

## The Research-Education Nexus: Basic Premises and Practical Application of the "Scholarship" Movement

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*The Scholarship of Academic Development [1] and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning [2, 3] are amongst the most controversially discussed concepts in both: recent discourse on university teaching and learning, and recent discourse on professionalization of roles within higher education. Both concepts are based on an approach of educational philosophy stating that researchers can (and should) increase their academic proficiency by systematically reflecting upon their teaching practices and the learning processes they (might) trigger. Both suggest, this should be accomplished in a form that can be publicly reviewed and built upon by peers [4–6]. Finally, both concepts aim at encouraging researchers to engage in educational research from their specific disciplinary background.*

*In this paper, I will inform from an education theoretical point of view about the conceptual distinctions of what is called the Scholarship of Academic Development (SoAD) and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). While SoAD follows on from Boyers and Frasers differentiations of the Scholarship concept [7, 8], SoTL was first introduced by Hutchings and Shulman [9].*

*The notion referred to in the conceptual variations of "scholarship" in latest discourse may provide a guiding principle and a common rationale for university teaching [2]. As an example, I will point out, how we applied "Scholarship" in an educational setting to build up a community of peers engaging in educational research practice from their (differing) disciplinary perspectives (a new Master's degree curriculum which was rolled out in winter term 2016/17 at the University of Hamburg, Germany).*

*Keywords: academic identity, research-based learning, scholarship of teaching and learning, scholarship of academic development, academic teaching*

### 1. Research vs. Teaching – Two Distinct Paradigms in Academia?

"I envision the design of research-based programs of teacher education that grow to accommodate our conceptions of both process and content" (Shulman, 1986, p. 13).

"Managing teaching–research tension is an identity struggle that is pervasive for disciplinary and de-affiliated academics alike" (Bennett et al., 2015, p. 223).

From an outsider's perspective, education at the university level is an odd thing: One would imagine, the "higher" an academic's position and rank, the more expertise you can expect in respect to their specific fields of practice. While this may be the case considering the *research* capabilities of most staff working in academia at a senior level, this statement does usually not apply in the same way for their university *teaching* skills and competencies. But is a university professor's proficiency not also based on how good he or she is at *distributing* their scientific knowledge?

One might derive an even more peculiar impression from focusing on how scholars become academic teachers in the university education system: Lectures, for instance, are generally given by persons that show an outstanding expertise in conducting scientific inquiry in their disciplines. Usually, they are expert researchers who have acquired profound knowledge not only in their field of study, but also in how to do science in this field. But how about teaching capabilities? Which role does teaching play to themselves considering their academic qualification process? While there may be quite a lot of lecturers who are known to be experts in both: conducting disciplinary research and transferring their specialized knowledge, the broad majority of personnel working in universities is focusing their efforts on topics related to their own research projects rather than on improving their pedagogical proficiency [7, 9–11].

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So, why do teaching and research still seem "dislocated" [12] in many academic contexts – especially, when looking at the qualification paths of the lecturers in our universities today? Why does research play such an important role in identifying oneself with a discipline while teaching seems to be rather less important?

## 2. The Scholarship of Academic Development

An academic's identity has been, for instance, described in reference to the negotiation of three distinct and – at the same time – constitutive roles: the teacher, the disciplinarian and the educational researcher [11]. Following Bennett, to be an academic person means, to synchronize those three components in relation to the broader university culture in which one interacts as a *scholar*.

In recent discourse on academic professionalization, there is a similar way of putting things. Here, too, the educational development of researchers has been described in reference to the term of *scholarship*. What does this concept mean in these contexts?

In the 1990s, Ernest Boyer [7] started to use this term in his work at the *Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching* to address issues of how to improve teaching on an academic level – which lead to a new meaning of the concept in the discourse community that followed his path [see 6]. Boyer claimed that the conception of a "scholar" was fundamentally associated with one's academic rank and one's being engaged in research and publication [7]. His efforts aimed at transforming this academic 'self-image' of being a researcher in the first place into one that also lays some emphasis on academic teaching proficiency:

We believe the time has come to move beyond the tired old 'teaching versus research' debate and give the familiar and honourable term 'scholarship' a broader, more capacious meaning, one that brings legitimacy to the full scope of academic work. Surely, scholarship means engaging in original research. But the work of the scholar also means stepping back from one's investigation, looking for connections, building bridges between theory and practice, and communicating one's knowledge effectively to students [7].

Boyer argued that, of course, excellent teaching on an academic level could not work without a teacher being steeped in the knowledge of his or her discipline. Nonetheless, following Boyer, there are more ways towards acquiring this knowledge than through research activities. Following this understanding, academic "scholarship" should include a broader set of interrelated dimensions: discovery, integration, application, and teaching [7, see also 9].

Apart from Boyer, David and Claire Baume [13] addressed conceptual issues with the *scholarship*-term in a similar form by drawing a distinction between two ways of educational professionalization: First, there is a way of developing scholarship by getting to know pedagogical content. From a trainer's perspective, they describe this way as "training teachers in certain reasonably well-defined skills, attitudes and approaches" [13]. In contrast to this way of academic professionalization, they describe a second approach laying the emphasis on the development of academic scholarship by "working with people to solve their educational problems, to meet their educational challenges" [13].

## 3. The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Today, the concept of *Scholarship* has moved forward from a singular term with a transformed meaning to a dictum called the *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)*. This expression refers to "an activity or practice we engage in, with certain traditions and standards that have evolved in our community. This practice is one of critically reflective enquiry into particular aspects of our teaching" [5].

What distinguishes the concept of *Academic Development* and the concept of *SoTL*?

First of all, the concept of *SoTL* is not as wide as the concept of academic development which has been identified with the term *scholarship* following Boyer [7], as it does not explicitly focus on academic staff working in the "third space" but primarily on researchers reflecting upon their educational development. Also, *SoTL* is used to describe scholarly activity on the individual level, while the *Scholarship of Academic Development* may also be used to address a departmental, faculty or even institutional level [6, 8]. However, as Hutchings and Shulman [9] point out, the concept of *SoTL* is not synonymous with excellent teaching: "It [the concept of *SoTL*, T.S.] requires a kind of 'going meta', in which faculty frame and systematically investigate questions related to student



learning". In addition to this *teaching*-focused perspective, SoTL includes a critical view on how students interact and how their *learning* can be triggered most effectively. It therefore "involves question-asking, inquiry, and investigation, particularly around issues of student learning" [9]. So, following his approach, being a scholar of teaching and being an academic identity seem to be two different things [e.g. 14].

#### 4. Applying the Concept: Putting the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning into Practice

At the University of Hamburg, we developed an innovative executive Master's degree programme following a stance which can be linked with the concept of SoTL. The programme addresses scholars from all disciplines who want to engage in pedagogical issues in the field of higher education on a research-based curriculum.

The overall aim, of course, is to professionalize one's academic teaching on a personal level. To do so, the Master's programme explicitly does not take a "training" or "skill-building" approach. Instead, it aims at enabling its students to reflect upon their own teaching and the main teaching paradigms in their disciplines by engaging in educational research activity themselves.

The curriculum has been designed as an on-the-job programme in which students will have to acquire 60 credit points. This can be accomplished during the timeframe of four semesters (2 years). As the programme addresses anyone who is part of a university's teaching staff in Germany, Austria or Switzerland, all modules are designed as blended-learning settings, including block courses up to three full days in a row (8 hours per day) and flanked by online sessions.

What makes this programme special from an academic professionalization perspective is its orientation towards higher educational development (which is defined not merely as *staff development* but as *educational development* in terms of Baume and Baume's [13] distinction)? The research-based curriculum includes a project module (20 credit points) in which a research project is conducted during three of the four semesters scheduled in the course catalogue and a Master's thesis (15 credit points) which includes a second research project.

At the beginning of this project module, students visit a project conference which is designed as a forum to give some orientation on possible research approaches to the "freshmen" and in which they will present their own projects when finished (usually after having completed the third semester). Students are then guided through their individual research processes by scholarly mentors and they have the opportunity to get in touch with other students working on similar topics and/or with similar methodological approaches.

All of the participants are disciplinary researchers already who want to acquire a second Master's degree. By inscribing to the Master's programme, they aspire to become *Scholars of Teaching and Learning* in the sense described before by engaging in reflective and systematic research activities linked with their own teachings and by making their efforts public to a broader community.

During their studies, the participants of the first cohort (starting date: winter term 2016/2017) of the Master's programme themselves are reflecting upon a definition of their role as both a teacher and researcher. From the literature they have studied on *scholarship* and *academic development*, they derived the following definition to describe their common mindset as researchers in the field of university teaching and learning:

- *Scientific Basis* – Conducting an inquiry on one's teaching means to apply the same scientific standards that are also valid for other forms of research activity.
- *Openness to Public Review* – One of the key criteria to have an impact on an educational community is the critical and discursive exchange of ideas. This exchange has to be open to others in the educational community to have some effect on educational practice.
- *Addressing Issues of Teaching and Learning* – In order to be part of educational research, problems that come up in academic classes or that focus on learning issues have to be addressed. Higher educational research is one key discipline providing some orientation for the design of the student's research projects.
- *Disciplinary Methods* – When dealing with issues of teaching and learning on an academic level, disciplinary approaches may be very helpful. As everyone who inscribed to the programme is involved in disciplinary research, their specific methodologies are constituting the basis for the individual research projects. SoTL itself does not provide a specific methodology, but refers to the methodological approaches inside one's home-discipline.



- *Practical Application* – Educational Research without any impact on educational practice is considered useless. So, any of the research projects are designed with the intention to solve a specific problem in learning and/or teaching. Yet, the research activities are not limited to a specific range of topics, as long as they address issues relevant to the field of higher education.

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