

Peer-reviewed article**SoTL: A mechanism for understanding and finding solutions to teaching and learning challenges****Jo-Anne Vorster**Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching
and Learning
Rhodes University
Grahamstown/Makhanda, South Africa

j.vorster@ru.ac.za

Abstract

The paper argues that the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is a necessary strategy for mitigating the many teaching and learning challenges in South African higher education that prevent a large proportion of students from achieving academic success. Research suggests that well-structured and coordinated educational practices that are valued and supported by institutions are crucial for student success. While there exists a very useful body of scholarship on teaching and learning in higher education in South Africa, the persistently high levels of student failure and dropout across the system points to the need for more research into teaching and learning dilemmas in diverse institutional, disciplinary and classroom contexts. I argue that if more academics are to conduct SoTL, it has to be valued and supported by institutions and academic leaders. Even though more SoTL is needed to contribute to solving the many pedagogic dilemmas South African academics encounter, it is counter-productive to expect all academics to conduct SoTL. Rigorous SoTL requires immersion in educational ideas, concepts, theories and research processes. Many academics may not have the time or inclination to work in the area of SoTL, but I suggest that all must be scholarly teachers of their disciplines.

Introduction

Significant changes in the South African higher education context since the 1990s necessitate a deep understanding of teaching and learning practices so that all lecturers can contribute to addressing the multiple challenges facing public universities (Badat, 2019). South African higher education has now massified, and there is overwhelming evidence that the system continues to fail the majority of its students, even after almost three decades of democracy (Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007; Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014). This failure stems, among other things, from a misalignment between the educational needs of students and university curricula (including teaching and learning and assessment practices), as well as misalignment between student expectations and the purposes of the university. I start the paper by outlining some of the most critical contextual challenges that South African universities currently face. Thereafter I argue that Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is a necessary mechanism to advance our understanding of how to address teaching and learning problems that continue to stand in the way of success for many students. I then discuss the various aspects of teaching and learning that can be addressed through SoTL and argue that, while there is a need for more SoTL studies, institutions should be careful about expecting all academics to research their teaching.

In the first part of the paper, I examine three contextual conditions in South African higher education that adversely affect student success. These are: the influence of massification on universities in South Africa, a university system that is failing many of its students, and the mismatch between student expectations and the purposes of the university. I suggest that SoTL can play a role in helping academics to mitigate some of these influences on teaching and learning.

The massification of South African higher education

The first contextual condition is the massification of the South African higher education system and the concomitant diversification of the student body. There are now more than 1 million students in public universities, constituting a 'participation rate' of 21% of South Africans aged 20 – 24 years old. For African students, this 'participation rate' is 18% and for coloured students 15% (compared to 47% and 56% for white and Indian students respectively). The number of African students in the system in 2017 was 763 767; the number of coloured students registered was 64 772; while Indians constituted 50 131 students; and white students accounted for 148 802 of the total 1 036 984 students registered at a university in 2017 (VitalStats, 2017).

There are almost 800 000 black students (African and coloured) in total in South African public universities, yet this number masks the marked disparity in financial status and social class among the group that contributes to the differential success rates of middle-class and poor students. There is a long-established relationship between social class and literacy practices in the home and school and preparedness for and success in higher education (Gee, 2008; Boughey, 2005). The massification and diversification of higher education has made evident the wide disparities between students from different social backgrounds. Against this backdrop, Sobuwa and McKenna (2019) argue that higher education continues to be construed as a meritocracy where student success is understood to be dependent mainly on hard work, effort, tenacity and so on. This view does not adequately recognise the contextual, structural and ideological nature of teaching and learning. Some students, primarily

those from financially secure backgrounds who had good schooling, enter university with more of the educational 'goods' and dispositions that set them up for successful study. Those who were not so lucky to be born into fortunate circumstances, tend to be left behind if their educational needs are not considered in the design of curricula.

A significantly large proportion of university students need systematic induction into university learning practices. Unless students from poorer backgrounds are admitted into an extended studies programme, it is likely that little accommodation is made in the mainstream curriculum to bridge the gap between the knowledge and practices students have when they enter university and the knowledge and practices that they need to be successful in higher education. Much SoTL research has pointed to the need for a systemic approach to the problem of high dropout and failure rates and has produced useful findings for both general and discipline-specific strategies to enable greater student success. Such an approach includes the careful induction of first-year students into the disciplines. Although there is a body of knowledge on what such induction should consist of (Scott *et al*, 2007; Leibowitz, van der Merwe & van Schalkwyk, 2009; Jacobs, 2015; Clarence & McKenna, 2017; Ellery, 2018), more SoTL research is necessary to establish the nature of induction needed in different institutional and disciplinary contexts.

The system is failing its students

The second contextual condition is the high dropout and failure rates of students in public higher education institutions. Cohort studies on student performance undertaken since 2000 (Scott *et al*, 2007) continue to make for sobering and depressing reading. The data are indicative of the extent to which higher education institutions are failing their students. Currently, about half the annual student intake in South African contact universities either drop out or fail, and half of the total who start in the first-year graduate within five years. Many graduates gain mediocre degrees that do not prepare them for the world of work or to create employment for themselves and others. Universities have to take responsibility for not doing everything possible to prepare graduates who are educated in the real sense of the word and who can contribute meaningfully to their own personal, social and economic well-being and that of their families and the country. I outline below some of the complex reasons for this state of affairs.

One reason is that large numbers of students are not fully engaged in their university studies. There may be multiple explanations for this alienation. Some students do not understand the kind of learning that is required of them, as university expectations may clash in various ways with their experiences of school learning (Ellery, 2018). Furthermore, as previously noted, students' home backgrounds are critical to their preparation for university (Boughey, 2005). Students from middle-class backgrounds with educated parents are more likely to have developed 'school' literacy practices at home, including critical reading and writing abilities. Students who were not so fortunate to have grown up in privileged homes would have missed out on this preparation for academic study and, having in all likelihood attended poorly resourced schools, are behind educationally when they enter university. The 'gap' in knowledge necessary for engagement with the curriculum, and for developing the ways of being that make for a successful university student, may only be closed after two or three years of university learning (Kapp & Bangeni, 2011). Ellery (2018) argues that, alongside disciplinary knowledge, it is also necessary to teach students explicitly what it means to be a university-level

learner of the discipline and what it means to be a knower of the discipline. How to integrate learning about the discipline, with learning how to learn and what it means to be a knower of the discipline, is an important area for SoTL inquiry.

Another aspect that can contribute to student alienation is the culture of an institution. During the student protests of 2015 and 2016, many students said that they had little in common with the cultures of historically white institutions (Tabensky & Matthews, 2015). It is entirely possible that the poor student attendance of lectures at my university over the past two or three years (and I have anecdotal evidence that colleagues at other universities are experiencing the same thing) is an effect of profound student alienation from the context. Yet, lecture attendance or active engagement in pedagogical processes may be necessary for student success. Allais (2014) argues that the ritual of students coming together with a teacher in the same place to examine complex ideas or problems is essential for stimulating interest and for creating energy and motivation for further engagement. By not attending lectures, students are not exposing themselves to an environment that can make them excited about learning the disciplines. In a classroom, the teacher connects with her students through making eye contact and being alert to non-verbal signals; she can gauge the extent to which students are making sense of what she is saying. Very large classes diminish the experience of connection between teacher and students and could be contributing to the students' experience of alienation.

Many students also feel alienated from the knowledge that they are taught, not only the ways of knowing and being they are required to adopt. The challenges may be so great that they would rather 'bury their heads under the blankets' rather than doing the hard work that is necessary to engage and participate in ways required for *higher* learning. Curricula in many fields foreground knowledge and voices from the global North that are alien to many students, and that do not address contexts in the global South. SoTL is beginning to address the decolonisation of universities, curricula, pedagogies and even of research practices.

The system is failing its students

The third condition that potentially constrains student success in higher education is that there may be a mismatch between students' reasons for studying and the broader purposes of the university. Mann (2005), in the context of the U.K., argues that the deep approach to learning (Entwistle, 2000) that university teachers want their students to adopt may be alien to students. This could, in part, be the result of students' digital reading practices that some believe, have eroded what Garfinkle (2020:2) terms "deep literacy", that is, the capacity emerging from engaging with texts that nurtures "our capacity for abstract thought, enabling us to pose and answer difficult questions, empowering our creativity and imagination, and refining our capacity for empathy [...which is...] generative of successive new insight ...".

Furthermore, students may be so focused on the ways in which *what* they learn will prepare them for employment, that they may not recognise that *how* they are learning is also integral to preparing them for the workplace. For many, only academic work that will add to a grade or mark is worth doing. This conception of the purpose of the university is a direct consequence of the neoliberal understanding that reduces university education to a means to gain a qualification that provides access to the job market and a good salary. In contrast, a deep approach to learning enables students to make meaning

and explore relationships beyond an immediate task. It prepares students for complex thinking required of work roles in a super-complex world (Barnett, 2000). It is crucial to make explicit not only what students learn, but also how they need to learn. Both are necessary for enabling access to knowledge and knowledge-making practices, and for addressing a significant cause of student alienation (Ellery, 2018).

At an institutional level, it is possible to facilitate student engagement through what Kuh (2008) refers to as 'high impact practices'. He argues that these strategies need to be implemented in a systematic way to ensure that every student has an opportunity to participate in at least two such practices during their undergraduate studies. These strategies are already in use in many South African universities, and include: coordinated first-year experience seminars (Leibowitz *et al*, 2009); writing-intensive courses (Nichols, 2017); collaborative assignments and projects (Thondhlana & Belluigi, 2017); inquiry-based learning; service-learning (Sewry & Paphitis 2018) and capstone courses (Bauling, 2017). These kinds of practices contribute to the development of students' identities as scholars and, in the case of service-learning, may foster critical citizenship.

In this first part of the paper, I have explored some of the significant contextual conditions that influence student success and failure in the South African higher education system at present. I have also begun to make the argument that institutions can put in place evidence-based or scholarly mechanisms to address these difficulties. These mechanisms include addressing students' educational 'gaps' through the curriculum by making the requirements for success more explicit; the introduction of 'high impact' programmes for students; and by creating more welcoming institutional cultures. In the next section, I focus on the importance of scholarly, research-led teaching and learning for ensuring student success.

Why more university teachers should conduct SoTL

As discussed previously, the South African higher education system has to contend with many tough challenges or "burning questions" (Wright, Finelli, Meizlish & Bergom, 2011:9). Some of these burning questions are discipline-specific while others have broader relevance and import, such as the question of how we can help students to bridge the gap between high school and university. The complexity of the challenges makes it necessary for lecturers to engage in systematic inquiry into teaching and learning practices. There is a need for the profession of university teaching to be taken more seriously and for academics to develop identities as scholarly teachers of their disciplines alongside their disciplinary identities (Vorster & Quinn, 2012). One way of strengthening one's teacherly identity is through the engagement with and in the scholarship of teaching and learning. The scholarship of teaching and learning builds knowledge of how teachers approach specific teaching and learning challenges and provides the possibility for others to learn from the outcomes of these endeavours and thus to enhance student learning outcomes. In this way, we will hopefully get closer to finding solutions to what currently look like intractable systemic problems. For such a project to succeed, institutions must value and nurture academics' engagement with the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

Many definitions of SoTL emphasise that teachers need to be reflective about their practice. This means that teachers need to be able to articulate what they do, why they do things in the ways that they do and, importantly, they need to examine the effects of what they do on their students' learning. SoTL is about the practice of *individual teachers in context* – a particular teacher, in a specific discipline, teaching particular students at a particular university; however, it makes sense to share the results of inquiries into specific contexts more broadly across a course team or department and also more widely within an institution so that colleagues can learn from each other. While the enhancement of the teaching practice of individual teachers and the learning of students in specific contexts are necessary, the widespread need for improving the educational outcomes of the hundreds of thousands of students who struggle across the sector, necessitate systemic responses to the range of teaching and learning challenges. Hutchings (2010:70) argues that “teaching, like learning, is intellectual work, work that can be improved through systematic inquiry, critique, and collaboration within a diverse community of learners...”. Understanding what is needed to improve the success of our students requires the establishment of communities of inquiry that explore, in systematic ways, the diverse challenges students and teachers confront in particular contexts.

This would mean setting up teaching and learning ‘experiments’ informed by the scholarly literature to explore the issues at hand and, where relevant, recording the effects of interventions. It would furthermore require researcher-teachers to adopt an approach to inquiry that recognises the complex and multi-layered nature of reality within and across their disciplinary and educational contexts. In the spirit of scholarship, such SoTL inquiry should be shared, and efforts made to look beyond specific studies to, as Clegg suggests, “ask questions about what mechanisms are at work” (2007:10) in each case, so that lessons can be learned from context-specific studies (Haigh, 2011). Teaching and learning practices, and how teachers and students experience them, emerge from the intricate interplay of contextual mechanisms. The job of the SoTL researcher is to understand why things are the way they are, and not otherwise, and how could they be different.

The foci of SoTL research

For those new to the scholarship of teaching and learning, I briefly outline a range of aspects that one could focus on when embarking on SoTL. These categories come from Booth and Woollacott (2017) who distinguish several domains of inquiry for SoTL. SoTL is about the domain of teaching and learning; Booth and Woollacott (2017) call this the *didactic domain*. SoTL aims to generate knowledge – often, it is knowledge about students' challenges with the knowledge domain of the discipline. They call this the *epistemic domain*. Here one could, for example, explore the application of strategies to enable students to explore concepts, theories, procedures, and so on, in the discipline. One could also investigate how one teaches students to integrate different kinds of knowledge. In the current global context, students need to be aware of the limits of knowledge, and teachers require mechanisms to enable students to reach that understanding (Lockett, 2001).

SoTL also necessarily engages the *interpersonal domain* and can examine what happens between teachers and students, and between students, when they are confronted with different teaching and learning and assessment practices. What happens, for example, when teachers try to negotiate the curriculum with students? SoTL research can inquire about the relationship between teachers in team teaching contexts. SoTL researchers can investigate how teachers understand the relationship

between their roles as teachers and their roles as researchers. SoTL can address *the moral or ethical dimensions* of how teaching and research are conducted. The struggles teachers experience in these various contexts would likely result in difficult conversations with institutional managers – this is another aspect to be examined as part of the interpersonal focus of SoTL.

Booth and Woollacott (2017) also outline the various *contexts* that can be the focus of SoTL, and they state that it is necessary to be explicit about the context when conceptualising and writing up SoTL research. SoTL can examine aspects of *the discipline*; explore what university teachers do to enhance *the profession of university teaching*; examine the beliefs, values and ideologies that shape the teaching and learning context; inquire into how teachers construe their roles, or how the institution sees its mandate in the South African higher education context. Finally, they suggest that SoTL can also focus on the *political context*, i.e. the national or institutional agendas that shape teaching and learning, including various policies.

The multiple contexts explored by Booth and Woollacott (2017) all relate in some way or the other to the curriculum, which is what I turn to next.

The need for a scholarship of teaching and learning that focuses on the curriculum

In South Africa, it is necessary that SoTL focuses on *the curriculum* – what is taught and also how teaching happens; it is also essential that the hidden assumptions that underpin the curriculum are explored. The current concern with decolonising the curriculum is important for various reasons, many of which were discussed in the writings of de Sousa Santos (2007). The decolonisation project also addresses the critical question of student alienation discussed earlier in this paper. Learning – thinking and cognition – engages the whole being, not only the mind. I would argue that if students see themselves reflected in what they learn, they are more likely to feel connected to the curriculum and thus more able to engage fruitfully in their learning. Students should, however, not be allowed to lose sight of the fact that education is not only about learning to understand oneself, but it is also about extending oneself, what one knows and what one can do and be in the world. Expanding ‘the archive’ that the curriculum draws on (Mbembe, 2002), so that students can immerse themselves in different kinds of knowledges from all parts of the world, is thus imperative for all disciplines. De Sousa Santos (2007) impels us to take the idea of an ecology of knowledges seriously when thinking about what to teach.

What knowledge is taught is an issue of social justice. The curriculum is, therefore, a space that can enable the achievement of social justice in the educational field. Nancy Fraser’s (2013) conceptualisation of social justice encompasses three intertwined aspects which together aim to bring about *participatory parity*, that is, the condition of participating as equals in a social context – in our case, the context of the university. The three aspects are representation, distribution and recognition, and they can be applied to thinking about students’ experiences of the curriculum. *Representation* is the political dimension of social justice – it is about who is allowed to be at the table. As noted above, in almost all public institutions, there are more black students than white and more women than men. However, participatory parity is about more than numbers; it is also about the quality of participation. The latter is influenced by *distribution* which is about access to resources. This is the economic aspect

of social justice, and it is about ensuring that all groups have access to the resources necessary to thrive.

The quality of participation is also influenced by *recognition*, that is, the cultural aspect of social justice. The languages, everyday knowledges and ways of being in the world of black students are still not recognised in many fields in the academy. Representation without recognition and equitable distribution of resources is not full justice. It is easy to see why many students claim that they feel alienated from institutions of higher learning when looking through the lens of Fraser's normative framework of social justice. The curriculum can contribute to integrating each of the three elements of Fraser's framework into the teaching and learning process. In so doing, the challenges I outlined at the start of the paper can begin to be addressed.

In what follows, I provide an example of the scholarship into teaching and learning that aims to address several of the aspects of curriculum and student learning issues that I have discussed in the paper thus far. The example shows how academics can take seriously the issues of participatory parity in their pedagogy. It also illustrates an approach to SoTL that enables discipline experts to conduct rigorous research into teaching and learning challenges through collaborating with academic developers.

A collaborative approach to SoTL

Gladman Thondlana is a university lecturer who, alongside his research in his field of Environmental Science, also has a keen interest in the scholarship of teaching and learning. He has a PhD in his field and a postgraduate diploma in higher education. He, therefore, has a sound knowledge of a range of teaching and learning ideas, concepts and theories and of educational practices. Environmental Science aims to prepare students to contribute to solving complex environmental problems. In the real-world, environmental scientists work with diverse communities. Community members hold different beliefs and values about their environment and about each other, and these views can sometimes be contradictory and have the potential to lead to conflict that can scupper or delay environmental interventions. At Rhodes University, South Africa, as is the case in most of the historically white public universities, the majority of the student body is now black, with a relatively small proportion of white students. The student population is thus, in a sense, a microcosm of the South African society. As such, making group assignments integral to the curriculum, and expecting students to provide peer feedback on each other's work, has several educational benefits apart from preparing students for the world of work. Students learn, among other things, to work in diverse groups; to work with and integrate different ideas and ways of working; to manage their time, and deal with conflict; they learn how to give and receive feedback; and they learn how to interpret assessment criteria and to judge the quality of work based on those criteria.

Thondhlana conducted a course evaluation in which he elicited student responses on engaging in and receiving peer-feedback on a group assignment. Much of the feedback on the peer-assessment process was quite negative, and Thondhlana was interested in finding out why this was the case. It is necessary to investigate why students respond negatively to a teaching and learning strategy if one is to improve one's practice and students' learning. Thondhlana requested the assistance of academic developer, Dina Belluigi, to conduct a focus group discussion with the students to elicit their views on

the peer-assessment strategy (Thondhlana and Belluigi, 2017). From the conversation, it emerged that black and female students experienced the assessment of their work by male and white peers as based not solely on the quality of their work; rather, they felt that the peer-assessment reflected race- or gender-based biases. Some black women in the class said that when engaging in group discussions, they were not listened to and that their views were either ignored or not valued. Some white students acknowledged that their preconceptions about peers of different races changed and racial and class differences became insignificant or less so as they got to know their fellow students.

The feedback from the focus group would enable Thondhlana to mediate group projects in the future. Students' perspectives on race, class and gender influenced how they related to each other and also how they participated in and experienced groupwork and in particular peer assessment of group assignments. Their participation in the focus group discussion allowed students to be heard and as such offered black and women students the opportunity to express their views and feelings and to have them heard and acknowledged by their teacher and hopefully also by their white and male classmates. The focus group discussion contributed to participatory parity and recognition in that context. The work by Thondhlana and Belluigi (2017) point to the need for inquiry into student learning that does not shy away from confronting difficult questions with students about race, class and gender and thus addresses the interpersonal and ethical dimensions of teaching and learning.

Both the assessment strategy and the evaluation process described in the above example show how someone who takes a scholarly approach to their teaching can address the problem of student alienation through the curriculum. Thondhlana also engaged in the scholarship of teaching and learning, motivated by a concern for his students' learning. The lecturer considered what kind of curriculum would give students access to the types of knowledge and practices to enable successful learning and also critical being in the world. Pitso (2011) argues that it is a moral imperative in the South African context to address the learning or developmental needs of students and the national priorities associated with creating a more socially just higher education system that takes seriously its accountability to students and the society more broadly.

While there is a growing number of discipline experts who engage in SoTL because they are interested in enhancing the learning experiences of their students, I believe that it might not be fair or reasonable to expect all lecturers to do this. SoTL is a field with theory and methods that may be foreign to many disciplinary academics, and that would require extensive investment of time and effort to master. One way of ensuring the interest of discipline experts in researching their teaching is realised, is to promote collaborations between disciplinary academics and academic developers, whose expertise lie in the theory and practice of teaching and learning. The work by Thondhlana and Belluigi (2017) demonstrates that such collaborations can result in nuanced and thoughtful research outcomes.

A challenge to institutional demands for more SoTL

Some universities, or departments/schools in certain institutions, require academics to produce SoTL publications. This may be because there is a recognition of the need to improve the quality of teaching and learning. However, this requirement could also be based on a misconception that researching teaching and learning is less demanding than doing disciplinary research and that it would be easier to get published in a SoTL or higher education journal than a disciplinary journal. While I believe that

more academics should conduct SoTL work, I suggest that it is counter-productive to make SoTL a performance requirement for all, for the following reasons.

First, requiring academics to conduct and publish SoTL research reinforces the superior status of research vis-à-vis teaching in higher education. Given the very real challenges with teaching and learning in our universities, this view is particularly problematic. It is as necessary to produce new knowledge in the disciplines as it is to find better, more productive ways to teach through serious inquiry into teaching and learning. Second, and in line with my comment on encouraging deep engagement with knowledge, I would argue that it makes sense to encourage and support more academics to conduct research in their disciplines, as it grows expertise and in the process is likely to deepen academics' knowledge and their understanding of knowledge-making processes in their disciplines. Understanding how to produce knowledge and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in one's discipline is likely to enhance one's confidence in the dissemination of such knowledge. In a decolonising context, it could provide one with the tools to challenge knowledge and knowledge production practices as well as to challenge long-standing curriculum practices.

One of the pre-conditions of being a good teacher is to know one's discipline. In addition, a teacher of a discipline should have a sense of how best to teach various aspects of the discipline and should understand how students learn the discipline. This brings me to my third argument against the *requirement* for academics to participate in SoTL. As noted by Potter and Kustra (2011), there isn't necessarily a correlation between conducting SoTL and good or improved teaching and learning; moreover, this is particularly likely if SoTL is institutionally mandated. SoTL has the potential to lead to better teaching and learning if it is the intention of the teacher-researcher to learn how to improve their practice. If the aim of the SoTL is to generate publications rather than to improve teaching and learning, then the link between SoTL and improved student outcomes is likely to be tenuous.

There seems to be a better correlation between *scholarly teaching* and better student experiences of learning. Gibbs (2010) cites research that shows that teachers who have completed formal studies on teaching in higher education such as the U.K. equivalent of the South African Post Graduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDip (HE)) are likely to be more highly regarded by students in terms of the quality of their teaching than teachers who have not done such courses. One reason is that PG Dip participants engage with scholarly work on teaching and learning in higher education. Participants thus learn a great deal about the nature of 'good' teaching and learning in universities. Another reason why PGDip graduates may be more highly rated as teachers relate to the "signature pedagogy" (Shulman, 2005) of these programmes. More often than not, these courses require participants to practice criticality and reflexivity and to provide evidence of praxis, i.e. theory-informed practice. Participants are encouraged to examine difficult teaching challenges, to experiment with ways to overcome those challenges and to explore the pedagogical reasons behind their failures and successes as teachers (Braskamp & Ory, 1994). The courses create the conditions for academics to pay attention to how student learning is influenced by what they do in the classroom.

I would suggest that it is essential for all university teachers to be scholarly teachers – that is, to study what it means to teach their discipline and what is needed for students to become successful learners of the discipline. Being scholarly about one's teaching can be a first step towards the scholarship of teaching and learning. By delving into the literature on teaching and learning broadly, and teaching

and learning in the disciplines more specifically, one is laying the foundation for theoretically-informed teaching as well as for SoTL. Academics are introduced to the scholarly literature on aspects of teaching and learning in the disciplines by engaging in short courses or successfully completing a formal qualification in the field of higher education studies, such as the PGDip (HE) offered by many South African universities. Scholarly teaching is underpinned by reflective practice aided by at least two, but hopefully all four, lenses suggested by Brookfield (1995) in his exploration of reflective practice. Using Brookfield's (1995) 'lenses' the teacher can extract what they know from *the literature* on teaching and learning to reflect on how they understand what is happening to them as they teach, and how they think their students are experiencing their teaching. They can also inquire from their *students* how they experience teaching and learning. Gathering feedback from students can be done through formative and perhaps informal means, as well as more formal and summative means of *evaluating their courses and their teaching*. Moreover, if they have a critical friend or two who can give them *peer-feedback* on their teaching, they have an array of data to analyse and triangulate so as to enhance their understanding of what works and what could or should be improved so that student learning can be enhanced.

A cursory engagement with the scholarly literature on teaching and learning in higher education will introduce lecturers to concepts such as student engagement, the importance of student activity in fostering learning, the influence of interactive teaching on learning and engagement, and how peers can contribute to each other's learning. These ideas can prompt teachers to explore the influence of educational processes in context on the quality of student learning. Furthermore, teachers new to scholarly inquiry into their practice can explore ideas related to the literacy practices of their disciplines. They can learn to "decode" their disciplines (Pace & Middendorf, 2004) and analyse their practice so that they can devise ways of making disciplinary ways of thinking and practicing explicit to their students. They can explore how to work with threshold concepts, as well as with frameworks and models for structuring the curriculum and pedagogy and assessment to create, what Lockett (2001) terms an epistemically diverse curriculum. Such a curriculum has the potential to develop students who can work with different kinds of knowledge, understand how they learn, and even challenge curriculum knowledge.

Conclusion

It is indeed the case, as Hutchings (2010) argues, that teaching, like learning, is intellectual work. It recognises that there is a body of work on teaching and learning that can be drawn on, in conjunction with feedback from students and peers, to aid examination of the *why* and the *how* of a teacher's practice. Teaching, as is the case with many practices, can be improved through the doing – especially if teachers reflect honestly on their work and use the results of such scholarly reflection to enhance their practice.

Theory, of course, provides lenses through which to view practice. The systematic critical engagement with literature on teaching and learning makes possible insights into what 'good' teaching and learning can look like. I place 'good' in inverted commas because there is no one-size-fits-all way of being a good teacher; different disciplinary and local contexts demand different approaches to the work (Pratt, 2002).

Common (1989:385) said, “Master teachers are not born; they become. They become primarily by developing a habit of mind, a way of looking critically at the work they do; by developing the courage to recognise faults, and by struggling to improve” (in Leibowitz, van der Merwe & van Schalkwyk, 2009:258). The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and a scholarly approach to teaching are paths to mastering the art and craft of teaching, but more importantly, they offer the means for South African university teachers to find ways of making it possible for more students to be successful than is currently the case. This important work is likely to grow if it is valued and supported by institutions and if the results of SoTL is used to find and build on solutions to the many vexing problems currently facing higher education in South Africa.

Funding sources:

No funding sources to acknowledge for this paper.

Acknowledgments:

I would like to thank my colleagues, Sherran Clarence, Lynn Quinn and Amanda Hlengwa, and the two anonymous reviewers for feedback on earlier drafts of this article.

References

- Allais, S. 2014. A critical perspective on large class teaching: the political economy of massification and the sociology of knowledge. *Higher Education*. 67: 721 – 734.
- Badat, S. 2019. The equity-quality/development paradox and higher education transformation post-1994. In Reynolds, J., Fine, B. and van Niekerk, R. (eds.) *Race, class and the post-apartheid democratic state*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Barnett, R. 2000. Supercomplexity and the curriculum. *Studies in Higher Education*. 25(3): 255 – 265.
- Booth, C. & Woollacott, L.C. 2017. On the constitution of SoTL: its domains and contexts. *Higher Education*. 75: 537–551. DOI: 10.1007/s10734-017-0156-7.
- Boughey, C. 2005. Epistemological access to the university: An alternative perspective. *South African Journal of Higher Education*. 19(3): 638 – 650.
- Bauling, A. 2017. Towards a Sound Pedagogy in Law: A Constitutionally Informed Dissertation as Capstone Course in the LLB Degree Programme. *PER / PELJ* 2017(20). DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/1727>.
- Braskamp, LA & Ory, JC. 1994. *Assessing faculty work: enhancing individual and institutional performance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Brookfield, S. 1995. *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San-Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Council on Higher Education (CHE). 2017. *VitalStats. Public Higher Education 2017*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.
- Council on Higher Education (CHE). 2016. *South African higher education reviewed. Two decades of democracy*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.
- Clarence, S. & McKenna, S. 2017. Developing academic literacies through understanding the nature of disciplinary. *London Review of Education*. 15(1): 38 – 49.

- Clegg, S. 2007. Extending the boundaries of research into higher education. In Crisp, G. & Hicks, M. (eds.) *Research and Development in Higher Education: Enhancing Higher Education, Theory and Scholarship*. Proceedings of the 30th HERDSA Annual Conference, Adelaide, Australia, 8-11 July 2007: pp 10.
- De Sousa Santos, B. 2007. Beyond abyssal thinking. From global lines to ecology of knowledges. *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*. 1 – 42. [O]. Available: <https://www.eurozine.com/beyond-abyssal-thinking/>. Accessed 29 July 2020.
- Ellery, K. 2018. Legitimation of knowers for access in science. *Journal of Education*. 71: 25 – 38. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2520-9868/i71a02>.
- Entwistle, N. 2000. Promoting deep learning through teaching and assessment: conceptual frameworks and educational contexts. Paper presented at the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme, First Annual Conference. University of Leicester. November.
- Fraser, N. 2013. *Fortunes of feminism: From state-managed capitalism to neoliberal crisis*. London: Verso Books.
- Garfinkle, A. 2020. The erosion of deep literacy. *National Affairs*. 43: Spring. [O]. Available: <https://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/the-erosion-of-deep-literacy>. Accessed 29 July 2020.
- Gee, J.P. 2008. *Social Linguistics and Literacies. Ideologies in Discourses*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge.
- Gibbs, G. 2010. *Dimensions of quality*. Heslington: The Higher Education Academy.
- Haigh, N. 2011. Sustaining and spreading the positive outcomes of SoTL projects: issues, insights and strategies. 17(1): 19 – 31. *International Journal for Academic Development*. DOI: 10.1080/1360144X.2011.586462.
- Hutchings, P. 2010. The scholarship of teaching and learning: from idea to integration. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*. 123: 63 – 72.
- Jacobs, C. 2015. Opening up the curriculum. Moving from the normative to the transformative in teachers' understanding of literacy practices. In Lillis, T., Harrington, K., Lea, M. & Mitchell, S. (eds.) *Working with academic literacies. Case studies towards transformative practice*. Colorado: WAC Clearinghouse. 131 – 142.
- Kapp, R. & Bangeni, B. 2011. A longitudinal study of students' negotiation of language, literacy and identity. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*. 29(2): 197 – 208.
- Kuh, G. 2008. *High-impact educational practices: what they are, who has access to them, and why they matter*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Leibowitz, B., van der Merwe, A. & van Schalkwyk, S. (eds). 2009. *Focus on first-year success. Perspectives emerging from South Africa and beyond*. Stellenboch: SUN MeDIA.
- Lewin, T. & Mawoyo, M. 2014. *Student access and success: issues and interventions in South African universities*. Cape Town: Inyathelo: The South African Institute for Advancement.

- Lillis, T., Harrington, K., Lea, M. & Mitchell, S. (eds). 2015. *Working with academic literacies. Case studies towards transformative practice*. Colorado: WAC Clearinghouse.
- Luckett, K. 2001. A proposal for an epistemically diverse curriculum. *South African Journal of Higher Education*. 15(2): 49 – 61.
- Mann, S, 2005. Alternative perspectives on the student experience: alienation and engagement. *Studies in Higher Education*. 26(1): 7 – 19.
- Mbembe, A. 2002. The power of the archive and its limits. In Hamilton, C., Harris, V., Taylor, J., Pickover, M., Reid, G. & Saleh, R. (eds). *Refiguring the archive*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. 19 – 26.
- McKenna, S. 2010. Cracking the code of academic literacy: An ideological task. In Hutchings, C. & Garraway, J. (eds). *Beyond the university gates: Provision of Extended Curriculum Programmes in South Africa*. Cape Town: Cape University of Technology. 8 – 16.
- Nichols, P. 2017. Writing democracy: From writing centres to writing fellows to writing intensive courses in a university-wide writing programme. In Clarence, S. & Dison, L. (eds). *Writing centres in higher education: working in and across the disciplines*. Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA.
- Pace, D. & Middendorf, J. 2004. Decoding the disciplines: helping students learn disciplinary ways of thinking. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*. 98: Summer. 1 – 100.
- Pitso, T. 2011. Fostering creativity in engineering undergraduates. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand. [O]. Available: <http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/handle/10539/11355>. Accessed 29 July 2020.
- Potter, M.K. & Kustra, E. 2011. The relationship between scholarly teaching and SoTL: models, distinctions, and clarifications. *International Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. 1(23): 1 – 18.
- Pratt, D. 2002. Good teaching: one size fits all? *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*. 93: 5 – 16.
- Scott, I., Yeld, N. & Hendry, J. 2007. *A case for improving teaching and learning in South African Higher Education*. Higher Education Monitor 6. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.
- Sewry, J. & Paphitis, S. 2018. Meeting important educational goals for chemistry through service learning. *Chemistry Education Research and Practice*. 19(3): 973 – 982.
- Shulman, L. 2005. Signature pedagogies in the professions. *Daedalus*. 134(3): 52 – 59.
- Sobuwa, S. & McKenna, S. The obstinate notion that higher education is a meritocracy. *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning*. 7(2). DOI:10.14426/cristal.v7i2.184
- Tabensky, P. & Matthews, S. (eds). 2015. *Being at home: Race, institutional culture and transformation at South African higher education institutions*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

- Thondhlana, G. & Bellugi, D. 2017. Students' reception of peer assessment of groupwork contributions: Problematics in terms of race and gender emerging from a South African case study. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*. 42(7): 1118 – 1131.
- Vorster, J. & Quinn, L. 2012. Theorising the pedagogy of a formal programme for university lecturers. In Quinn, L. (ed). *Re-imagining academic staff development: Spaces for disruption*. Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA. 51 – 69.
- Wright, MC., Finelli, C., Meizlish, D. & Bergom, I. 2011. Facilitating the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning at a research university. *Change: the Magazine of Higher Learning*. 43(2): 50 – 56. DOI: 10.1080/00091383.2011.550255.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>