(Re)Considering the Scholarship of Learning: Inviting the Elephant in the Room to Tea

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Keywords
Scholarship of Learning, Academic support and development, Scholarship of Teaching, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Transformative Learning, Learner Conflict

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(Re)Considering the Scholarship of Learning: Inviting the Elephant in the Room to Tea

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Abstract

This essay argues that the SoT(L) field has mistakenly equated learning solely to teaching and the teaching classroom, and has systematically ignored the other moments and opportunities within higher education institutes where learning and scholarly learning occurs—particularly within academic support and development programming. Therefore, we endeavour to discuss what we see as the elephant in the SoT(L) living room—learning, scholarly learning, and the Scholarship of Learning—and examine the ways in which learning and the Scholarship of Learning can be brought back into the SoT(L) discussion through an examination of academic support and development programming. Through the creation of a new theoretical and diagrammatic SoTL framework, this essay presents a more integrated, enhanced, and expanded understanding of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, and does so to further dialogue and to recognize the Scholarship of Learning as a strong and important contribution to the SoTL literature.

Keywords: Scholarship of Learning; academic support and development; Scholarship of Teaching; Scholarship of Teaching and Learning; Transformative Learning; Learner Conflict

Introduction

When Ernest L. Boyer (1990) released his seminal work, Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate, he introduced into the academic lexicon four overlapping areas of and for scholarship in institutes of higher education: the scholarships of discovery, integration, application, and teaching (p. 16). While Boyer’s work was lauded for its attempts to confront and counter the dominant view in the academy that being a scholar was really only about being a researcher (Herteis, 2002), it was his scholarship of teaching that became most prominent, because according to Huber and Hutchings (2005), it “gave teaching a place in a broader vision of scholarship that also included discovery through basic research and efforts to advance the integration and application of knowledge” (p. 3). Indeed, Boyer (1990) argued that the scholarship of teaching was “not only about transmitting knowledge, but transforming and extending it as well” (p. 24, italics original).

While Boyer attempted to bring focus back to teaching, and to the importance of investigating the processes and techniques of teaching for their effectiveness, he quite noticeably did not entitle one of his areas of scholarship the ‘scholarship of teaching and
learning’. And yet, within the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning literature, his ‘scholarship of teaching’ is now synonymous with and renamed as the ‘scholarship of teaching and learning.’ This begs the question: when did teaching become synonymous with learning in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning literature?

Indeed, it seems that somewhere along the lines, Boyer’s ‘scholarship of teaching’ became the ‘scholarship of teaching and learning’, because there has been a rather mistaken assumption in the literature that “teaching is as much about learning as it is about teaching, so the scholarship of teaching is as much about learning as it is about teaching” (Healey, 2000, p. 170). Yet, this situation and assumption sees learning tacked on to the end of the phrase, as though its absence was seen as problematic (because of the assumption that teaching and learning are synonymous), but its addition has never been taken seriously, and as we argue, learning has not been recognized or understood within the current Scholarship of Teaching and Learning construct to its fullest extent.

As an area of inquiry, and as those interested in researching within the context of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, we are still left woefully short when it comes to a conceptual approach that understands both teaching and learning, for we are unmoored in a sea of teaching that is missing a theoretical framework for understanding the myriad contexts and forms of learning that exists within higher education that are outside (but still connected through students) the teaching classroom. This is simply not satisfactory or acceptable, and indeed, we argue that if we are to use the term the ‘Scholarship of Teaching and Learning,’ then we should at the very least be aware of the possibilities of teaching and of learning, of scholarly teaching and of scholarly learning, and of the Scholarship of Teaching and of the Scholarship of Learning.

Indeed, we believe that the SoT(L)³ field has mistakenly equated learning—the proverbial elephant in the proverbial living room—solely to teaching and the teaching classroom. Indeed, through the ignoring of other moments and opportunities within higher education institutes where learning and scholarly learning occurs—particularly within academic support and development (ASD) programming, the focus of this paper—the SoT(L) literature has missed a valuable opportunity to further the theoretical and practical fields by studying and considering where the Scholarship of Learning not only impacts upon students, but also informs courses, curriculum, and faculty approaches.⁴

Now we may all like elephants, and we may all respect them and not begrudge them their existence, but what do we do when we can no longer ignore their presence in the living rooms of our institutes of higher education? What do we do when ignoring the elephant becomes an increasingly difficult task as the elephant continues to grow and take up more and more room? We believe there is nothing to do in this situation but acknowledge the elephant, invite it to tea, ask it to join in the dialogue, and allow its existence to further inform our study of, and approaches to SoT(L). Therefore, with this paper, we endeavour to discuss what we see as the elephant in the SoT(L) living room—learning, scholarly learning, and the Scholarship of Learning—and examine the ways in which learning and the Scholarship of Learning can be brought back into the discussion through an understanding of academic support and development (ASD) programming, as well as the ways in which this learning programming can inform and be integrated into curriculum design and delivery. We do so to present a more integrated, enhanced, and expanded theoretical understanding of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, and to continue the dialogue of the ever-evolving SoT(L) arena.
Setting the Stage

Before we continue further, we believe it is important to situate ourselves as learners and professionals, for the emergence of the integrated understanding of SoT(L) we present in this paper emerged directly from our experiences as students, academic support and development (ASD) professionals, researchers, teaching assistants, and lecturers, as well as from our desire to integrate teaching, learning, and research into our own teaching classrooms and our own pedagogical approaches. In short, the framework which we will be discussing in this paper emerged from our desire to find a new way towards our professional careers, which would unite our passions, experiences, and beliefs in teaching and learning, pedagogy and academic support.

At the time of writing, we are both pursuing PhD programs (in rural studies and environmental philosophy and animal science and integrated biology, respectively), with a goal of combining our research, teaching, and learning background with our future academic professions. In addition, we have a combined experience of over fifteen years working with undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty from all disciplines in ASD programming situated within an integrated Learning Commons that provides learning, writing, research, numeracy and technology support to students, staff, and faculty. We have also had the opportunity to move into the teaching classroom, first as teaching assistants, then as course instructors at the undergraduate level.

This background provides an interesting combination—we are at once learners, teachers, and academic facilitators, simultaneously studying, designing courses and curriculum, and assisting students to expand and enhance their learning approaches and capacities. We are committed to teaching, and to continually improving our teaching practice through research on the effectiveness of our approaches, yet we do so through integrating our experiences and professionalism with academic support programming into the teaching classroom; that is, we unite both sides of the spectrum, from pedagogical approaches to learning support programming, to design our classes and deliver our content.

Defining Learning and Academic Support and Development (ASD)

For the purposes of this paper, we are defining learning within an academic support and development (ASD) context, which is linked closely to an understanding of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991). As O’Sullivan et al. (2002) explained,

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awarenesses, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy. (p. xvii)

This learning is a purposeful and intentional reflective process dedicated to questioning personal beliefs and assumptions, particularly when confronted with conflict or in Mezirow’s (1991) phrase, ‘disorienting dilemmas.’ It is also a process of sense- and meaning-making, as the individuals who engage within the ASD environment learn to negotiate and re-
They negotiate their personal purposes, values, and feelings to further enhance their learning experience, and develop as individuals, learners, and academics. We are not only interested in learning that involves shifts and changes in meaning perspectives and meaning schemes (Mezirow, 1991), but also in skills, techniques, approaches, and reflective capacities—all within a context of creativity and experimentation within and beyond the classroom.

Now that we have defined learning within the context of academic support and development, it behooves us to also explain what exactly we mean by ASD. In our experience, it is programming—curricular or extra-curricular—which has an awareness and understanding of the learners, the learning environments, and the learning which is expected by and from each of those components. It is programming that is personal and context-specific, and takes into consideration the whole student, and the myriad factors which affect each individual's learning and development. It is programming that is based on reflexivity and reciprocal dialogue between and among students, academic support staff, faculty, and the curriculum, and requires that all stakeholders come together in dialogical encounters focused on student learning (Cunsolo Willox & Lackeyram, 2008).

Finally, it is programming centred around an understanding of Learner Conflict—that is, a type of conflict which is individualized and occurs and emerges “at a point of rupture—a rupture of one’s habits, perceptions, skills, patterns, and beliefs about one’s self, one’s learning, and one’s context in the world. This ruptures presents a choice: one can ignore the conflict or one can confront the conflict and acknowledge, manage, maintain, and advance it. Indeed, in order for transformation to occur, one must be willing to confront this conflict, and by engaging in the process of critical self-assessment, reflection, and re-assessment, act upon it” (Cunsolo Willox & Lackeyram, 2008, p. 12).

At our institution, we follow a three-tiered program delivery system: supplemental, integrated, and embedded programming (Schmidt & Kaufman, 2007). Supplemental programming occurs outside of the formal classroom, and is in the form of individual and/or small group consultations, print- and web-based learning sources, and workshops on topics ranging from time management to learning from lectures and text to multiple choice exams to critical reading and thinking. Integrated programming pieces are created in consultation with faculty, instructors, and teaching assistants, and are more specialized to the particular department, discipline, and/or educational and learning needs of the students. Embedded programming goes one step further, and takes the academic support programming pieces, and formally and continuously ‘embeds’ them in the teaching classroom through the design and delivery of curriculum and class structure.

There are four main traits which, from our experience, define academic support and development programming: the programming pieces are non-remedial, the programming is not counseling based, the programming is not attached to the power dynamics of marking, and finally, the programming focuses on the context of the learners and on Learner Conflict (Cunsolo Willox & Lackeyram, 2008).

Within many institutions of higher education, ASD units “are often located at the margins of academic divisions, within student services or in separate units outside of the teaching faculties” (Chanock, 2007, p. 272), and the programming is generally perceived to be providing remedial services to help students ‘catch up’ and/or to fulfill the requirements of academic probation. This is simply not the case. We see students from myriad abilities and programs, and we meet with them to expand and enhance their personal learning and their intellectual potential; that is, ASD programming believes that all learners can continually
improve upon their personal skills, and as such, we work with each individual’s and/or small group’s specific circumstances and needs to provide a personalized and tailored approach to programming, providing the “opportunity for every learner to continually challenge him/herself to expand and enhance their capacities, and to strive towards ever-furthering knowledge and learning” (Cunsolo Willox & Lackeyram, 2008, p. 7).

Building on this misconception is the prevailing belief that academic support is almost synonymous with counseling. While we often deal with very personal issues within the context of academic support programming, and while we work closely with the counseling units on our campus, our main focus is on student learning, and on the ways in which these personal issues are impacting the ability of students to learn (indeed, many students we see through academic support and development come to us for a learning concern, only to discover that the underlying cause of the particular anxiety or conflict has its roots in another facet of their lives). Through our programming, we have the opportunity to work within an academic context while still allowing for personal issues to arise, be recognized, and in many cases, worked through (Cunsolo Willox & Lackeyram, 2008).

Third, in the context of our institution (and we are aware that this is not necessarily always the case for all ASD units), our programming is not attached to the power dynamics of marking. As such, we are able to form different relationships with our students than are often possible for a course instructor; indeed, since we are not marking and/or evaluating them, students are often more willing to expose areas of themselves that they may find more difficult and/or are more embarrassed about and/or are more willing to take risks, experiment, and be creative (Cunsolo Willox & Lackeyram, 2008).

Finally, through academic support programming, we are able to take into consideration the whole student; that is, we are able to allow academics and emotions, context and backgrounds, skills and needs to emerge and inform not only our approach to programming, but also our approach to working with students. As ASD staff, we too are continually learning as we adapt and respond to the myriad and ever-changing student body and student needs. By unhinging our programming from remediation, counseling, marking and evaluation, yet still maintaining a flexible and adaptable learning environment that allows for the emergence of emotions and Learner Conflict, and combined with our three-tiered delivery framework, we experience numerous opportunities for engaging instructors, students, teaching assistants, administration, and staff in and through the learning process (Cunsolo Willox & Lackeyram, 2008). This collaborative approach allows the learner to further personalize their learning—and to further make sense and meaning—by confronting his/her individual conflict (regardless of discipline and academic background) with an open, flexible, and reflective educational environment outside the classroom.

**Contributions of Academic Support and Development to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning**

Building off this understanding of transformative learning and Learner Conflict, the environment of ASD programming and consultations creates opportunities for students to experiment with new strategies, learning approaches, and techniques (often provided through the ASD programming), and in so doing, allows students to begin to name and move through their Learner Conflict.

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ASD also provides the opportunity for student reflection—indeed, ASD is premised upon the need for intentional and critical self-reflection—and through its dedicated time for reflection and sharing, allows for further sense- and meaning-making to occur. This opportunity for critical and intentional self-reflection, sharing through dialogue, and further sense- and meaning-making also allows for students to (begin to) take more ownership of their learning and their learning processes.

In addition, according to Chanock (2007), ASD can also assist with “the larger challenge of applying understandings of learning to the activity of teaching” (p. 272), and does so by being informed by extensive conversations with students on the one hand, and by the access our work gives us to the design of subjects in the disciplines, the discourse of lectures, the texts assigned by lecturers, and the comments they write on students’ work. Although any lecturer sees a very limited range of some of these kinds of academic discourses—limited, usually, to his or her own discipline and, often, to his or her own subjects—we see samples across a wide range of disciplines and have a sense of where the commonalities and the contrasts lie, as well as a sense of what causes problems for students’ learning. (Chanock, 2007, p. 275)

Because of this cross- and multi-disciplinary connection with students, ASD practitioners also have the opportunity to examine what students are being taught, and the ways in which they respond to the curriculum—that is, what they are learning in comparison to what the course instructors are intending them to learn. At a larger program level, this also allows ASD units to begin to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the students in the program, and begin to analyze how the learning experience of students can be enhanced inside the classroom and beyond.

Finally, Chanock (2007) also argues that ASD practitioners are “well-placed to help our colleagues in the disciplines take up this kind of scholarship [SoT(L)]” (p. 272), and in so doing, are well-situated to begin building bridges between and among ASD practitioners, course instructors, and the disciplines to further develop not only the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, but also to further enhance student learning within and outside the classroom. Indeed, since ASD units and professionals “are quickly sucked beneath the surface of their students’ texts and immersed in the intellectual matrix of each different discipline...it should be possible, therefore, to build bridges into the disciplines, at this level of thinking” (Chanock, 2007, p. 274).

**Classroom Teaching and ASD Learning: Two Processes, Two Approaches**

Since we began our careers within the academic support and development arena, moving to the teaching classroom afforded us a unique opportunity to reflect upon the differences between teaching and academic support programming, and between the learning which occurs in and through the teaching classroom (content- and discipline-driven) and the learning which occurs through the ASD programming (learner-driven). Occupying positions, from academic support professional to course lecturer to graduate students, we have had the opportunity to consider and reflect upon the differences between the teaching process in the classroom, and the learning process in an academic support setting, and how these processes impact upon the learner. It is these differing processes to which we now turn. We hasten to add that by separating these processes, we do not intend to dichotomize, but rather, to bring out the nuances of each area within the context of the SoT(L) field, and
examine what an understanding of ASD can bring to an understanding of the Scholarship of Learning.

**The Teaching Process**

In our experiences with the teaching process, teaching and content delivery flows to the student (the ‘receiver’) through various methods, technologies, and teaching innovations. The content functions as a mechanism to bring the students within the community of practice (Wenger, 1998), and does so by providing students the opportunity to learn the language and terms of the discipline, how to communicate within the area, and how to build and create knowledge within the field.

The students must then take this disciplinary information and content, and produce products (as pre-determined by the course outline), which will be assessed for marks. If the students ‘fail’ to produce the results that an instructor would like to see, there is often a response that the students need to be fixed (manifesting as a ‘fix my student’ response); that is, the students need extra support and help that the classroom cannot provide. Indeed, we “commonly find—and widely lament—that students are referred to us for help with matters that lecturers seem to regard as mechanical and uninteresting. … Frequently, our centres seem to be regarded as a form of crash repair shop where welding, panel-beating, and polishing can be carried out on students’ texts” (Chanock, 2007, p. 273).

Sometimes, if numerous students are struggling, there is an understanding that perhaps changes can be made in the delivery of content and/or in the design of the curriculum, and this feeds back to trying new technology and innovations.

In the teaching process, there are four main components: the content/curriculum, the assessment, the learners, and the learning. The curriculum is pre-determined; that is, the students have little to no control over the content, because curriculum is based on discipline and institutional standards, culture, approaches, and curriculum mandates. The assessment in the teaching process is based on the product and the output—that is, it is based on what the students do with the pre-determined content and the pre-determined assignments, and how that ‘product’ fits within the institutional and academic culture of the classroom and of the discipline or area.7

In the teaching process, the learners are considered to be receivers of knowledge (although not in the sense of Freire’s ‘banking model’ where students are empty vessels), and the focus in the teaching classroom stays with how students produce assignments and perform on exams. As such, it is less focused on the processes occurring inside the box, and more focused on what comes out of the box (input in, output out). Tied into this is the understanding of learning in the teaching process: learning is often measured and assessed by marks and performance, yet as we know, this assessment is also based on pre-determined content and pre-determined assignments.

What does this particular structure and process mean for student learning? From our experiences moving from academic support programming to the teaching classroom, the teaching process entails a ‘selling’ or ‘convincing’ period for the learners—that is, students are interested in how what they are learning within the classroom is meaningful (and in some cases, useful) to their lives. Indeed, as instructors, we are often asked by students, ‘Why should I take this course? Why should I learn this material?’, and are continually challenged by our students to explain the importance and relevance of the particular
curriculum we are covering as well as the structure of the classroom, the course, and the assignments.\(^8\)

The teaching process also excludes individually-derived goals; that is, it subordinates the personal and academic goals of the individual to the institutionally- and discipline-mandated and created goals. The learners are often required to leave their personal learning goals outside of the classroom, and instead, embrace the goals as set out by the course parameters. In this setting, the default for the students is often ‘getting by’, as pragmatics of scheduling, responsibilities, course work, and getting credentials, and not necessarily learning, drives the students.

**The Learning Process**

In contrast, the learning process looks slightly different. In the learning process—and here it is important to note that for the purposes of this paper the learning process which we are depicting is the process we experience through the learning we witness in the ASD environment; a learning that is shared with us through dialogical encounters and emergent from students’ self-reflections—what is to be learned feeds into the learner's context and is understood within the framework of Learner Conflict. In ASD, the learner is not considered simply a receiver of knowledge, but rather, a dynamic creator of knowledge and meaning where his/her context engages with his/her learning in continually evolving and unexpected ways.

In this process, learning is measured not through products and evaluated through marks, but through a process of self-reflection and self-reporting. As the students move through the learning process in academic support and development programming, they have the opportunity—through the process of self-assessment, reflection, and re-assessment—to realize and determine the need for enhancing and expanding learning skills and strategies. This leads to a ‘fix myself’ (rather than ‘fix my student’) approach, as the learners discover and recognize their points of conflict, and begin to work through this conflict, utilizing creativity, experimentation, and continual, intentional, and critical self-reflection. Through this ‘fix myself’ approach to learning, students continually set new goals, find new points of motivation, discover new strategies, learn new skills, and try new approaches, all within the individualized learning cycle of self-assessment, reflection, and re-assessment.

As with the teaching process, the learning process also has content, assessment, learners, and learning as its four main components. In this process, the content is based on the learner’s goals; that is, the content within academic support services revolves around what the students want to focus on and improve upon. The pre-mandated goals of the curriculum become the background, not the foreground, to the students’ experiences. Building on this, marks are no longer the currency by which success is measured; rather, the achievement of the individually-defined and directed goals becomes more important indicators of learning and development.

As was mentioned above, in this process, the learners are no longer receivers where curriculum flows in and products/assignments flow out. In the ASD learning process, the learners assume primary importance, and indeed, it is the learners, their context, and their points of conflict which really drive the entire process. Emerging from this is the existence of a learner-created and learner-defined learning process that is more personalized. Indeed, the entire process of ASD is primarily concerned with accompanying and guiding students through the discovery of their personal points of conflict, through the creation of personal goals, and through the process of self-assessing and reflecting upon the learning process.
When it comes to student learning in the learning process, there is very little ‘selling’ or ‘convincing’ required. Students often choose on their own initiative to access our programming, and do so for myriad reasons, from wanting to further their understanding of a particular approach or discipline to desiring to improve their grade point average to having difficulties with personal and/or academic issues to hoping to develop and improve upon particular skill sets (writing, test-taking, problem-solving, etc.) to needing to utilize our program as a condition of academic probation to wanting an environment that supports creativity and experimentation to looking for the opportunity to have scheduled dialogue in support of self-reflection. As such, the ‘buy-in’ to ASD happens quickly, as students have the opportunity to drive and direct the entire process. Within this process, goals are individually-created and derived (rather than institutionally- and instructor-derived), and as such, the motivation comes from an internal source, rather than an external pressure.\(^9\) This allows for further ownership of the learning process, as the learners have the opportunity to self-reflect and re-reflect in a process of conflict-confrontation and continual sense- and meaning-making.

**Expanding and Enhancing the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning**

Now that we have examined the ways in which we as instructors, ASD staff, and learners have experienced the two processes emerging from the teaching classroom and the ASD setting, let us return to the two areas of scholarship of which this essay is concerned: the Scholarship of Teaching and the Scholarship of Learning.

**The Scholarship of Teaching**

According to much of the literature, there are three layers which make up the Scholarship of Teaching: teaching, scholarly teaching, and the Scholarship of Teaching (figure 1).\(^{10}\)

![Figure 1: The three layers of teaching in the Scholarship of Teaching](http://www.issotl.org/tutorial/sotltutorial/u1a/u1a1.htm)

From the SoT perspective, the first bubble of teaching is the act by which instructors disseminate knowledge within a classroom to their students. Scholarly teaching, however, is “teaching that entails certain practices of classroom assessment and evidence gathering; teaching that is informed not only by the latest ideas in the field but by current ideas about teaching generally and specifically in the field; and teaching that invites peer collaboration or review” (Georgia Southern University, [www.issotl.org/tutorial/sotltutorial/u1a/u1a1.html](http://www.issotl.org/tutorial/sotltutorial/u1a/u1a1.html)). It
is teaching “based on practice wisdom which is developed by reflection on experience and published research” (Martin, 2007, p. 1; see also Allen & Field, 2005). Scholarly teachers “are those who consult the literature, select and apply appropriate information to guide the teaching-learning experience, conduct systematic observations, analyze the outcomes, and obtain peer evaluation of their classroom performance. …Scholarly teaching tends to be focused on effective teaching rather than on student learning” (Martin, 2007, p. 1; see also Richlin, 2001).

The Scholarship of Teaching moves beyond the parameters of scholarly teaching, and according to the SoT field, is focused on how teaching influences the learning process through systematic evaluation of teaching and student learning and performance (Martin, 2007). The Scholarship of Teaching is differentiated from scholarly teaching by its in-depth research, systematic inquiry, critical reflection, and peer-reviewed publication. As Richlin and Cox (2004) explain, “the scholarship of teaching results in a formal, peer-reviewed communication in appropriate media or venues, which then becomes part of the knowledge base of teaching and learning in higher education (p. 127, originally found in Martin, 2007). As Trigwell et al. (2000) summarize, the Scholarship of Teaching requires that “university teachers must be informed of the theoretical perspectives and literature of teaching and learning in their disciplines, and be able to collect and present rigorous evidence of their effectiveness, from these perspectives, as teachers. In turn, this involves reflection, inquiry, evaluation, documentation, and communication” (p. 156).

Yet, as we can see from the above explanations and definitions, the Scholarship of Teaching is still only incorporating a very narrow definition of the learning—that which is connected to the teaching classroom.

The Scholarship of Learning
It should be clear by now that the learning we are discussing in this paper is a very different process than what is traditionally understood and considered within the SoT(L) arena to encompass learning. In the SoT field, learning is that which results from teaching. It is dictated and directed by the instructor and the discipline, and driven by the parameters of the course and the curriculum chosen. In short, it is considered to be in existence because of teaching. Now, while there are numerous ways to affect student learning through teaching—and indeed, the rich body of SoT(L) research that has emerged since 1990 is certainly testament to that—teaching can never direct learning fully. It can ignite and incite it. It can encourage it, and provide the opportunities for its emergence, but teaching can never dictate the direction the learner will take his/her learning, nor can it ever foresee all possible meanings and nuances the learner will ascribe. And this is one of the things that makes teaching so exciting and so dynamic a vocation—it is nothing if not surprising and ever-changing!

And yet, this is not the only type of learning within institutes of higher education, nor is it a type of learning that should negate other forms. Therefore, we feel that in its current manifestation, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is a misnomer, and really is only the Scholarship of Teaching; that is, it really only focuses on the type of learning that teaching hopes to incite and ignite. As such, and based upon the above visual representation, we offer up an understanding of the Scholarship of Learning (figure 2) based upon the work and the learning that occurs in academic support and development units as a complementary vision to the Scholarship of Teaching.
Figure 2: The three layers of learning in the Scholarship of Learning

Just as in the Scholarship of Teaching, the Scholarship of Learning encompasses three tiers: learning, scholarly learning, and the Scholarship of Learning. Just as in figure 1 with the first layer of teaching, the first layer of learning is simply that which we as academic support staff facilitate by having students access our resources. It is the level of academic support and development that occurs through the offering of resources, and the creation of space for dialogue and reflection to occur. Scholarly learning, however, moves towards an understanding of the result of a learning activity or programming piece has on the learners. Just as in scholarly teaching, in scholarly learning, we as academic support staff consult the literature, study various learning theories, engage in critical reflection, obtain feedback, and continually monitor the effects on student learning in the efforts to continually improve our approaches and our programming.

The Scholarship of Learning, however, moves one step further, and indeed, mimics the attributes of the Scholarship of Teaching, but from a learning support perspective. Just as in the Scholarship of Teaching, the Scholarship of Learning is characterized by systemic inquiry, in-depth understanding of the literature, and an understanding of how ASD can enhance, expand, and support learning. And just as in the Scholarship of Teaching, the findings from these research studies in the Scholarship of Learning are made public, peer-reviewed, and then offered up for use by others, becoming part of the academic knowledge base. And just as Trigwell et al.’s (2000) criteria for the Scholarship of Teaching, this process involves systematic and critical reflection, rigorous inquiry, evaluation, documentation, and public communication.

**Bringing it Together: The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning**

Before we continue, it is important to note that the while the learning process and our understanding of the Scholarship of Learning (figure 2) described above is related to academic support programming, this process also meld into, and indeed can inform, the teaching process and the teaching classroom. There are areas of freedom within the teaching classroom where the students can integrate the individual goals, internal motivations, and self-assessment, reflection, and re-assessment experienced in and through academic support programming, and allows them to complement and inform the institutionally mandated curriculum and content.
We find this opportunity for melding together these two processes a very exciting opportunity for both academic support programming and for the teaching classroom, and indeed, this is where we believe the true Scholarship of Teaching and Learning lies: in the integration of the teaching classroom with the underpinnings of academic support programming and development, of the integration of the Scholarship of Teaching with the Scholarship of Learning. As such, we offer our vision of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (figure 3) to provide not only a theoretical framework that expands and enhances our current conceptualizations of SoTL, but also a point of discussion, debate, and dialogue.

![Figure 3: The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning](https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsotl.2009.030127)

The reader will notice that the diagram is situated within a larger context of research. Here it is important to note that for the purposes of this conceptualization of SoTL, there are four types of and approaches to research: our own personal and academic research from our disciplines and backgrounds, research that occurs in the context of the teaching classroom, research that is conducted within ASD units, and individualized ‘research’ undertaken by students in their continual process of sense- and meaning-making through reflection, experimentation, creativity, and action.11 Within the SoT(L) literature, research is generally discussed solely within the context of teaching, yet we argue that the other forms of research are equally as important to understanding this approach to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Thus, the addition of these other layers of research, and the understanding that these types of research are not only the background of our approaches to, and conceptualizations of SoTL, but are also that which feeds and nourishes our SoTL approaches, becomes an incredibly important component of this conceptualization.

In addition, the interface that holds the two facets together is the learner and his/her Learner Conflict. Indeed, it is the students who can and do integrate the teaching and learning processes, and it is the learner and their myriad backgrounds, meaning-making schemes and perspectives (Mezirow, 1991), and points of conflict who unite teaching and learning in all their facets. Thus, for this framework, the students/learners become the central focus, the binding factor, and the privileged travelers who traverse and negotiate the
confluence between the teaching classroom and academic support and development programming.

Going further, it is learners who bridge the teaching and learning worlds, for students have the opportunity to take the lessons learned in both arenas, and unite them in their personal approach to learning. Learners have a mobility that neither teachers nor academic support staff have; that is, the learner is not confined, and as such, the learner can unite teaching and learning, the formal classroom and the academic support environment. In this light, teaching and ASD are two different processes, working from within two different contexts, which both function to support student learning. With this understanding, we begin to construct an understanding of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning which unites the teaching classroom with ASD units—with students at the epicenter and as the interface—with the focus on and for the purpose of improving student learning.

Towards a Conclusion: Inviting the Elephant to Tea

Now that we have recognized the elephant and invited it in for tea and a dialogue, we may be wondering about the benefits of such an unexpected partnership. First, we see great benefit to moving away from the piecemeal occurrences (Ewell, 1997) of research that is occurring within the entire SoT(L) arena. By approaching our scholarship within SoT(L) from a unified theoretical framework that gives equal space, prominence, and understanding to both teaching and learning, we can begin to integrate our teaching and our learning within institutions of higher education in a more consistent, continuous, and informed manner.

Second, we see great benefit to the unification of personal and academic goals for the learner. Why should students continually have to subjugate their individual goals to institutionally- and discipline-derived goals? Through this framework, we envision an environment where through the unification of teaching and learning (emergent from an understanding of academic support) in the classroom, there is a closer alignment of personal and classroom/discipline goals, all within an academic framework.

Finally, there is the opportunity for a synchronous, synergistic, symbiosis between the teaching classroom and academic support services. Through partnership and collaborations, as well as a more complete understanding of the parameters of both teaching and academic support, we have the exciting opportunity to expand and enhance our approaches, our scholarships, our teaching, and our learning—all with a focus on our students.

As we can see, this integrated framework requires a cultural shift in higher education and in our conceptualizations of teaching and learning, as it begins to call into question what we value in the classroom and in the academy. While we continually discuss the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, and produce studies examining the effects of our teaching techniques on learning outcomes, we rarely examine and/or articulate what exactly it is we mean by learning. Is it discipline learning? Curriculum learning? Personal learning? Learning that occurs within the classroom? Learning that occurs in the ASD context? We often talk about teaching as though it is synonymous with learning and/or as though it dictates learning. But if we are honest, we realize that teaching is only in support of learning; that is, it provides the opportunity for learning to be encouraged, but it is not learning itself, nor should it be equated with learning. By ignoring the elephant in the room—learning—we are ignoring an important, valuable, and dynamic area of study, and we are missing the opportunity to further the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.
As Huber and Hutchings (2005) wrote,

As the scholarship of teaching and learning has evolved and been enriched by intersections with related initiatives, its boundaries have been subject to debate; indeed, much of the discussion has been about definitions and distinctions. For one thing, it has become clear that there are elements of discovery, integration, and application within the scholarship of teaching and learning, because this work typically involves classroom inquiry, synthesizing ideas from different fields, and the improvement of practice, all at the same time. (p. 4)

Indeed, the SoT(L) arena is an ever-changing, multi-faceted, multi-disciplined arena which is continually shaped and affected by the multiple stakeholders—students, faculty, academic support, and administration—that shape higher education. Through this essay and this framework, we continue to challenge the boundaries, and hope to further extend the borders of the debate and dialogue around what exactly constitutes the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

Returning to the elephant: it is said that elephants never forget: if we invite the elephant in our teaching and learning living room in for tea and dialogue, then we need to be prepared to listen to the elephant, understand its position, and be ready to accept it for what it is; a large, powerful, and interesting beast which has been waiting patiently for us to acknowledge its existence, begin to understand its intricacies, and respect it in its wholeness.

References


**Endnotes**

1 We would like to extend our sincerest thanks to Allan C. Lauzon, University of Guelph, for his critical and insightful comments—this paper is the stronger for it. Many thanks also to the staff and students at the Learning Commons, University of Guelph, for all the support, inspiration, and myriad opportunities for learning over the years.

2 For Boyer (1990), “Teaching 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” (pp. 23-24).

3 Here, and throughout the paper, we will refer to SoTL as SoT(L), recognizing that the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, as it is often defined in the literature, is more appropriately labeled the Scholarship of Teaching (as many writers, such as Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin, and Prosser (2000), utilize).

4 When we differentiate the teaching classroom from academic support and development (ASD) units, we do so not to create a false dichotomy, but rather, to highlight and differentiate the institutional roles and functions of the teaching classroom and the academic support and development environment. While both areas are concerned with student learning, the contexts are very different, and it is in an examination of these differences where an understanding of one area of the Scholarship of Learning—that which emerges from ASD units—can be more fully explored, analyzed, and defined.
This is not to negate the impact or the influence of other learning theories such as feminist approaches, communities of practices, or Freire’s conscientization—for indeed all these learning theories inform our practice and our research—but rather to more clearly articulate our approach to, and understanding of, learning within the context of our work in academic support and development.

For more information, please see Schmidt and Kaufman (2007) and Cunsolo Willox & Lackeyram (2008).

It is important to note that we recognize that in some classrooms, instructors do evaluate students based on the process (as we ourselves have done in the past), not just the final product. However, the general approach to evaluation is still to assess the final project or product.

In this light, part of the teaching process should be about assisting students to integrate the curriculum into their meaning-making frameworks, and in so doing, assist the students in understanding the relevance of what they are learning to their sense- and meaning-making. As such, teaching needs to create a context in which meaning-making can take place (Lauzon, 2008). That said, there are myriad examples of classrooms where this does not occur, and we have experience with numerous students who have desired this, but have not found it within the teaching classroom.

While we recognize that many students are motivated to learn within a classroom setting, we want to emphasize that this is a different type of learning that occurs in the context of ASD. Students are not dealing with specific curriculum or content within ASD; rather, they are approaching learning from a reflective, critical, and meaning-making framework removed from the specifics of the classroom. This allows students to approach learning in a more unfettered way, focusing on the internal processes, rather than learning within an external construct of course assignments, curriculum, and the temporality of academic semesters.

In Georgia Southern’s original diagram, the square box is labeled ‘Scholarship of Teaching and Learning’. For the purposes of this paper, we have modified it to stand in this representation of the Scholarship of Teaching.

While many readers may be surprised by our consideration of the ‘research’ that students undertake, for the context of this paper and this diagram, it is important to recognize that learners go through a process of ‘experimentation’, complete with the collection of ‘results,’ reflection, and re-experimentation, when they hit points of conflict in their continual attempt to make sense and meaning of their learning.