

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL): The thorn in the flesh of educational research

John Canning^{a*} and Rachel Masika^a

^aCentre for Learning and Teaching, University of Brighton, 104 Watson Building,
Falmer, Brighton, BN1 9PH

* Corresponding author

j.canning@brighton.ac.uk <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5481-7724>

rachel.masika@ntlworld.com <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7505-528X>

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Abstract

Thirty years ago Boyer's report *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (1990) inspired the launch of the 'SoTL movement' which sought to raise the status of learning and teaching in higher education. In this paper we argue that despite its honourable intentions the SoTL movement has been a thorn in the flesh of serious scholarship into learning and teaching in higher education. Drawing on various debates within and outside the SoTL movement and interviews with teaching and learning leaders in the UK, we argue that the time has come to consign SoTL to history, and start the process of asserting the value of higher education research. A widened understanding of SoTL that we conceptualise as SoTL 2.0 has superseded and edged out earlier conceptualisations of SoTL (SoTL1.0), weakening SoTL's potential research rigour, legitimacy and validity.

8433 words

Introduction

Scholarship of Learning and Teaching (SoTL) as a concept, developed from Boyer's (1990) conception of four scholarships – discovery, integration, application and teaching (the adding of 'learning' emerged in the late 1990s) Hutchings and Schulman (1999: 13). Boyer's statement that 'teaching can be well regarded only as professors are widely read and intellectually engaged.' (Boyer 1990: 23) firmly placed the responsibility of this scholarship onto all academics who teach, irrespective of whether they see their role primarily as one of teaching or of research.

Post-Boyer, SoTL is not only presented as a form of scholarship, but as a movement (Tight, 2018). In 2000 a discussion of SoTL characterised it as '... work that is peer reviewed, related to student learning, and connected to previous literature/scholarship' (Atkinson 2001: 1222). She observes that this understanding was close to that of Shulman that:

We develop a scholarship of teaching when our work as teachers becomes public, peer-reviewed and critiqued, and exchanged with other members of our professional communities so they, in turn, can build on our work. These are the qualities of all scholarship. Shulman (2000: 50).

Over the past two decades SoTL has come to be identified with a range of learning and teaching activities that include quality and enhancement of learning, excellence and recognition, pedagogic research and solving work-related problems (Fanghanel et al., 2016), not all of which meet any criteria of being public, peer reviewed and critiqued. Aside from a focus on teaching and learning much of what is represented as being in the scope of SoTL is unpublished, not available to critical evaluation, not disseminated beyond its original context and unconnected with any previous literature and scholarship. SoTL has come to be regarded as an umbrella

concept (Levander et al., 2019), covering a range of activities and practices. To many academics, SoTL has meant reading papers and being informed, not undertaking primary investigation (Cotton, Miller and Kneale 2018) and these concerns have been expressed within the SoTL movement itself (see Kanuka 2011, Chick 2014). Cotton, Miller and Kneale (2018) argue that in the context of current UK research assessments, SoTL should be seen as different to HE pedagogic research. However, in context of the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF), Tierney (2020) uses the term ‘PedR/ SoTL’ to imply that the differences are either subtle or that SoTL is simply another term for pedagogic research in higher education and that the two terms can be used interchangeably.

Concerns about SoTL have been expressed from both within the ‘SoTL movement’, e.g. Kanuka (2011) and outside of it (e.g. Boshier 2009, Macfarlane 2011). Kanuka (2011) warns of the dangers of SoTL losing its scholarship—for example a large proportion of work presented at SoTL conferences does not have theoretical underpinning and does not reference nor engage with existing educational scholarship meaning that SoTL cannot be taken seriously by educational researchers and cannot genuinely add to wider knowledge in the discipline. Macfarlane (2011) from the ‘outside’ expresses concerns about the damage SoTL does to the reputation of educational research more generally reinforcing a sense of lower status. In this paper we go further than previous critics and call for an abandonment of the term SoTL altogether in view of its confused definition, open boundaries and threat to serious scholarship in higher education teaching and learning practices.

As well as drawing on the literature around SoTL this paper also draws on recent interviews with eight teaching and learning leaders in UK universities.

Starting point

Both authors of this paper are experienced researchers into teaching and learning in higher education, and we work in a centralised learning and teaching centre in a UK university which supports academics in developing their teaching practice and implementing/ disseminating institutional policies around teaching and learning. This dual role as educational researchers and facilitators of institutional policies can be a conflicting one. While our professional role and identity is not a central concern of our argument we are often tasked with getting subject-based academics to take a more scholarly approach to their teaching within their disciplinary context and we are members of a higher education research group within our institution which seeks to do precisely this. SoTL is often presented as the vehicle through which this is possible, as SoTL, in Healey's (2000) terms is embedded in the disciplines. If SoTL is effective it will resonate with colleagues within their disciplines and this scholarship will elevate the status of learning and teaching in these disciplines.

We did not undertake the project with a definitive view on the definition(s) of SoTL, but our expectations were informed by increasingly inclusive definitions of the term. For example Chick (2014) envisages SoTL as a 'big tent' and a 'tent without walls' (Chick, 2014) accommodating a range of perspectives, methodologies and meanings. We conceived SoTL as involving a range of varying components and a continuum reflecting its pluralism and taxonomical nature (Hutchings 2000: 11). We were also aware of its roots in Boyer's (1990) work, and were familiar with the idea that SoTL 'ought' to be institutionalised within university, to raise the status and importance of teaching and learning within disciplinary communities There is also the question of whether SoTL needs to be developed within the culture of each discipline (Healey, 2000) or needs to move beyond disciplines as well (Kreber, 2010). Regarded as inherently interdisciplinary yet also deeply anchored in disciplines (Miller-Young and

Yeo, 2013; Fanghanel, 2013), there can be contrasts between SoTL and disciplinary epistemologies as well as challenges to identities as teachers and researchers, including risks associated with loss of disciplinary identity and status (Miller-Young, Yeo and Manarin, 2018).

The wider scope of SoTL: Individual and institutional considerations

SoTL is as an activity undertaken by a diversity of people including education department researchers, researchers in government and specialist research units, part-timers formed of academics from all academic fields, disciplinary education researchers, disciplinary specialists, academic developers and university administrators) (Harland, 2012), SoTL may be regarded as open access field which generates debates about what it is, its purposes and the validity of the knowledge it creates (Harland, 2012, Booth and Woollacot, 2018, Fanghanel et al, 2015). SoTL has been regarded as both encompassing research, i.e. leading to the discovery of generalisable knowledge as well as research-like inquiry that is integrated into the practice of teaching, teaching as reflexive self-evaluation that builds knowledge on the local level.

Debate continues as to whether SoTL should be regarded as research, (like other education research), or as investigations of practice that are not research, but essential components of professional activity (Ashwin and Trigwell, 2004). Ashwin and Trigwell argue SoTL results in (1) personal knowledge, born out of personal and professional experience (2) local knowledge, which derives from investigations intended to inform a group (3) public knowledge which has implications beyond the local context and is peer-reviewed or validated. Mårtensson, Roxå, and Olsson (2011) add a fourth – the need to cultivate cultures of continuous improvement.

Ginsberg and Bernstein (2012) argue that organisational cultural change in the form of acceptance and support for SoTL is necessary if teaching and learning practice

is to be improved learning and teaching practice. The notion of organisational culture is embodied in values, processes, goals, decisions, actions and communication both on an instrumental and symbolic level (Tierney, 1988, Amaral et al., 2013; Stensaker and Vabø, 2013). Institutional theories illustrate how cultural change within HEIs involves careful self-reflection, robust dialogue and rigorous analysis and the role of institutional logics in explaining structure and action (Ocasio et al., 2015), particularly where HE agendas are influenced by marketisation (Taberner, 2018) and managerialism that shape institutional discourses, cultures and practices. While current HE agenda make it harder for academics to engage in SoTL as business and economic functions and imperatives are prioritised over educational objectives and values (John and Fanghanel, 2016; Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005), there are also opportunities for leveraging SoTL for managerialism concerns (Openo et al, 2017).

This raises two central questions for our study: (1) how is SoTL understood (meaning and sense-making) and cultivated in the context of ‘cultivations of cultures of continuous improvements’ (Mårtensson, Roxå, and Olsson, 2011) in HEIs? (2) What are the implications of the conceptualisations of SoTL for its research validity and rigour? Drawing on diverse cultural, institutional change and education-inflected perspectives, SoTL may be examined through lenses that shed light on meanings, structures and action to gain insights into how it stands as a field of study. With this in mind, we interviewed teaching and learning leaders from a range of UK universities to gain insight into their understanding of SoTL and how they were embedding SoTL into their institution's culture.

Approach to empirical evidence (or methodological approach)

We interviewed a total of eight educational development leaders of whom five were from England and one each from Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales (see Table 1). Interviewees were selected purposively from a prior survey of participants who had volunteered to take part in a further interview – a convenience self-selecting sampling strategy. This non-probabilistic approach to sampling, typical of qualitative research, aimed to recruit at least one participant from each nation representing a mix of types of universities (e.g. teaching-led and research-led universities). This research was a component part of a larger project about SoTL in UK.

[Table 1 about here]

Interviews were transcribed and then analysed first inductively. This involved open coding (Saldaña, 2015) in NVivo10 where data relating to the research interview questions was assigned and organised around codes then axial coding in Word where data was searched that fit these codes with new codes also developed (Miles et al., 2013; Miles and Huberman, 1994). The data was then categorised iteratively under key broad themes related to the questions which involved deductive analysis re-categorising subthemes within the key broad themes: definitional issues; positioning, institutionalisation and embedding; resources, advocacy and capacity building for supporting SoTL for professional development, recognition and reward; student engagement strategies and; evidence and impact. The broad themes provided a heuristic device for presenting the subthemes emerging from the data. In drawing conclusions, we systematically and iteratively examined and re-examined the data using what Miles and Huberman (1994, 245-262) call ‘tactics for generating meaning’ in noting patterns and themes, clustering, contrasting and comparing, partitioning variables, and subsuming particulars in the general.

The following questions regarding SoTL were asked:

- (1) How would you define SoTL? How/in what ways is SoTL supported in your university/institution?
- (2) What are the key challenges you face/your institution faces in implementing SoTL?
- (3) Can you identify 3-5 key challenges in implementing SoTL?
- (4) How is SoTL embedded and supported institutionally and within disciplines in your university/institution? What policies, strategies, implementation plans are in place?
- (5) What strategies are promoted/applied to engage students in SoTL at your university/institution? What evidence is there on impact including in developing critical thinking?
- (6) How is SoTL applied in diverse academic and professional roles in higher education? How is this changing in the context of increasingly transnational and technology-mediated teaching and learning environments?
- (7) What suggestions do you have for enhancing SoTL to inform professional practice and development?

While the exact scope of their roles varies, each interviewee had a broad strategic role in their institution to oversee the enhancement of teaching quality through responsibilities such as courses for early career academics, assessing HEA Fellowships (UK) , providing developmental workshops to academic colleagues, distributing funding for small-scale teaching and learning projects and developing institutional learning strategies. Not all the interviewees have published research into teaching and

learning in higher education, but we were confident that given their role as learning and teaching leaders their perspectives would be insightful.

SoTL first

As our project was concerned with embedding SoTL into an institutional context, we needed to get a sense of how our informants understood and embedded SoTL into the institutional culture of their universities. We were not asking our participants how they are generally supporting learning and teaching and enhancing its status, but were explicitly asking questions about SoTL in line with the aims of the wider project of which these interviews formed a part.

The principal emerging theme from the data was a strong confusion about the range and scope of the term ‘SoTL’ amongst those with teaching and learning leadership responsibilities, who are often charged with the task of promoting or constructing frameworks to promote, recognise and reward SoTL throughout their institutions. Part of this confusion relates to a lack of definition and therefore unclear expectations:

I think probably we don't have clear enough definition about what we mean and what our expectations are. So that ranges from scholarly teaching right through to definitions of providing research evidence, public dissemination and our dissemination through our sharing of good practice in the centre itself across the university. (Interviewee 8)

Nuanced differences in perceptions of SoTL are indicative of the extent to which it is considered as serious educational research or as a watered-down version of research that underpin the confusion about its nature, value and purpose. For example, the following contrasting statements regarding SoTL as an innovation or enhancement

practice, to an evidencing research-based practice to a development practice that is watered-down research:

I think SoTL for me is linking of research and teaching it is a scholarly practice it is about evidence informed innovation and enhancement in one's practice (Interviewee 4).

I think that is about seeing learning and teaching in higher education particularly as being evidence lead and evidence based, being research led and research based'. (Interviewee 7).

Because I am a pedagogic researcher I just see SoTL as almost a watered down version of that which is not quite fair, but most of the research that I do I don't consider SoTL... how would you define SoTL [?], small scale research and development work in teaching and learning designed to inform practice at a local level. Now that's not necessarily how everyone would use it ... that in a way is what differentiates it for me from pedagogic research which is aimed at wider impact and more of a theoretical understanding' (Interviewee 5).

It is not unusual for the definitions and scope of educational concepts to be contested, but this empirical research, in triangulation with the literature around SoTL, has led us to the view that SoTL as conceived in the 1990s and 2000s is one of two main camps in conceiving a definition of SoTL – at first glance it would appear that this second more inclusive camp embraces the first yet goes beyond it.

In interviewee 1's view it is evident that this understanding is a shift in emphasis from an outward-focused, evaluative approach of Boyer (1990), Shulman (2000) and Atkinson (2001) to an emphasis on scholarly practice for innovation and enhancement. Interviewee 5 perceives SoTL as 'watered-down' research and development to inform practice at a local level rather than outward-focussed.

The SoTL spectrum

The idea of SoTL as a wide range or spectrum or continuum of activities strongly emerged as a key idea when asking participants how they defined or understood SoTL.

SoTL is a spectrum so there's everything from your reflective practice and taking more scholarly approach to your teaching straight through to, I'm applying for grants ... [and] I want to have REFable publications' (Interviewee 4).

I think continuum is really good way to describe it...I would consider things like engaging in the published literature and drawing on the research literature to improve your teaching would absolutely be part of that and I agree that through all of our accreditation professional development activities the research is completely underpinning that, so in that sense it's all got this scholarly underpinning so yes we do use it it's just not a term that I relate to that well. (Interviewee 5)

While participants spoke about SoTL as a spectrum or continuum, one aspect which emerged was a strong lack of conviction in their definition. There were no clear attempts to exclude anyone or anything from their definitions other than activities that were not directly related to learning and teaching. The ideas of continuum and spectrum are instructive of what may belong in the SoTL 'tent'. A recent literature review demonstrates that SoTL can potentially encompass practices as varied as discussions around the 'professionalisation' of university teaching, reflective practice, rewarding learning and teaching excellence, the enhancement of teaching quality and pedagogic research (Fanghanel et al 2016). Interviewee 4's definitions of the ends of this spectrum are instructive – SoTL could range from individual reflective practice through to 'Refable' research, 'Refable' research being that which meets the criteria UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF) which requires the research to be original under these definition (REF2021 2019: 90). So while it would not be reasonable to expect all those teaching to be undertaking REFable research into their teaching and learning

practice, it is imperative that all who teach in higher education ought to undertake some reflection on their practice. While we accept that the sorts of projects studied by Mårtensson, Roxå, and Olsson (2011) undertaken by new academic staff can and do have local value, the use of SoTL as a vehicle for those who are inexperienced or whose real expertise lies elsewhere lends credibility to the idea of SoTL as a watered-down version of teaching and learning research.

Much that is viewed as being on the SoTL spectrum does not get disseminated, even locally:

... we do recognise excellence in teaching through rewards through prizes...one of my issues is that they get the award then that's it, [the] end. (Interviewee 3)

It is clear that these spectrum definitions extend way beyond those of Boyer (1990), Shulman (2000) and Atkinson (2001) who were strongly of the view that SoTL requires a process of the publication, evaluation and peer review and into the territory of Kanuka's (2011) concern. SoTL in this less 'inclusive' view does not include mere reflection on practice or awards for being 'good' at teaching.

Reward of individuals and 'muddled implementation'

Another key theme emerging from the interviews concerned the reward of individual members of staff for their SoTL-related activities. Rewards mentioned included promotion and progression, internal institutional funds for learning and teaching projects and prizes though the outcomes and impacts are uncertain.

[T]he culture hasn't yet caught up and that's why we think what we really need to do as it say is define what we mean, what does it mean if somebody is on a teaching and scholarship contract, what are their opportunities for development, advancement promotion, how is that all going to fit in. [Interviewee 3]

Interviewee 3 mentions staff on ‘a teaching and scholarship contract’. Many UK universities have separate career ‘tracks’ for ‘teaching’, ‘research’ or a mixture of both. While the nomenclature varies there is an acknowledgement that not all staff are engaged in (or contractually engaged in), what Boyer would call the ‘scholarship of discovery’. However, those placed on a ‘teaching and learning’ routes are intended to have the equivalent opportunities for career development and promotion as their so-called ‘research active’ colleagues. While the success indicators for research staff have long included publications and grants received, it is not always clear what the equivalent success indicators are for staff on these learning and teaching routes (Gretton and Raine 2017: 301). However, the notion of promoting the status of teaching and learning remains a strong idea.

I would say that its public proclamations are very clear that it values learning and teaching and that we are currently in a position where our relatively new vice chancellor and myself and others in a relatively new unit, are being given a lot of real actual support to promote learning and teaching. (Interviewee 7)

One interviewee demonstrated the success of SoTL’s institutionalisation in explaining how guidance was initially provided in terms of a document and that over a period of between three to four years the concept has developed such that over 80% of staff evidence their approach, though what is precisely meant by ‘a SoTL approach’ is unclear:

The university has a policy... as we’re very keen on keeping that concept of academics who weren’t solely about the practice of teaching so we took a SoTL approach to that... when we started with it we had a very big guidance document because we were trying to pull a whole raft of staff from not engaging with it to engaging with it. But after three and a half years we got to point where we had over 80 percent of the staff being able to evidence their approach so we updated the policy to say yeah we still have to do it but you’re not having a monitoring process to it in the way that we did during the three or four years of intense development of the concept. (Interviewee 6)

Those promoting SoTL have described some institutional contexts in terms of having ‘an open door’, or ‘taking a pragmatic approach’, ‘storm trooping’ and ‘fixing or improving things’, signifying the range of institutional approaches, cultures and contexts in which SoTL is being promoted. But some interviewees spoke of the need for institutional change or a culture shift to successfully institutionalize SoTL, as has also been argued by Ginsberg and Bernstein (2012). The need for a cultural shift to enable SoTL practice was a recurring theme with participants noting the time it takes and the need for cultural change, structured ways of exploring what works, for structures in place to catch up:

SoTL is specifically referred to in terms of quality assurance and enhancement process,... but also in our promotions processes ... probably less directly in our discussions with staff about the quality of their teaching and their delivery and the specific focus at school and faculty level for the curriculum design and development at the subject level. (Interviewee 8)

I’ve been trying to almost change the culture at [Institution name] really ... in the past it’s been quite managerial and staff want very explicit guidelines about what they can and can’t do and I think because the teaching learning enhancement strategy is quite strategic and it’s more like a framework than a set of prescriptions, so I’ve been trying to empower staff to run with things and I think some colleagues have really enjoyed that but also a number of staff have found it quite difficult (Interviewee 4)

SoTL’s reference in quality and enhancement processes suggests a leveraging of SoTL for these strategic processes, often aligned with marketisation and managerialism. There has been growing evidencing of this leveraging in HE strategic documents (Opena et al, 2017) which indicates growing attempts to bridge managerial and educational concerns, but there is little support for institutional SoTL capacity building (Myatt et al, 2018).

Interviewee 8’s acknowledgement that the appearance of SoTL in strategies did not manifest itself in broader conversations with teaching staff around learning and

teaching suggests the term has little credence and any discussions about it may be restricted to the interests of those leading teaching initiatives.

...we've had those conversations in many different contexts, that takes time it takes a shift in culture for many of the students and staff, and to think in terms of SoTL that again would be a very useful platform to explore in much more meaningful and structured ways what works and what doesn't work in that culture shift'
(Interviewee 8)

Interviewee 7 suggests that because of institutional cultural dynamics where subject research is valued over and above learning and teaching and individual's pragmatism towards promotions means that SoTL is not always purposefully valued or implemented/achieved as would be desired:

However, there is no doubt that there a lot of work to do and that behind the public proclamations the schools still value research and research outputs and subject based research as opposed to pedagogic research more highly than leaning and teaching and individual academics know for a fact that currently if they want to get promotion they need to be good researchers rather than good practitioners.
(Interviewee 7)

This suggests that institutional strategies for learning and teaching, even where they articulate SoTL in terms of broadened understandings that encompass quality assurance and enhancement do not materialise in consistent well-defined applications of SoTL. Typically institutional strategies are influenced by the wider environment, organisational culture and trends in higher education driven by new managerialism and marketisation paradigms where SoTL is framed to fit in with managerial and strategic priorities that show up the tensions between research and teaching, and where SoTL can be a bridge but is diluted and muddled by strategic actions treating research and teaching as separate tracks requiring different outcomes.

Unfortunately we don't have that budget in the same way as we did before, I'm working with the new Pro Vice Chancellor to say we've got all these great ideas about how we are going to join this up but at the end of the day unless we put real money behind it which will either buy people out time or provide money for them to develop resources, it won't happen. (Interviewee 3).

Implications

In this section we will outline the implications of confused definitions of SoTL, and the muddled way in which in SoTL is implemented in institutional contexts. There is nothing original about recognising that understandings of the scope for SoTL vary, but it is clear that SoTL, as understood by our interviewees had mostly moved away from an outward-focused, evaluative approach of Boyer (1990), Shulman (2000) and Atkinson (2001) or as encapsulated by the aims of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning towards an increasingly inclusive, though nebulous understanding through which anything from personal reflection, sharing of good practice through to the publication of the findings from major research projects is in scope as 'SoTL'.

The desire for inclusivity is laudable, but the confusion exhibited by our interviewees, all of whom are involved in the leadership of teaching and learning strategies are demonstrative of a confusion around the idea of SoTL. There is a clear understanding that SoTL is a 'good thing' that relates to the important need to raise the status of learning and teaching in HE in a way which appears rigorous and scholarly; however if teaching and learning leaders are unable to articulate any workable understanding of SoTL to their own satisfaction, then it is unsurprising that there is not a sufficient shared understanding of the process to be useful. The danger of such an inclusive approach is that a vague commitment to reflective practice at one end of the SoTL spectrum only adds weight to beliefs that pedagogic research is somehow less

rigorous than non-educational research if both practices are encompassed by the term 'SoTL'. Moreover, as those who publish SoTL are by definition at the scholarly 'ends' of the SoTL spectrum, their work is often seen as being little more than the basic practices everyone who teaches should be engaging in anyway such as reading teaching and learning texts and maybe talking to colleagues about their teaching practice.

This would indicate SoTL is at best confusing and at worst devaluing the serious pursuit of research into higher education learning and teaching:

If SoTL is to secure credibility in the educational research community, this is an important issue for those engaged in SoTL. Many education academics are concerned that SoTL is eroding the scholarship in their field of study. This perception has existed since the inception of the SoTL but became most public when Graham Gibbs from Oxford University made a strong statement about the lack of theory and awareness of previous work in many of the papers presented at the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) conference (Kanuka 2011: 2).

The two SoTLs

The creeping broadening of SoTL's scope in the 2000s and 2010s has rendered the term increasingly inadequate. By referring to such a wide range of activities as SoTL, the pursuit of original, scholarly research into teaching and learning is placed in the same category as reflection or Continuing Professional Development every practitioner ought to be undertaking regardless. Rather than a spectrum we conceive of the emergence of two SoTLs, which we call SoTL 1.0. which is faithful to Boyer (1990), Hutchings (2000) Atkinson (2001) etc. and a new SoTL 2.0 which has roots in SoTL 1.0. (see Table 2).

SoTL 2.0 reflects emerging marketization and managerial concerns in higher education more broadly and may be regarded as responding to institutional pressures

and priorities. Its distinctive characteristic is its focus on the institution and internal dynamics and its inclusion within SoTL of all activities related to learning and teaching and how learning and teaching may be valued. It is largely untheorised and external dissemination is not a key priority. As noted by Interviewee 3 above, good practice is recognised and seen as part of SoTL, but that is the end of the process; there is no or little dissemination, the institution can claim good practice has been implemented and rewarded, but this is where implementation and reward ends. SoTL is concerned with realising strategy rather than understanding teaching and learning beyond any very localised context:

So I think that tacitly there's an expectation that scholarship of teaching learning and teaching innovation is the way in which we're going to realise our strategy and take things forwards, so I would say that it's starting but it's not throughout the institution I think some colleagues have been struggling a bit'. (Interviewee 4)

Our innovation grants where we have 50k a year to fund up to ten grant areas are all SoTL in that sense, not necessarily in the open sense I think as an institution we moved from focussing on the output to focussing on the change and the impact and so certainly when we report on SoTL initiatives we report on them in impact terms rather than in did we publish anything out of it (Interviewee 6)

[Table 2 about here]

While Table 2 might be viewed as an attempt to pit 'good SoTL' 1.0 against 'bad SoTL' 2.0, as Kanuka observes much work which on the surface meets the definition of SoTL 1.0 takes place in a separate space to research into teaching and learning, whereby previous work on learning and teaching is not referenced or engaged with, presumably due to lack of awareness rather than a deliberate attempt to disparage educational theory. Therefore SoTL 1.0 and SoTL 2.0 have more in common than might be evident at first sight, as failure to properly engage with previous educational research sets up SoTL 1.0 to quickly morph into SoTL 2.0. So although in SoTL 1.0 it is clear

that scholarship needs to engage with the prior literature, this is not always the case in practice, especially as more and more scholarship gets invited into the ‘big tent’.

Boshier (2009:3-5) not only levels claims of SoTL being a ‘Synonym for other activities’ but also anti-intellectualism and serving neoliberal management agendas.

But equally as line managers, heads of school and deans would not necessarily see SoTL as a priority if it’s not income generating or it’s not directly part of the core business. (Interviewee 8)

Having identified two SoTLs, questions about the origin of this shift occur. Did SoTL 2.0 evolve naturally from SoTL 1.0 through a drive towards greater inclusivity or did it emerge separately, appropriating the language of SoTL 1.0 for a managerialist institutionalist purpose? Alternatively, a combination of the two is possible, but here we need to return to Kanuka’s (2011) work – the characteristics of SoTL 1.0 outlined in Table 2 are also not dissimilar to those of educational research, so the question arises, why we need the term ‘SoTL’ at all? If SoTL is contributing original knowledge and understanding to education, why is that not considered educational research which contributes to the discipline of Education?

Therefore SoTL 1.0 has a problem too in differentiating itself from pedagogic research or the discipline of education. Perhaps SoTL exists for those who feel excluded from the discipline of Education where the bulk of the work concerns scholarship in compulsory education, but there are a substantial number of general and discipline specific Higher Education focused journals, many of which long predate Boyer so this does not appear to be a legitimate reason either. Kanuka’s work implies that SoTL is operating in a parallel universe to learning and teaching research in higher education.

The historical roots of confusion

Interviews such as the ones carried out for this article are an important source of information about SoTL 2.0. A methodological problem of investigating these super-inclusive views of SoTL as those who view SoTL as a mostly private or internal endeavour, are less likely to be writing about their views on SoTL. Those who do not disseminate their thoughts do not write articles or undertake presentations on why they do not disseminate their work. Our empirical work gives some voice to these views.

The only individuals for whom Boyer envisaged SoT(L) to be their primary scholarship were those working in community colleges where it was more challenging to the undertake the other three forms of scholarship (Boyer 1990: 61). So while Boyer understood SoT(L) as being an activity in which every higher education teacher ought to be engaged, he stated that those in ‘lower status’ or less well-resourced institutions would do more of it – this instantly placed SoTL into the position of a poor relation. Moreover as (Macfarlane 2011) points out, the Scholarship of Teaching was listed last, firmly announcing SoT(L) as the fourth ‘best’ scholarship. Boyer was setting SoT(L) up to fail in terms of its parity of esteem with other scholarships. Doing SoTL as opposed to other forms of scholarship was always going to be a last resort dictated by a lack of resources to undertake ‘proper’ research, rather than a choice an individual academic would make.

It is often overlooked that Boyer’s four scholarships did not consider the position of a scholar whose research concerned teaching and learning in higher education itself, rather than something which applied to a particular discipline. While Atkinson’s (2000) view from a sociological perspective is entirely consistent with Boyer’s position, the idea that the higher education teaching and learning might be a discipline in and of itself does not appear to have fitted into his model of scholarship. For those of us who conduct research into teaching and learning in HE, SoTL is more of

a threat than an opportunity as our work gets placed into a category called ‘pedagogic research’ which is considered a lesser form of research than other forms of discipline-based research. However:

What really matters is whether a piece of research is based on sound methods, has something interesting or useful to ‘say’ and has been properly peer reviewed before publication. The only important distinction is between good research and poor research. However, it is hard to undo the now widespread perception that research about ‘learning and teaching’ of any kind exists in some sort of separate, box marked ‘second rate’. (Macfarlane 2011: 127-128)

The way forward

By no means are we arguing that all activities considered as SoTL by their authors are not embedded in the pre-existing scholarship, do not contribute original knowledge or are merely sharing practice. The problem with the ever-widening scope of SoTL has been research into learning and teaching is devalued by association. As Chick (2014: 1) concedes ‘The big tent’s absence of walls speaks to the challenge of discussing quality in SoTL’ Moreover, those who have attempted to promote the idea of SoTL as an inclusive means to enhance the status of learning and teaching in higher education have actually contributed to the devaluation of research into learning and teaching. In a UK context, policies to enhance the status of learning and teaching have actually separated it from research entirely creating a separate category of less importance: ‘pedagogic’ research (Macfarlane 2011) and separate career paths for ‘teaching specialists’.

Sadly, enthusiastic advocates of SoTL have proven their own worst enemies. Extolling the distinctiveness of ‘pedagogic’ research and the notion that anyone can and should do educational research has lowered, rather than raised, its currency. (Macfarlane 2011: 128)

Those in the SoTL 1.0 camp may wish to assert the earlier definition and fight the appropriation of the term by the SoTL 2.0 camp. The latter camp have appropriated an idea rooted in scholarship and turned it into a diluted over-inclusive term rooted in the needs of institutions and public policy. However, a campaign to ‘reclaim SoTL’ does not help as the low and special status of learning and teaching research has its roots in Boyer himself as indicated above.

A second course of action might be to take the Cotton, Miller and Kneale (2018) approach in clearly differentiating SoTL from pedagogic research. This would mean that pedagogic research would not be dismissed as ‘just SoTL’, or a something everyone should be doing anyway. Moreover, it can mitigate claims that those who undertake basic teaching and learning reflection are engaging in SoTL when their subject-based research is found wanting. This would be a good start to the process of ensuring that there is wide-spread recognition that basic reflection or sharing of practice are not in same cognitive domain as carrying out and writing up original research. This distinction is something which quality regimes such as the UK REF can (and does) facilitate in its definition of what is ‘REFable’ research (though not all would agree on its exact boundaries, and the use of the term ‘pedagogic research’ has got its own image issues). However, this may be the most viable course of action.

Thirdly, the concept of SoTL itself has served its purpose. In 1990 it was a useful vehicle to promote the importance of teaching and learning in institutions of higher education where it was frequently devalued. The creeping broadening of SoTL’s scope in the 2000s and 2010s has rendered the term inadequate to differentiate i) the pursuit of research into learning and teaching (an activity undertaken by a small minority of academics), ii) The professional ethics of taking a scholarly approach to teaching (which should be undertaken by all who teach), iii) assorted schemes around

reward and recognition for teaching innovation, iv) managing/ leading teaching and learning on an institution-wide scale, and v) being good at teaching. By referring to all these activities as ‘SoTL’, the pursuit of original research is categorised alongside a basic level of understanding of teaching and learning practice. This being the case, we need to abandon the term SoTL altogether and start referring to activities by what they are. Where serious research with a scholarly underpinning is done into teaching and learning, we need to affirm it as ‘research’ which is not categorically different to research in other disciplines. Where people are sharing their classroom practice, anecdotes or ideas not embedded in a scholarly context, that should be called sharing practice and/ or experience and does not need a name which gives it parity of esteem with teaching and learning research any more than the opinions of an armchair sports fan have parity with those of a professional coach.

Abandoning the term ‘SoTL’ is not likely to be universally welcomed, not least because many colleagues (who are excellent educational researchers by any definition of the term) are so highly invested in the idea of SoTL as an inclusive movement for raising the status of teaching in higher education. However, SoTL has become a millstone round the neck of teaching and learning research and has become too inclusive to be useful.

Chick’s (2014) big tent ‘without walls’ provides an apt illustration of the problem – a tent without ‘walls’ does not provide warmth or shelter from the elements; it is little better than having no tent. SoTL has become exactly what Hutchings and Shulman (1999) said it was not. The interviews we conducted demonstrate that learning and teaching leaders see SoTL as little more than a catch-all for various activities around teaching and learning. Moreover, rather than raising the status of learning and teaching SoTL advocates have committed the fallacy of special pleading, by arguing,

perhaps inadvertently, that research into HE learning and teaching falls into a different category than research in other disciplines. Boyer's work was valuable in its own context, but the notion of the 'four scholarships' which separated teaching from other forms of scholarship has developed into an article of faith, maintaining and demanding a special (and lower) status for teaching and learning scholarship.

In conclusion it is time to move on from Boyer and express confidence in research into teaching and learning which does not need to defend its right to exist or open itself up to those whose work has no scholarly foundation. Boyer did not invent the idea of scholarship in HE learning and teaching practice and he was not the first to wrestle with the conflicting demands of teaching and disciplinary research (e.g. Groshong 1956). Moreover, as Boshier (2009: 9) points out although Boyer's ideas themselves were conceptualistically confused it was others who 'disaggregated' Boyer's wider perspective on the four scholarships. Those of us who research teaching and learning in higher education need to affirm confidence in the theoretical foundations and methodological rigour of our work and not 'open up' to all sorts of others agendas in the name of inclusivity. After 30 years SoTL needs to be thrown on the ash heap of educational history.

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Table 1: Characteristics of participants and their institutions

Participant	Institution type and characteristics (see Scott 2013 for more on University missions groups).	Gender	Nation
Respondent 1	Post-1992 university.. Member of Million Plus mission group.	Female	England
Respondent 2	Small i institution with Catholic ethos. Specialises in teacher education, human sciences and liberal arts	Male	England
Respondent 3	A pre-1992 research intensive university with overseas centres.	Female	England
Respondent 4	Small post 92-institution with focus on vocational education.	Male	Scotland
Respondent 5	Post 92 University Alliance member institution Gaining an increasing reputation for research.	Female	England
Respondent 6	Pre-1992 university	Male	Wales
Respondent 7	Pre 1992 institution which was awarded university status in the 1960s.Former member of the now-disbanded '1994 group' of smaller research intensive universities.	Male	England
Respondent 8	Pre-1992 university	Female	Northern Ireland

Table 2: A comparison of SoTL 1.0 and SoTL 2.0

	SoTL 1.0	SoTL 2.0
Central concerns	A concern for better understandings of teaching and learning	A concern for being and valuing learning and teaching
Arena	Disseminated and peer reviewed outside an institution.	An institutional / internal focus.
Definition	Clearly defined and delineated	Inclusive of all that relates to teaching and learning.
Philosophy	Philosophically inclusive	Philosophically untheorised.
Dissemination	Externally focused and disseminated.	Internally focused and sometimes disseminated.
Leadership	Research-led	Management-led
Innovation	Innovates and contributes original knowledge.	May innovate, but does not disseminate.
Foundation	Builds on previous scholarship	Builds on the needs of the institution or individuals.

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