

Promotion and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Iris Vardi
Curtin University of Technology

Robyn Quin
Curtin University of Technology

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The move toward recognizing teaching academics has resulted in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) gaining a greater prominence within the academy, particularly through the academic promotions system. 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.

However, examination of the definitions of SoTL reveals not only their variation, but also their limitations in terms of academic promotion. This paper examines the institutional concepts underlying promotion and compares these to definitions of SoTL. It argues for a broadening of the SOTL concept to meet the underlying institutional expectations of reward and recognition through promotion.

Key Words: *Academic Performance; Promotion; Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*

Introduction

Since Boyer's *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate* (1990) the concept of the "scholarship of teaching" in higher education has gathered momentum at the national level worldwide through, for instance, the Carnegie Foundation in the United States, the Higher Education Academy in the United Kingdom, and in Australia, the Australian Learning and Teaching Council. At the university level the scholarship of teaching and learning is increasingly seen as a fruitful means for overcoming the divide between 'research' and 'teaching' and for recognizing and rewarding teaching which "for too long has been the poor relation in higher education" (Department for Innovation Universities and Skills, 2003). For many years research staff have been rewarded by promotion for the quality, quantity and impact of their research. As universities increasingly recognize the value of diversity in the roles of academic staff, so the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) has become one of the ways in which teaching staff can be rewarded through promotion.

However, despite the increasing interest in SoTL and its application to academic promotion, definitions and interpretations vary (Andresen, 2000; Smith, 2001). This has led some to question its value within the academy (Boshier, 2009), and others to exhort the movement to extend the scope of the concept (Kreber, 2005; Nicholls, 2004). Despite efforts to pull together the various interpretations through the development of models (e.g. Trigwell, Martin et al 2000; Weston & McAlpine 2001), difficulties in operationalizing and institutionalizing the concept (Boshier 2009) have persisted resulting in poor academic understanding of what it means in practice (Nicholls 2004).

The lack of clarity around what SoTL includes or excludes creates a risk for universities. There is the risk that staff will lose faith in the reforms to university promotion and probation processes which have occurred in all Australian universities over the last five years. There is also the risk, that in an era where issues about staff productivity are high on the agenda, university management might be failing to make its expectations clear to its academics.

In addressing these risks, we at the Curtin University of Technology, a large Western Australian university, have been re-examining how we define SoTL within the context of promotion. This paper explores the relationship between the institutionally held concepts underlying promotion and those underlying SoTL to arrive at implications for ensuring that SoTL is meaningful for institutions within the current Australian context.

The Australian Context

Over the past 10 years, the Australian government has been systematically driving the agenda for better accountability and improved quality in teaching from all Australian universities. The importance the government attaches to this is high: it measures performance, provides incentives and sets the bar for teaching performance both at the institutional and individual staff levels. Its impact has been widespread, affecting how Australian universities value teaching and the staff who deliver the teaching programs.

Nationally, the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) has significantly raised the profile of teaching and learning and rewards universities and academics Australia-wide through its teaching and learning grants, teaching excellence awards and fellowships. Through these funding mechanisms the Council has provided benchmarks to which academic staff may aspire. Teaching excellence nominees, for example, are required to demonstrate “Scholarly activities and service innovations that have influenced and enhanced learning and teaching. This may include showing advanced skills in evaluation and reflective practice; participating in and contributing to professional activities related to learning and teaching; coordination, management and leadership of courses and student learning; conducting and publishing research related to teaching; demonstrating leadership through activities that have broad influence on the profession” (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2008a). Similarly, ALTC fellowship applicants must “devise and undertake fellowship activities that promote and support excellence in teaching and the scholarship of teaching in Australian higher education institutions”. Their curriculum vitae must particularly emphasise their “scholarship and leadership shown in advancing learning and teaching in higher education” (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2008b).

This national focus on teaching and its scholarship has significantly impacted on universities and how they manage and reward staff. All Australian universities, including universities which describe themselves as research intensive, now provide promotional opportunities based on excellence in teaching, and a number of Australian universities now recognize teaching as a valid career path. For instance, both the University of Queensland and Edith Cowan University have three categories of staff: teaching focused, teaching and research, research only (University of Queensland, 2009a). Although Curtin

University does not categorise staff in this way, it now provides an academic promotion route up to and including the highest level of professor solely on the basis of their teaching, leadership and service (Curtin University of Technology, 2007).

As universities increasingly recognize the value of teaching so SoTL has become one of the criteria which staff may address in the pursuit of promotion. The promotions guidelines of many Australian universities make explicit reference to SoTL, but definitions, if provided, vary and reflect the diversity and range of definitions in the literature. For instance, The University of Sydney’s promotions policy emphasizes the systematic use of evidence to inform teaching and assessment while the University of Queensland defines scholarship as involving “exploring, testing, practicing and communicating improved pedagogies, learning processes, curricula, policies and learning materials” (University of Queensland, 2009b).

With teaching and its scholarship high on the federal government agenda, clarity around SoTL is essential for a promotions system and to protect the integrity of those staff promoted for their teaching. Where it is used to reward staff whose primary focus is on teaching, it needs to be carefully conceived and needs to demonstrably represent the same value, effort and intellectual capacity as promotions based on research in order to avoid accusations that teaching scholarship is a “soft” or inferior promotions option.

So what are the concepts underlying promotion that impact on concepts of SoTL within the promotions context? To find out, we extracted the concepts through examination of promotions and associated documentation at our university.

Concepts underlying promotion

Academic promotion in the Australian environment is situated within the context of the Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBAs) of each university. Through the position classification standards in the EBA, the types of duties and accountabilities appropriate to each academic level are prescribed. At Curtin there are 5 academic levels with “A”, the Associate, being the lowest level, and “E”, the professor, being the highest.

Curtin’s EBA, the *Academic Staff Certified Agreement 2005 – 2008*, states the types of duties that typically distinguish each level for teaching focused staff as shown in Table 1. The types of duties listed for each level of appointment are cumulative (i.e. they include the types of duties listed in the level/s below).

Table 1: Types of duties and accountabilities appropriate for “teaching” staff at each academic level

Level	Types of duties and accountabilities
E	Distinguished scholarship and contribution in teaching and learning at all levels, nationally or internationally; Maintenance of academic standards Management/leadership of a large organisational unit, a university wide initiative, policy development, community affairs, excellence in teaching / research; international recognition; capacity building

- Significant service to both the University and the community
- AND
- D** Development of curriculum / programs of study; Significant scholarship in teaching and learning locally or nationally
- Management/leadership of an organisational unit, a large team, a Faculty wide initiative; Mentoring of colleagues
- Significant service to the University, profession, discipline
- AND
- C** Course* / Year / Program co-ordination; Scholarship in teaching and learning
- Management/leadership of a team, a school wide initiative, a course, a year group; Mentoring of students
- Service to the profession, the Faculty
- AND
- B** Undergraduate and postgraduate unit** co-ordination; Postgraduate lecturing, tutoring, demonstrating, clinical supervision, fieldwork and associated activities
- Management/leadership of teaching units, sessional staff
- Service to the academic unit and its functioning
- AND
- A** Undergraduate lecturing, tutoring, demonstrating, clinical supervision, fieldwork and associated activities
- Development of own teaching / professional expertise
- Service to own areas of teaching

*At Curtin, a “course” describes a collection of units that lead to a degree (sometimes known in other universities as a “program”)

** At Curtin, a “unit” describes a credit bearing learning package (sometimes known in other universities as a “course”)

The new *Academic Promotions Policy* at Curtin shows that at each level, staff are rewarded for their performance relative to the typical types of duties expected (Curtin University of Technology 2007). Two core concepts underpin promotions: the scope of influence and responsibility arising out of the duties, and the demonstrated performance relative to the expectations for a particular level.

Scope of influence and responsibility

One of the core concepts underlying the position classification standards and hence promotion is that as one progresses through the hierarchy of levels, so the scope of influence and responsibility increases. At level A, the lowest level, the scope of influence and responsibility is limited to teaching within a unit co-ordinated by another academic of a higher level. As teaching staff progress through the levels so their responsibilities increase. At level B, academics are responsible for co-ordinating individual units, at level C for co-ordinating between units and between years, and at level D for developing new courses (programs) and curricula. Responsibilities for leadership and management increase from managing teaching staff within their own unit through to managing

departments, schools, and faculties. The scope of their service also increases from providing service in teaching and learning to their own academic area (e.g. a department or a school) through to actively participating in and leading teaching in their discipline, profession, the university and the community.

Other Australian universities also link promotion to increasing scopes of influence and responsibilities. For instance, the University of Adelaide's Promotion Policy states that an applicant will only be recommended for promotion when they can demonstrate "they have the capacity to perform tasks commensurate with those expected of staff at the level sought" (University of Adelaide, 2007). Similarly, the University of Queensland's *Criteria for Academic Performance* explicitly links levels of performance to seniority stating that "Senior staff are expected to make a significant contribution to the leadership of the organisational unit and the University. This responsibility for greater leadership applies across teaching, scholarship of teaching (for teaching-focussed staff), research and service" (University of Queensland, 2009b). Clearly, such increasing responsibilities are considered to be an integral part of being a teaching professional: an aspect that needs to be clearly reflected in SoTL.

High levels of performance

The second core concept is high performance. At each level, the promotions process rewards staff for their performance. Curtin University rewards staff for "performing highly" and showing "excellence" in duties appropriate to their current level of employment as well as showing evidence of "satisfactory" performance in duties appropriate to the level that they are applying for (Curtin University of Technology 2007).

The idea of reward through promotion for high performance is echoed in other Australian universities. For instance, the University of Melbourne requires the applicant to demonstrate: "a high level of achievement and promise" in the case of Level B; "excellence" in the case of Level C; and "exceptional distinction" in the case of Level D. For promotion to level E "the applicant must demonstrate eminence as a scholar of international standing" and in the case of the academic whose "prime focus is teaching or knowledge transfer (must) demonstrate that their contribution is underpinned by outstanding scholarship" (University of Melbourne, 2008). Similarly, the Australian National University explicitly makes the same link between level and performance: "The academic promotion process measures applicant output against the standards of quantity and quality expected at the level for which the applicant seeks" (Australian National University, 2009).

The types of evidence needed to demonstrate high performance and excellence include: the types and amount of outputs produced; the quality and impact of work; and the reputation and recognition received.

Outputs. One aspect of performance is the nature of the outputs expected. At levels A and B, the outputs are a given and include appropriate teaching materials, assessment tasks and tools, provision of timely feedback and so forth. But as staff progress through the

higher levels, additional outputs are expected. For instance, at the C level, the types of outputs expected include increasing levels of research into teaching and learning, text book publication and publications on teaching and learning practice. At levels D and E, these types of outputs are expected to be increasingly more significant.

Quality and impact of work. Another aspect of performance is the quality and impact of the work being undertaken. At Curtin, evidence of quality and impact relate directly to the types of duties appropriate to the level and its expected outputs. For instance, staff at the B level, where responsibilities are limited to managing units, are required to show evidence of: “well designed and delivered assessment, learning experiences and feedback”, how they made improvements and how this impacted on student performance and satisfaction. Such improvements and impacts can go well beyond good unit design and teaching practice and include evidence of effective leadership, management and development of the staff who teach within the unit. Impact at this level is assumed to be limited to the students taught by the academic and his or her immediate colleagues.

As staff take on a wider set of duties, they are required to also show evidence of quality and impact that goes beyond design and leadership of a unit. At level C this can include evidence of high course (program) performance compared to other institutions, well designed and delivered courses (programs), improvements made at course (program) level and the impact that this has on student and stakeholder satisfaction with the course (program). Quality leadership in teaching and learning also plays an important role, with teaching staff being asked to demonstrate their leadership and impact on the course (program) as a whole and the staff that teach within it, or through a teaching and learning initiative that spans across an area.

At levels D and E, the quality of the additional outputs also becomes important: the journals and book publishers that they publish with, the originality of the work being done, the types and size of teaching and learning grants being secured and so forth. Also of importance is the leadership the academic shows in teaching and learning across and between organizations, and the impact that this work has on teaching practices, policies, programs, partnerships and the like, similar to the types of leadership required of nominees for the ALTC teaching excellence awards.

Reputation and recognition. A third aspect underlying performance levels is reputation in the teaching community and the degree to which others recognize the quality and impact of the academic’s work. In promotion, evidence of recognition by peers, students and external bodies are deemed important regardless of level or responsibility. At Curtin, the expectation for level C is that evidence is emerging of a growing profile and of participation at the local level in teaching and learning. As staff move to level D, the expectation is for evidence of an increasing profile and participation nationally resulting in a “significant” reputation that then grows further at E.

This need to demonstrate high performance across a range of outputs and outcomes which is recognized as impacting on teaching and learning at all levels is echoed in other universities’ promotion policies. For instance, at the University of Queensland a level E

is described as demonstrating “a substantial impact on learning in the discipline over a sustained period, effective mentoring of junior staff, recognition as an international authority in the scholarship of teaching, a major impact on educational policy and curriculum, and a significant contribution to international debate and practice in these areas” (University of Queensland 2009). High performance requirements at all levels have significant implications for how universities define SoTL so that it is both meaningful to the process and considered of equal value to promotion through research.

Scholarship of teaching reconsidered in the context of promotion

In 1990, Boyer argued that research alone would not secure the future of higher education nor the (American) nation, rather that a full range of scholarly activity needed to be recognized: discovery, integration, application and teaching. This placed teaching alongside and equal to other scholarly endeavours. The scholarship of teaching, he said, involves developing the knowledge, skill, mind, character, or ability of others. It “means not only transmitting knowledge, but transforming and extending it as well.” Teaching stimulates “active, not passive, learning and encourages students to be critical, creative thinkers, with the capacity to go on learning...It is a dynamic endeavour involving all the analogies, metaphors, and images that build bridges between the teacher’s understanding and the student’s learning. Pedagogical procedures must be carefully planned, continuously examined, and relate directly to the subject taught” (Boyer, 1990 pp. 23-24). It was the scholarship of teaching, argued Boyer, which would entice the next generation of scholars into the academy.

In this view, scholarship is seen as ‘scholarly teaching’ which transforms and extends students’ understanding through scholarly approaches to knowledge: debate and challenge (Nicholls 2004). It reflects an apprenticeship view where teaching staff inculcate students into what Lave and Wenger (1991) term the “community of practice” of the academy. Along with other forms of “scholarship”, as defined by Boyer, this scholarship is to be valued for its ability to engage, stimulate and excite students to be part of the academy.

However, Boyer argued that this form of scholarship was one of four integrated types which is situated within a traditional view of the full range of academic work undertaken by an academic staff member. Is this view of teaching scholarship, however, sufficient for academic promotion in the current context of “teaching focussed” academics where staff are now rewarded for their teaching without necessarily requiring them to engage in the full range of academic endeavours, including research? In terms of scope of influence and responsibility, such a definition of SoTL is limited to the design and delivery of learning in the classroom, with the impact and recognition of the work being constrained mainly to the students taught. In practice, this limited level of influence and responsibility is akin to the duties and accountabilities of staff at the lower academic levels.

Another understanding of SoTL, one which builds on Boyer’s view of the reflective practitioner promoting active learning of the ways of the community, incorporates the contemporary views of a student-centred approach to teaching. In this view, SoTL is the process for reflecting on and improving teaching practice so that learning improves

(Kreber & Cranton, 2000; Prosser, 2008). Glassick, Huber and Maeroff (1997) describe the concept as reflective practice, peer review, authentic practice, scholarly teaching and teaching excellence (cited in R. Smith 2001, p. 70).. Andresen (2000, p. 147) describes it as “personal, local and informal - into one’s own teaching and one’s students’ learning”. This includes evaluation of all aspects of teaching quality – goals, preparation, methods, results, syllabus, materials and so forth (Andresen 2000). Aligned with this, is the view of SoTL as the application of educational theory, research, and the experiences of others to one’s own practice, again with the aim of improving teaching and, by implication, learning (Kreber and Cranton 2000; Trigwell, Martin et al. 2000).

However, like Boyer’s definition, these views of SoTL are limited in terms of scope of influence, impact and recognition, to the lower academic levels as defined through promotion policies. Reporting on what we do, including the critical reflections on that practice, provides a clear benefit to others (Andresen 2000). This sharing of practice has been described by Shulman (1998) as “a public account of the full act of teaching – vision, design, enactment, outcomes, analysis” (cited in Smith 2001). From a promotions point of view, this broadens the concept of SoTL because it requires the teacher to have impact beyond the classroom – they must influence others and garner a reputation.

For some, SoTL is more than reflecting and reporting on practice. Rather it is more formal educational research, aligning more closely with the traditional research role within universities (Kreber and Cranton 2000). This has been taken to include research into teaching and learning that is both discipline and non-discipline specific providing the type of public permanent work that is judged by peers to be scholarly (Andresen 2000). From a promotions perspective, including formal educational research in the definition of SoTL provides for increased impact, recognition and influence as required at the higher academic levels. While important, such a definition could also be viewed as limiting SoTL, pushing it into the predominant “teaching - research” paradigm.

More recently, some have challenged the supporters of the SoTL to move beyond classroom practice and its improvements to student learning; to consider scholarship as a critical and intellectual activity (Kreber 2005). According to Kreber a critical paradigm goes beyond the classroom to question the goals of higher education and examine the “forms of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are promoted in our curricula and ask why these are pursued and not others” (Kreber 2005 p. 396).

Interpretations of scholarship in the context of promotions

Curtin has now completed two rounds of promotions under its new policy which provides for promotion based on teaching. Within this new system, SoTL is minimally defined as “research on, evaluation of or reflection on teaching and learning that results in improvement to practice. It includes communicating good practice to others”, (Guidelines for Applicants, Curtin University, 2008). However, the policy and procedures make clear the core concepts underlying promotion: scope of influence and responsibility and demonstrated performance relative to the expectations of a given level.

With these two messages underlying promotion through teaching, we were interested in examining how applicants addressed SoTL in their applications for academic promotion. Following ethics clearance, a number of applicants gave us permission to examine their claims in depth on the understanding that we would not reveal any identifying details in publication.

Examination of the promotions applications revealed that, at the lower levels, applicants pointed to their reflective practice and how they improved their classroom teaching. This is in line with much of the SoTL literature (e.g. Andresen, 2000; Kreber & Cranton, 2000; Prosser 2008) For example:

“ X has always been a challenging unit, particularly for external students and for internal students with English as their second language, due to the new concepts and language introduced. ..students had commented about and the need for more To make this unit more equitable, flexible and accessible to all students ... it was redesigned around Feedback from students supported this (change)....”

“My scholarship in teaching and learning is demonstrated by my own reflective approach in reviewing the X units. For example, I developed for the unit Y after reviewing the students’ comments ... and discussion with colleagues. A more interactive approach to learning is encouraged through the results have showed satisfactory outcomes have been achieved as demonstrated in the student progress ... and (student) unit evaluations”

However, applications to the higher levels of D (Associate Professor) and E (Professor) were different. While they all pointed to their successful teaching practice as required in the policy, many of the applicants emphasized reputation and recognition, and the types of outputs that go beyond the classroom context – typically publications and grants. For example:

“I am establishing a national and international reputation for my contribution to the scholarship of teaching and learning, as can be seen from the publication of numerous papers in refereed journals and conference proceedings in”

“During the presentation of my refereed paper at X, I was invited to ... Together we worked on a successful X Grant worth Y titled: Z ... There has been extensive interest nationally”

Like national and international publications, successful grant applications provide evidence of increased scope and influence, particularly in Australia where the ALTC provides significant grants for projects that further “the sector as a whole ... organisations within the sector, and the development of national approaches or policies ...” (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2009). From a promotions perspective, a successful grant application provides evidence of scholarship with a broad scope of influence much beyond the curriculum and the classroom as is expected of applicants at a higher level.

In addition to publications and grants, applicants for all levels pointed to teaching awards that they had received. Many applicants considered awards (particularly the ALTC awards) to be an effective demonstration of external recognition and reputation. While

the ALTC awards recognize influences on classroom learning, they also go well beyond the classroom and the curriculum to reward "... contributing to professional activities related to learning and teaching; ... conducting and publishing research related to teaching; demonstrating leadership through activities that have a broad influence on the profession" (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2008a). Programs and initiatives in teaching and learning are further rewarded for their "breadth of impact" which is judged by "the extent to which the program has led to widespread benefits for students, staff, the institution, and/or other institutions, consistent with the purpose of the program" (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2009). So not only is scholarship rewarded within and beyond the classroom, it is also rewarded for impacts well beyond students and their learning....

The institutional perspective: implications for scholarship

What is clear from this examination of SoTL within the promotions context, is that institutional expectations of SoTL in many Australian universities (supported by government expectations as revealed through awards and grants) go well beyond many of the SoTL definitions in the literature. Expectations go beyond the improvement of, and research into student learning to include scholarly approaches to the broader student experience, to the staff experience, and the governance of the university. Furthermore, scholarship for the purposes of promotion is expected to address staff needs and capabilities as well as the structures and support mechanisms teaching staff need in order to further student learning, engagement and the overall experience.. Such scholarly endeavour is expected to influence the sector and provide national approaches to education.

Nicholls (2004 p. 38) describes academics' views of scholarship in general as being about:

- "Critical thinking and problem solving
- Production, conceptualization and understanding of new knowledge
- Dissemination of knowledge to a variety of audiences"

Applying such a scholarly approach to the full range of responsibilities undertaken by teaching academics from A through to E may yield a more fulsome definition of SoTL that would better address the integrity of the concept in the promotions process. This would imply a scholarly approach beyond the classroom and curriculum to other educational matters such as the development and evaluation of educational policies, procedures, structures and additional programs offered by the institution. This would provide scholarly leadership not only in the discipline, but across the academic community.

Conclusion

What is clear from promotions is the depth and breadth of the teaching academic and the significant contribution to scholarship that can be made right through to level E. SoTL that is conceived of primarily as 'good teaching with reflective practice that is informed by the literature and the practices of others' leaves an applicant for promotion stuck at the A and B levels in terms of both scope of responsibility and performance. Such a definition is a poor second where it is used as a basis for promoting staff to higher levels,

particularly for those who have demonstrated a much broader scope of responsibility along with the outputs, outcomes, impacts, and reputation of higher levels. From an institutional perspective, such a definition falls short of the aims underlying promotion.

The challenge for SoTL is to catch up with the higher education institutions. The changing landscape of education requires this and the institutions may well be leaving the literature on SoTL behind. This creates a significant risk for both staff and the institutions. For staff, any confusion about SoTL and what it means within the promotions context affects how they organize their work, focus their endeavours and progress their careers. For the institutions, any lack of clarity affects their ability to influence staff endeavours so that they meet their mission and their obligation to provide the best overall educational experience to their students and staff.

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