliverables are outlined in policy documents related to promotion and tenure policies, it sends a strong signal to faculty about the value of this field (Franks, A, 2020).^[28]

When SOTL is recognized and supported within the organization and among members, it promotes the transformation of institutional culture to a certain extent, and improves the legitimacy and value of SOTL in teaching and research institutions. In addition, research funding should be provided and regional, cross-institutional SOTL commons should be established to support the development of teaching and learning. A community of practice is a group of people who collectively focus on an issue, a series of issues, or are passionate about a topic and deepen their knowledge and expertise in the field through ongoing interaction.

SOTL staff are easily overlooked in the research process, which can lead to a loss of motivation to participate. The establishment of a regional and cross-institutional community of practice is conducive to promoting the development of SOTL within the institution, reducing the isolation of researchers, enhancing the motivation of research, and providing a knowledge space for communication and exchange among scholars. Or create a teacher learning community, as Emma Bailey (2022) describes, to support scholars in their transition from subject matter experts to teaching academic practitioners, and to provide a sense of belonging for teachers and academic research.^[29]

5.3. Build a Multi-layered Ecosystem for SOTL

The construction of an ecosystem can not only revitalize SOTL, but also inject fresh blood into the sustainable development of higher education. Any serious issue of in-depth and long-term improvement of teaching and learning requires an understanding and action that can only change the way we approach learning issues, from high-level learning research to all levels of educational development in local institutional settings (Bass, R.V, 2020).^[30]

SOTL should not be confined to the disciplinary assumption of who is most important. Researchers can start from different levels and use a variety of ways to break the narrow paradigm of traditional institutions and students, build a multi-layered ecosystem of SOTL, further promote the development of teaching and learning, and solve the dilemma of interdisciplinary disorientation. For example, convergence research or ecological approaches can be a way or means to construct a SOTL ecosystem.

In order for scholars from different disciplines to agree on research on SOTL, their knowledge, theories, methods, data, research communities, and languages need to become increasingly mixed or integrated. The ecological approach would also be conducive to breaking down the narrow paradigms of traditional institutions and students, and would liberate the analyst from the conceptual constraints imposed by traditional students, linear models of individual academic progress, narrow formal idealizations, and assumptions that universities occur through co-existence (Stevens, M, 2015).^[31]

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