Creating a Foundation for SoTL and Academic Advancement at Queen's University

Andrew Leger, Elaine Van Melle, E. Joy Mighty, Denise Stockley
Queen's University

Authors' contact Information

Andy Leger, Queen's University. 99 University Avenue Kingston, Ontario, Canada K7L 3N5
email: al7@queensu.ca

Elaine Van Melle, Queen's University, 99 University Avenue Kingston, Ontario, Canada K7L 3N5
email: vanmelle@queensu.ca

Joy Mighty, Queen's University, 99 University Avenue Kingston, Ontario, Canada K7L 3N5
email: mighty@queensu.ca

Denise Stockley, Queen's University, 99 University Avenue, Kingston, Ontario, Canada K7L 3N5
email: stockley@queensu.ca

Abstract:

Engagement in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) has become an increasingly important dimension of the work of teachers in higher education. An underlying reason is the academy's desire to create a climate where teaching is a visible and therefore valued activity, particularly as it relates to understanding and improving student learning (Huber, 2004). Supporting individual faculty members' initiatives thereby encouraging the development of communities of practice, is one strategy adopted to advance SoTL. A second strategy is to ensure that SoTL is well represented and promoted through institutional reward systems such as promotion polices (Bunton & Mallon, 2007; Feder & Madara, 2008; O'Meara, 2005; Simpson et al. 2004; Simpson et al, 2007). Indeed, it is suggested that institution-wide strategies are critical to creating an organizational culture in which individual faculty initiatives focusing on SoTL can flourish (Gallos, 2008). In this article we document one university's development of an infrastructure to support faculty wishing to engage in SoTL. We then examine the extent to which the institution-wide process for academic promotion encourages advancement through SoTL. This is accomplished by examining how department heads represent SoTL as a viable pathway for academic advancement. Preliminary results indicate a high degree of variation amongst department heads with respect to their understanding and support of the possibility of academic advancement through SoTL. It is argued that this lack of consistency contributes to "cultural inertia". Cultural inertia exists when there is a disconnect between the institutional intention to value SoTL versus the actual practice of academic promotion (Simpson et al, 2007).

The paper concludes by presenting strategies required to address this disconnect. It is suggested that these strategies will lead to a culture where academic advancement through SoTL is well accepted and forms a critical foundation for building communities of practice.

Key Words:

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, SoTL, academic promotion, advancement, cultural inertia, communities of practice.

Context for the SoTL at Queen's University

The movement towards the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is relatively new in the history of Queen's University. Our institution was established by Royal Charter by Queen Victoria in 1841, twenty-six years before Canadian Confederation. We are considered both internally and externally as a research-intensive institution that values its traditions and students. We offer a comprehensive program with Faculties of Applied Science, Arts and Science, Business, Education, Health Sciences (including Medicine), and Law. In Canada, we are considered a mid-sized university and in 2008, our full-time student body consisted of 17,368 undergraduate and graduate students, and our full-time faculty complement was 1092.

The Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) was established in 1992 through our Senate endorsing the recommendation of a Principal's Task force to establish a unit that would enhance teaching effectiveness and learning satisfaction at Queen's University. Our initial funding, in the early nineties was in part through an endowment provided by undergraduate students who placed a levy on their student fees and raised $750,000. In 2009, the undergraduate students once again voted by referendum to place a new levy on their fees towards supporting the Centre for Teaching and Learning for three consecutive years. To the best of our knowledge, we are the only Centre for Teaching and Learning to be funded through students self-selecting to support the work that we do.

Throughout the years the CTL has evolved with the trends in educational development (i.e., movement towards SoTL and leadership) and we believe that teaching, and the development of teaching is a scholarly activity and a professional responsibility of all academics. Our mission reflects this view and we perceive that our role is to enhance the quality of student learning and support all instructors in their teaching role by:

- Fostering and sustaining a culture of collaboration through community building.
- Providing services and programs to support the educational development activities of individuals and academic units.
- Encouraging policies and initiatives that value and recognize good practice.
- Promoting the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Our current strategic areas of focus are: building community, encouraging good practice, providing and developing educational leadership, and fostering the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. In this vein, the CTL has demonstrated a significant

commitment to inquiry and leadership in the SoTL through institutional programs and initiatives. All educational developers in the CTL actively engage in the SoTL, making our work public via national and international conference presentations and publications. The SoTL is further enhanced through our role as educational developers, as we nurture the cycle of inquiry and promote disciplinary practice through consultations and partnerships with faculty members.

Based on this on-going commitment to SoTL, in 2006 we submitted a proposal to participate in the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning - Leadership Program which was accepted and we joined six other institutions within the cluster on Building Scholarly Communities. Our participation in the CASTL Leadership Program is consistent with the mission of the CTL. It has allowed us to build upon and accelerate the work that we do to foster, promote and increase the visibility and recognition of the SoTL at our institution and elsewhere. Engaging and collaborating with other institutions, with the guidance, expertise and resources of the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, has increased our capacity to share, expand, and develop new approaches to understanding, appreciating and promoting the SoTL, goals that would be difficult to achieve independently. Moreover, the visibility, recognition and credibility gained from our formal affiliation with and participation in the CASTL Leadership Program have increased the value of SoTL at our institution which corresponds with our strategic goal of providing leadership which encompasses the capacity to influence others to value and recognize SoTL at Queen's.

Initiatives to Promote and Support SoTL at Queen's University

The CTL is further committed to supporting the professional development needs of faculty members across the spectrum of their careers, from their time as graduate student teaching assistants through to their senior years. In our work at Queen's, we have developed a systematic approach that, at each stage of a teachers' career, provides programs which focus on excellent teaching and scholarly teaching but also provides an introduction and foundation for the SoTL.. In addition to promoting the SoTL, Queen's also support those that want to engage SoTL in real and tangible ways. Programs include certificate programs, institution teaching forums and grants for innovation and development.

Providing Developmental Support

The most remarkable aspect of our staged support for teachers (See Table 1) is that scholarship is emphasized and facilitated at every stage, through a range of different ways that reflect and promote developmental growth over the duration of teaching careers. The following table provides a range of the types of activities that we have offered over the years.

Table 1. Range of CTL initiatives, organized according to career stage of target audience.

Graduate Students	Post-doctoral Fellows	New Faculty & Adjuncts			Faculty Associates
Professional Development Day	Orientation for Post-Doctoral Fellows	New Faculty Orientation	Focus on Course Design (with technology)	Meet the Teacher	Faculty Associate
Workshop Series for Teaching Assistants	Intensive course on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education	Enabling Professional Practice (EPP)	Focus on Foundations	Faculty Associate	Queen's University Chair in Teaching and Learning
Certificate Program for University Teaching and Learning	Teaching Dossier Development	Teaching Matters	Teachers' Reading Circle	Enabling Professional Practice II	Journal articles on teaching in your discipline
SGS 901: Teaching and Learning in Higher Education	Teaching Squares/ Peer Consultation	Focus on Foundations	Teachers' Writing Circle	Focus on Graduate Supervision	National Teaching Awards
SGS 802: Communication Skills for Teaching Purposes	Program for International Post-Doctoral Fellows	Teaching Dossier Development	Teaching Squares/ Peer Consultation	Cross Faculty Teaching Forum	Presentations at Conferences

For junior faculty, we have instituted a *Teaching Matters* program, designed to support them and to foster high quality teaching. The program provides a structured opportunity for participants to share and reflect on their teaching experiences, planting a seed for what we hope will be a continuing conversation about their teaching. This program has been offered as a discipline-based program and offered in Applied Science and Arts and Science on a cohort basis.

Both junior and mid-career faculty may take advantage of our *Focus on Foundations Certificate Program*, which is a core series of workshop on the fundamentals of scholarly teaching. A workshop in this series is on the SoTL, including defining SoTL, providing a framework, and provides opportunities where faculty can reflect on how they can engage in the SoTL. This program also requires participants to complete scholarly

projects and share the outcomes with peers. As of Fall 2009, this program will be offered completely online.

In addition to systematically supporting teachers' scholarly development, we have a core collection of four programs open to faculty at all stages of their careers that both explicitly and implicitly promote aspects of scholarship. The *Teachers' Writing Circle* brings together colleagues interested in writing about their teaching and this program has resulted in formal publication. The *Teachers' Reading Circle* invites participants to create a scholarly community of teachers by introducing them to provocative texts about teaching and encouraging wide ranging discussion of those texts. Our *Meet the Teacher Series* is an online offering that showcases interviews of successful teachers discussing how they teach, why they teach as they do and vignettes from their classroom teaching (http://www.queensu.ca/ctl/programs/programsworkshops/mtt/).

Intentionally Promoting SoTL

Our staged supportive approach for SOTL specifically begins with our graduate students, for whom we offer a course on teaching and learning in higher education (*SGS 901*) for those interested in a teaching career. A significant component of this course introduces them to the scholarship of teaching and learning and encourages them to become reflective about their teaching and about student learning. The success of this program has been followed by a similar one designed exclusively for law graduates, the first of its kind in Canada, another for PhD students in Business, and Master's level courses in Anatomy. Many of these students will work elsewhere and will take to other institutions their commitment to SoTL fostered in these programs.

Another initiative of note for graduate students is the *Program for University Teaching and Learning (PUTL)*, which includes a certificate devoted to *Teaching Scholarship*. Within PUTL, the three certificates have been designed along the path of a teaching continuum; the first focuses on *Professional Development* and is geared towards a good practice approach, wherein participants attend workshops or a course relating to teaching issues. To receive the second certificate called *Practical Experience* the individual most teach in a variety of settings and then write a reflection on this experience. The third certificate, *Teaching Scholarship*, requires participants to conduct research on some aspect of university teaching and learning and share the results with their colleagues in the form of a research paper, or make teaching public by creating resources, or by develop and facilitate a workshop. Within the last two years, 28 graduate students have completed the Scholarship certificate.

The *Cross-Faculty Teaching Forum*, an annual extended event open to faculty members from across the disciplines, is the equivalent of a yearly institute in which colleagues discuss with each other aspects of their work. Our most recent Forum, Global Perspectives: Practical Approaches to Internationalizing the Curriculum provided SoTL opportunities for faculty to go public with their teaching by highlighting the work that they do in the classroom. Previous forums included a forum on Inquiry-Based Learning and one on Student Engagement. Following each Forum, a scholarly community is created by participants, and Forum proceedings are developed.

At Queen's there is evidence, non-traditional, inter- and cross-disciplinary approaches to scholarship, which include methods of engaging in inquiry as well as approaches to communicating findings. One example is collaborative self-study of teaching and learning, which is the focus of a bi-annual conference at Queen's' Herstmonceux Castle in England organized by a senior faculty member, who recently became a Queen's Teaching Chair. Most faculty are familiar only with approaches to scholarship used within their own disciplines. We encourage exploration of multiple methods so that faculty can choose to use strategies that best suit the context and purpose of their inquiry.

These programs, under the banner of SoTL along with our theme-based scholarly communities, and with the addition of a program devoted to methodologies of inquiry, could provide an explicit, and more intentional, framework for the scholarly efforts of faculty across the disciplines.

Intentionally Supporting SoTL

The Queen's University Senate in 2004, supported financially by the Vice-Principal Academic established Chairs in Teaching and Learning. These appointments recognize teachers who have a record as excellent teachers and as scholars of teaching and learning, who have demonstrated educational leadership at Queen's and elsewhere, and who have a program of activities that would allow them to make their expertise widely available to the university community. These Chairs are the first of their kind in Canada and demonstrate the commitment of the university to the SoTL on our campus.

Chairs receive a 3-year appointment and $20,000 annual discretionary funds to be spent in support of their program. One chair is selected annually. The Chairs work collaboratively with the Centre for Teaching and Learning and during their term give a Public Lecture. To date there have been four Chairs selected who have worked on projects such as Inquiry@Queen's (http://www.iatq.ca/), E2QUATE: Enabling Educators at Queen's to pursue Active Teaching strategies and promote Excellence (http://e2quate.blogspot.com/) and Improving the Quality of Student Learning at Queen's (http://sites.google.com/site/changingourteaching/)

Over the past three years Faculty members at Queen's have had the opportunity to apply to a centrally adjudicated fund administered through the Centre for Teaching and Learning. These one year grants are intended to encourage and support activities and projects designed to enhance student learning at Queen's. Projects might include designing or redesigning courses or programs, developing innovative and effective assessment or teaching strategies, integrating technology, or creating new active learning opportunities to increase student engagement in learning. These targeted grants have not only provided the opportunity to improve student learning, they have also afforded Faculty members the incentive and support to share their projects, thus furthering the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning at Queen's.

This fund was initially established by an annual $10,000 investment by the Vice-Principal (Academic) in 2007. The need for this fund was clearly established in the first year when proposals in excess of $10,000 were received. In the second round of funding in 2008 the amount requested exceeded $30,000. During this round of funding,

beyond it being a clear indication there was need for such a fund, it became apparent that many of the proposals received focused of technology in many of the proposals ITServices at Queen's therefore offered to match the original $10,000 and the fund for 2009 was increased to $20,000. The trend that had been established over the previous two rounds of funding continued in 2009 with over $44,000 requested, and with well over half of the applications focused upon the use of educational technology.

The selection criteria were established intentionally so that all applicants when conceptualizing their own project thought about the need to not only develop their project with students in mind, but also to give consideration to the evaluation and dissemination of their project so that others at the university would have the opportunity to learn from it. Furthermore, the need for departmental support was deemed necessary so that there would be some recognition by Department administrators of the substance and value of an individual Faculty member's initiative and their scholarship of teaching and learning project.

To date there have been 18 proposals funded ranging from $500 to $4,390. Projects have included development of e-learning modules, poster sessions, case-based instruction, virtual laboratories and manuals. The products and results of these grants have led to a number of dissemination forums included public displays, articles within the campus newspaper, journal submissions, and presentations at university, regional and national conferences.

It is clear from the response to the call for proposals, the resulting projects and the dissemination of their results, that Faculty members can benefit from some support, even if is a small amount of funding. The combination of financial support, departmental support and the recognition that can come from dissemination of one's own project has been effective in promoting the SoTL for those faculty members that have received funding from the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Grants.

This past year a Community Service Learning Engagement Grant was initiated. In collaboration with the Office of the Associate Vice-Principal and Dean of Student Affairs and the Centre for Teaching and Learning, this program creates and supports opportunities for faculty and students to enjoy meaningful engagement and learning beyond the context of the classroom. Grants were funded for amounts, up to a maximum of $2,500 from the $20,000 available.

These grants were intended to encourage and support activities and projects which occurred outside of the classroom through the pedagogy of Community Service Learning. Projects might include developing and implementing a service project that relates to material discussed in coursework, building pre-service capacity by engaging students in purposeful discussions in residence halls (e.g. book groups, issue-based programs, lunch series, etc.), or creating new inquiry-based and active learning opportunities involving civic engagement projects or projects promoting cross-cultural dialogue and/or learning. As part of the grant applicants were asked to address, among other criteria, the evaluation and sharing aspects of their project. This past year a total of eight grants were awarded. To date there have been several institutional presentations of the implemented projects, with more expected as the evaluation of the projects are completed. The public dissemination of these projects will be facilitated in

the next round of grants, as successful applicants will be asked to share their experiences in a year-end symposium. It is hoped that this event will further enhance the recognition and encourage further development of these SoTL projects at Queen's.

Reflecting Institutional Priorities for Teaching and Learning

Though our focus is always on particular teachers working in particular contexts with particular interests, and our intention is to develop individual scholars of teaching and learning who are nonetheless committed to collaborating with colleagues, we believe it is worthwhile to provide special support for scholarship that furthers institutional priorities for teaching and learning. At Queen's there are currently in place initiatives devoted to further development in the areas of internationalization, service learning, inquiry-based learning, integrated learning, problem-based learning, inter-professional education, and others. For example, Queen's participation in the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) has created opportunities for us to promote and support university-wide SoTL work around the issue of student engagement. Our aim is to encourage scholarly inquiry in these areas, as a means of ensuring that development and advocacy is well-informed and grounded in critical reflection on our experiences.

Academic Advancement through SoTL

With all these activities and opportunities to engage in SoTL, we are aware that for SoTL to have a significant effect there needs to be a cultural shift across the institution (Cambridge, 2004; Gallos, 2008). Such a shift includes the promotion of SoTL through professional reward systems. Consequently, as part of our CASTL project we thought it was important to investigate how SoTL was represented as part of the pathway for academic advancement. Our CASTL group looked to the Office of Health Sciences Education (OHSE) in the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) for leadership in this project.

The OHSE exists to "*enhance teaching and learning through scholarship and innovation.*" Over the past few years the OHSE has undertaken a number of initiatives to raise the profile of SoTL specifically within the FHS. Most recently a research project was undertaken to investigate the extent to which SoTL was represented as a viable pathway for academic advancement for clinical faculty members. More specifically, given their important role in academic advancement (Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch & Tucker, 1999), a study was undertaken to explore how department heads characterize SoTL as part of the promotion process (Van Melle & Flynn, 2009). Given that the CTL has a university-wide mandate for the CASTL project this study was expanded to include all department heads across Queen's University.

As a starting point we examined the Collective Agreement between Queen's University and the Queen's University Faculty Agreement (QUFA) to determine how SoTL is represented within academic advancement. Our Collective Agreement is the document that describes the criteria and process for academic advancement for faculty members. More specifically, we examined Article 30 which describes the criteria for renewal, tenure and promotion for tenure-track and tenured faculty members. Indeed, Article 30 clearly states, "*Writing and research with respect to pedagogy and innovative teaching shall be assessed as scholarly activity.*" Furthermore, under Article 30 accomplishments in teaching are considered as a separate and distinct feature

contributing towards academic promotion. Evidence of accomplishments in teaching are described as "*A record as a very good teacher committed to academic and pedagogical excellence.*"

Interestingly, creating a distinction between excellent teaching and SoTL as part of academic advancement parallels developments in the literature (Fincher & Work, 2006; Kreber, 2002). For example, Fincher & Work (2006) clearly stipulate that excellent teaching is not synonymous with SoTL. The elements of peer review and public dissemination (elements common to all forms of scholarship) are qualities which are described as distinguishing SoTL from teaching. Furthermore in the literature engaging in SoTL is represented as a continuum of growth (Weston & McAlpine, 2001; Kreber, 2006) (see Table 2). Within this continuum, drawing from the literature is described as a unique feature of scholarly teaching. This is an important point because engaging in scholarly teaching is characterized as a key phase for faculty members as they make the transition from being concerned with excellent teaching to focusing on SoTL.

Table 2 Continuum of Growth Toward the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Phase One: *Excellent Teaching*	Phase Two: *Scholarly Teaching*	Phase Three: *The Scholarship of Teaching & Learning*
Focus of Activities		
Continual refinement of teaching activities based on an intuitive and subconscious decision-making process.	The systematic examination of a specific problem in teaching practice as informed by educational theories and relevant literature.	The creation of a product presented in a form that can be reviewed by peers for quality, and publicly disseminated for others to learn from and build upon.

The distinction made in the Collective Agreement and the literature between engaging in SoTL and being an excellent teacher, as well as the possibility of a pathway for academic advancement through SoTL, helped to shape our research questions for the department head study. More specifically we wanted to know how do department heads characterize the SoTL and to what extent does this characterization support academic advancement through SoTL? We speculated that if department heads were able to differentiate between excellent teaching and SoTL they would be in a better position to represent the role of SoTL in academic advancement. We also speculated that if department heads were able to describe getting to SoTL as a continuum of growth they would be in a better position to provide advice to faculty members wishing to incorporate SoTL as part of their academic advancement.

Institutional ethnography (IE) was the methodology of choice. IE allows the researcher to focus expressly on understanding how macro level discourses or documents (e.g. policies) shape micro level processes in a given institutional setting (Gobo, 2008; Smith, 2006). A semi-structured interview format was adopted where the interview questions were deliberately constructed to create an understanding of typical

processes. For example, participants were asked to describe the kind of advice they would provide to a faculty member wishing to be promoted based on their role in medical education. Only when the interviewee indicated that they couldn't think of any other advice to provide, did the researchers directly ask the interviewee to distinguish between the terms excellent teacher, scholarly teacher and the SoTL. To date interviews have been held with held with approximately half of the department heads at Queen's (20 interviews). All completed interviews have been transcribed and an iterative process has been used for data analysis. Key themes are already emerging from the data that provide us with insight into the challenges of creating an institution-wide momentum for career advancement through SoTL. These themes are presented as follows.

Department heads demonstrate an inconsistent understanding of SoTL

Based on the data collected to date we found that some department heads are indeed able to describe SoTL as indicated by the following response.

Scholarship is about the development of new and innovative programs . . . to formal studies of effect. Scholarship is associated with a creative, novel approach to teaching and with doing something new and communicating about it in some fashion.

Other department heads however, did not raise the possibility of SoTL as contributing towards academic advancement. The predominance of discipline based research as the traditional vehicle for promotion seemed to overshadow any consideration of SoTL affiliated activities. In these cases ensuring that teaching did not interfere with discipline based research activities, and therefore successful attainment of academic promotion, was described as the key challenge.

So we have grown accustomed to not doing much teaching and to being able to devote a lot of uninterrupted time to research . . . because people fear it (teaching) is going to interfere with their research.

Traditional discipline-based research overshadows consideration of SoTL in academic advancement

Even when department heads supported the importance of engaging in SoTL; it was still described as being separate and distinct from traditional discipline based research.

Interestingly enough in our department there are many who are not that keen on research per se, but are very interested in educational research, and we've had some very novel ideas on how to teach.

Consequently, when describing evidence to be considered for academic advancement most department heads noted that the amount of grant funding and number of publications in relation to discipline-based research was literally what counted. Rarely was research or publications in relation to teaching raised as evidence for academic advancement, even in the case of department heads who exhibited an understanding of SoTL. Rather the role of education in advancement was equated with considering the results of teaching evaluations. Unlike grants and papers, this evidence was described as being '*intangible*' and '*hard to evaluate.*'

Most department heads are confused by the term "scholarly teaching"

Finally, most department heads had trouble distinguishing between excellent teaching, scholarly teaching and SoTL.

Ok, I guess I've thought about two anyway. Excellent teaching is an expectation we have of people who are here . . . trying to develop your approach from year to year, looking for better practices and discussing what you're doing . . . At that point it starts to cross over, to me, into what I would imagine scholarly teaching would be, and I guess eventually to scholarship of teaching. I see the scholarship of teaching as some level of creativity and development of new programs or innovative programs or new technologies to formal studies of effect. So I'm a little wooly in the middle, but I'm clear on what I think of the two ends.

Next Steps

These preliminary results suggest that, despite the intent in the Collective Agreement, SoTL has not yet become an integral aspect of academic advancement. This disconnect is referred to in the literature as "cultural inertia" (Simpson et al, 2007). Cultural inertia exists when the intention to value SoTL does not match actual practice or experience of faculty members. During the interview process the following strategies have been raised by the department heads as a way to bridge this disconnect.

- Clarify pathways and possibilities for promotion through education including providing specific guidance regarding the types of evidence required and the role of the teaching dossier.
- Provide examples of how various combinations of education, service and research work can lead to advancement through SoTL.
- Enhance recognition for promotions and educational accomplishments.

We anticipate that additional strategies will emerge as we continue to interview department heads across campus. The results of the study will be used tom identify strategies which will foster a culture supportive of SoTL. These strategies will complement the infrastructure put in place through the CTL and ensure a strong foundation for building communities of practice engaged in SoTL.

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