

Scholarship of Learning and Teaching (SOLT)

Context and Key Issues

The scholarship of learning and teaching involves research into practices of teaching, learning and curriculum. It involves:

- asking questions about how your students learn and how best to enhance learning through effective teaching
- gathering and interpreting evidence about student learning from a range of sources
- sharing the results of your analysis publicly for the purposes of peer review and to share the body of knowledge with colleagues and the academic community.

Scholarly teaching and the scholarship of learning and teaching

Effective teachers in higher education should engage in **scholarly teaching practices** as a matter of course. These might include:

- staying in touch with the latest research developments in your discipline
- integrating these into the curriculum, for example through lectures and assessment tasks
- routinely gathering student feedback (e.g. using the SET, SEC and other instruments) and using this to guide curriculum review and improvement.

The scholarship of learning and teaching goes beyond scholarly teaching by emphasising the importance of analysing, documenting, sharing and publishing the results of your investigations into student learning. Shulman (1999) argues that scholarship is evident when one's research on learning and teaching is:

1. made public e.g. through staff seminars
2. subject to critical review and evaluation by members of one's community e.g. in peer reviewed journals
3. used, developed by and integrated into the activities of one's academic community e.g. colleagues make changes to their curriculum design or assessment and feedback practices as a result of hearing about your research on learning and teaching

You may be familiar with how these principles apply to your discipline area but less certain of how they apply to the scholarship of teaching. This guide provides you with a framework to enhance the scholarship of your teaching by guiding your enquiry and reflection. As with research in your own content discipline area, the enquiry into, and reflection about, your own teaching practices should be informed by earlier scholarly work in the same area. It should also be subject to rigorous peer review through such avenues as staff seminars, conference presentations, and peer reviewed journal articles.

Selected examples of SOLT areas to explore at Griffith

Exploring the impact of institutional initiatives on your students' learning

Griffith has committed to a number of initiatives intended to give a particular character to learning at Griffith. These include: work-integrated learning (WIL), internationalisation, blended learning and research-based learning (RBL). Each of these areas is the subject of considerable enquiry as to its relationship with learning. You can contribute to this enquiry by framing questions about the ways in which any of these initiatives play out in your own teaching.

Exploring the impact of innovative or non-traditional learning and teaching arrangements on students' learning

These might involve investigating:

- the impact of a range of technologies on student learning experiences and outcomes
- the influence of a tri-semester study configuration on the student experience

- ways to enhance the student experience through peer-assisted study sessions (PASS)
- the use of e-portfolios as an assessment tool.

Starting with your own teaching problem

If you are confronted with a difficult teaching situation, for example, students' assessment performances are of poor quality or something that has worked before is not working, ask research questions about it. For example, is it possible for first years and fourth years to share a classroom and for both groups to learn optimally? Is it possible to construct a workable graduated approach towards English language competence?

Researching system-level questions

These may arise particularly if you have leadership responsibilities such as program convening, course convening, large class convening, first year advising. How do aspects of students' broader experience (e.g. their friendship networks on campus, or their interactions with academic staff) intersect with their capacity to be effective learners?

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (Shulman, 1986)

Shulman challenged a widespread tacit assumption that the knowledge base for teaching involved two knowledges – the knowledge of disciplinary content and the knowledge of pedagogical methods. He proposed rather that the requisite knowledge base for teaching involved an integration of the two; that is, knowing the substantive disciplinary area, but knowing it in terms of the pedagogic activities that would best enable learners to cope with likely hurdles and block points.

Research that involves teasing out, trying out, and describing in practice the most effective pedagogical representations of particular content contributes to the SOLT in a way that is extremely valuable. Because it is discipline or area-specific, it can immediately be picked up and applied by others teaching in the same discipline.

A Griffith University Example of the SOLT Cycle

Source: K. Wilson, GIHE Graduate Certificate in Higher Education seminar, 30.5.08

Practice to theory case study: Student Feedback on Assessment

What did we do?

- Investigated students' perceptions of helpful and unhelpful written assignment feedback
- Firstly content analysed students' descriptions of helpful and unhelpful feedback (study 1)
- Then investigated the dimensions underlying their conceptions of effective feedback using factor analysis (study 2)

What did we find?

- Students identified 3 dimensions of effective marker feedback – developmental (task), encouraging (socio-emotional), fair (justice)
- Developmental feedback was most strongly associated with students' perceptions of effective assessment feedback

What did we change?

- Ensure in our courses that staff feedback protocols on assignments reflect the 3 criteria
- Make these criteria explicit to students in our courses as aspirational goals for staff and invite feedback on our process (transparency)

How did we disseminate?

- Incorporated findings into assessment protocols for new tutors in our annual tutor training program
- Refereed publication: Lizzio, A., & Wilson, K. (2008). Feedback on assessment: Students' perceptions of quality and effectiveness. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 33(3), 263–275.

Selected Resources on SOLT:

- The website for the Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: <http://www.iupui.edu/~josot/>
- Find out about the Griffith University SOLT Community of Practice visit the GIHE website: www.griffith.edu.au/gihe/learning-teaching-resources/scholarship-learning-teaching

References:

Shulman, L.S. (1986). Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching. *Educational Researcher* 15(2), 4-14.
 Shulman, L.S. (1999). Taking learning seriously. *Change*, 31(4), 10-17.