

## **Threshold Concepts and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning**

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The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is an important international movement, which contributes to the quality of teaching and learning in higher education, as well as to a growing body of educational literature (Hubball, Pearson, & Clarke, 2013). With a focus on student learning in diverse educational contexts, SoTL encompasses a broad set of practices that engage educational leaders in examining curriculum and pedagogy in a methodical and rigorous way (Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997; Hutchings, Huber, & Ciccone, 2011).

Providing a literature informed, peer reviewed justification for program and policy changes, SoTL is a practical and complementary undergirding for research in teaching and learning. However, many institutions lack internal SoTL expertise to effectively develop and evaluate curriculum and pedagogical practices (Hubball, Lamberson, & Kindler, 2012). There is a need for better and more integrated theoretical work in designing SoTL programs (Gurung & Schwartz, 2010; Hutchings, 2007; Kandlbinder & Peseta, 2009). Recent studies illustrate that threshold concepts have proved useful for initiating cross-disciplinary discourses (Carmichael, 2010); acting as a starting place for curriculum making (Carmichael, 2012). The ultimate purpose of this paper is to identify the threshold concepts in SoTL in order to facilitate the adoption and widespread use of SoTL by faculty members in diverse contexts.

Theorization in threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2003; 2005; 2006) works as a lens with which to investigate SoTL and as a frame to consider curriculum for SoTL programs. Focusing on the 'stuck places' in SoTL programs, this research considers the experience of faculty members previously and currently enrolled in a SoTL program at a research-intensive university in Canada. Semi-structured responsive interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) were conducted with 14 current SoTL program members and 20 past graduates to explore their experience of learning the ways of thinking and practicing SoTL. These interviews revealed a variety of troublesome concepts and coping strategies to navigate the liminal space. Participants noted the challenging epistemic shift required when designing and conducting SoTL research in an educational frame. Most of the interviewees expressed that participation in the SoTL program transformed their understanding of teaching and learning in higher education.

In light of the potential institutional benefits afforded by the adoption of SoTL for pedagogical and curricular investigations, an understanding of SoTL that includes threshold concepts will help to facilitate the requisite cultural shift within departments and institutions. The troublesome nature of threshold concepts in SoTL provokes the uncomfortable, liminal spaces that are a necessary feature of learning to do SoTL. It will push the educational research in higher education into a new place for both faculty and students.

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