

PROMOTING SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH THE SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

EDITED BY
DELORES D. LISTON
AND REGINA RAHIMI

EDUCATION

"This is an exciting work that contributes a great deal to the clear goal of SoTL—the moral imperative to use evidence to improve student learning and support the development of informed citizens of the world."

—**CAROL HOSTETTER**, Indiana University

How can education become a transformative experience for all learners and teachers? The contributors to this volume contend that the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) can provide a strong foundation for the role of education in promoting social justice. The collection features contributions by an array of educators and scholars highlighting the various ways that learners and teachers can prepare for and engage with social justice concerns. The essays offer reflections on the value of SoTL in relation to educational ethics, marginalized groups, community service and activism, counter narratives, and a range of classroom practices. Although the contributors work in a variety of disciplines and employ different theoretical frameworks, they are united by the conviction that education should improve our lives by promoting equity and social justice.

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Jennifer Meta Robinson, Whitney M. Schlegel,
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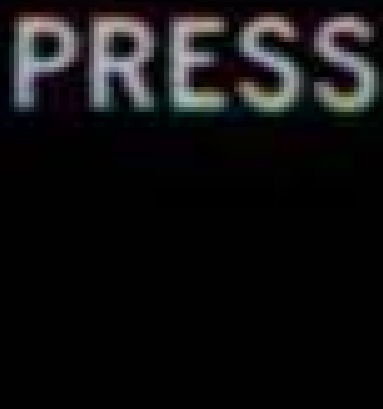


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SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Jennifer Meta Robinson,
Whitney M. Schlegel, and
Mary Taylor Huber, *editors*

We would like to dedicate the volume to the memory of our colleague and friend, Lorraine Sophia Gilpin (1971–2014).

Also, Dr. Liston would like to acknowledge the support of Georgia Southern University and the College of Education for educational leave that was granted to her in the spring of 2015 to work on this edited volume and prepare the prospectus we submitted to Indiana University Press.

Introduction: Unlocking SoTL's Potential for Transformative Education

Delores D. Liston and Regina Rahimi

THE SCHOLARSHIP OF Teaching and Learning (SoTL) represents a movement in higher education to revolutionize scholarship in relationship to teaching.

Many scholars enter academia because they want to conduct cutting-edge research in their fields. So they become experts in their particular fields, and then, once they've obtained the coveted terminal degree and landed a tenure-track position at a college or university, they discover that in addition to researching and writing about their area of expertise, they must teach undergraduate or graduate students or both. For these faculty members, research is primary and teaching is secondary. Teaching is often viewed as a hindrance to their *real* work as scholars, which involves presenting and publishing their research findings.

For others, obtaining the terminal degree is a means to the ends of entering a teaching profession at the collegiate level. Members of this group might have started as K-12 teachers, but their goal is to teach in higher education (generally for less pay than they earned in public schools, but that is a story for another day). For these faculty members, teaching is primary and research is secondary. Researching becomes a task they *must* do in order to remain in their teaching post at the college or university.

At this point, I'm sure there are some readers wondering about the "third leg" of the academic stool: service. For most college and university faculty, the service component (service to the profession and service to the institution) remains tertiary. Although I'm sure there are *some* who enter the realm of college teaching in order to serve on various institutional, departmental, and even professional committees, this cadre is fewer in number. Further, this cadre also moves quickly into administrative positions within the university, places where teaching *and* scholarship become

secondary to the business of managing the institution. Therefore, for the most part, the service component of academic life is outside the scope of this volume. Activities of teaching and learning, on the other hand, are central to the discourse of this text and form the basis of SoTL.

Whether teaching or research is primary for an individual faculty member, a tension between these two aspects of being a college professor undoubtedly exists. For the former group, teaching is an activity that pulls the researcher away from the primary task at hand and interrupts the flow of the research and scholarship process. For the latter group, researching and scholarship are drudgery, activities that must be completed to justify their continuation in the academy.

SoTL has emerged as a vehicle with the potential to resolve, or perhaps better stated *dissolve*, the tension between research and teaching that has plagued academia. Seemingly simple, the idea behind SoTL is that teaching *is* a scholarly activity (Boyer, 1990; Menges & Weimer, 1996). Therefore, scholars ought to recognize that their teaching and their research need not be at odds with one another, but rather scholarship should support teaching and teaching should support scholarship.

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning has great potential as a vehicle to elevate the work of teaching, improve classroom engagement practices, and enable us to learn more about pedagogy, classroom management, and most importantly our students. This opportunity to explore our personal interactions with our students, the sociology behind teaching, and the diverse perspectives explored through a teaching and learning relationship is perhaps the most powerful promise of SoTL. Examination of social justice and opportunity for equity in the work of SoTL is what the contributions of this text hope to provide.

What Is SoTL?

As noted earlier, SoTL is a movement within higher education that seeks to revolutionize scholarship in relation to teaching. As Gilpin and Liston (2009) noted in an earlier publication,

SoTL seeks a transformation in the academy through its threefold agenda: 1) recognizing teaching as inquiry relevant to research; 2) recognizing the act of teaching as a public rather than private endeavor, and thus related to the formation of community or commons; and 3) recognizing teaching as a scholarly endeavor, and thus subject to peer review and evaluation (McKinney, 2007; Huber & Hutchings, 2005; Huber & Morreale, 2002; Shulman, 2002; Bender & Gray, 1999; and Bass, 1999). We see this transformative aspect of SoTL as potentially manifesting in two significant ways: 1) turning teaching into scholarship to be used for tenure and promotion in order to increase the emphasis and importance of pedagogy throughout the university community; and 2) establishing commons whereby learning communities grow in their understanding of one another and our roles in society in order to

transform those roles. Of these two, our focus in this research specifically addressed the second of these manifestations of transformation. Indeed, we believe that the expression of threefold agenda of SoTL as manifested through establishment of the commons holds potential to go beyond technical machinations of our pedagogical practices. We believe that the commons can move us into a reconceptualization of teaching and learning as a shared endeavor that transforms not only teaching and learning but our relationship of one to another and of ourselves to our world. (p. 2)

The implications of SoTL's agenda for dissolving the tension between research and teaching are clear. Teaching and learning become part and parcel of research and scholarship. Conventional lines between when one is teaching and when one is conducting research are erased; teaching is research and research is teaching. Additionally, reconceptualizing teaching in this way, as a scholarly activity, heightens awareness that teaching is public and open to peer review and evaluation. Further, in community, distinctions between when one is a learner and when one is a teacher are also blurred. Not only does teaching become a feature of academic life worthy of scrutiny as an aspect of one's research agenda, but one's research agenda also shifts to ensure timely relevance and accountability to the *community of learners* (Huber & Morreale, 2002; Gilpin & Liston, 2009).

In this way, SoTL reminds us, we are *always already* (Heidegger, 1926, 1962) learners, teachers, and researchers. SoTL's existence brings this truth to the forefront and insists that we remain ever cognizant that embodying this triad of learner, teacher, and researcher constitutes the heart of being a scholar. Further, recognizing the diverse positionality that each brings to the teaching-researching-learning praxis is at the heart of the potential for a transformative experience and efforts toward social justice.

Guiding Question

Simply put, the guiding question for this edited volume is "How can SoTL be used to make education a transformative experience for *all* learners and teachers?" As noted above, SoTL directs a change in the conceptualization of teaching, learning, and scholarship to better match an integrated understanding of scholarship in a community of learners. But, as stated by Gilpin and Liston (2009), "Will the transformation of the academy promised by SoTL shift priorities from research in the disciplines to research in pedagogy? Or will SoTL pursue more in-depth transformation of the conception of teaching and learning?" (p. 1).

Our hope and desire was that SoTL offer more than a mere shift from discipline-based research to pedagogical-based research, which means the learner, teacher, and scholar are always fully considered. We hoped that SoTL could offer a strong platform from which to use the transformation authorized through SoTL to promote a more socially just society. In our view, descriptions of the essence of SoTL align with this agenda. Braiding together the value base and essential characteristics of SoTL, critical

pedagogy, and transformational or transgressive education (hooks, 1994) provides a path to more in-depth transformation of teaching and learning.

Therefore, the purpose of this introduction is to explore the foundations of SoTL in order to excavate its potential to support transformative education and critical pedagogy, forwarding a social justice agenda through SoTL. The conceptualization of the commons (supportive communities of teacher-learner-researchers), and reconceptualization of the classroom as a space for scholarly praxis, establishes moral and pedagogical imperatives for SoTL to participate in the promotion of social justice (Huber & Hutchings, 2005; Hutchings, 2002; Shulman, 2002; and Huber & Morreale, 2002). Thus, clearly, SoTL promotes concepts of social justice, inclusion of diverse perspectives, and critical dimensions of pedagogy. For this reason, SoTL may be (or become) a vehicle for “transformative education” (hooks, 1994), forwarding social justice. This edited volume provides examples of SoTL scholarship built on this foundation. Each chapter of this edited volume contributes to a richer picture of the potential of SoTL as transformative education.

Through exploration of the unique perspective offered through development of pedagogical innovations supported through the commons, this edited volume seeks to unlock SoTL’s potential for transformative education (Gilpin & Liston, 2009). This introduction will establish the context through which the ensuing chapters address the question “How can SoTL be used to make education a transformative experience for *all* learners and teachers?” To establish this context, we will explicate the characteristics and value base common to SoTL, transformative education, and critical pedagogy, focusing on the ways in which these three threads can be braided together to support social justice through the commons, supporting learning and teaching and resulting in scholarship that supports and furthers equality, before providing a brief description of the subsequent chapters.

Value Base and Essential Characteristics of SoTL

The primary impetus of SoTL is to give us pause regarding the relationship between teaching and learning and scholarship. That is, SoTL makes us think again or reconsider (Boyer, 1990) our intentions and outcomes relevant to teaching and learning and scholarship. This rethinking is meant to reignite our love of learning as scholars share their passion about their areas of expertise with novices and apprentices.

Second, SoTL seeks to combine teaching and learning with scholarship, resulting in publications. In turn, these publications make our endeavor public, promote discussion, and elevate the discourse on pedagogy. As Huber and Hutchings (2005) have written, SoTL contributes to “viewing the work of the classroom as the site for inquiry, asking and answering questions about student learning in ways that can improve one’s classroom and also advance the larger profession of teaching” (p. 1). This is certainly true when this work enters the public domain of scholarship and publication. Such

attention to the scholarly work of publication and presentation enlivens the teaching and learning experience and provides evidence of the effectiveness and significance of teaching and learning. This results in a win-win for faculty and for teaching and learning as a whole. The win for faculty is peer-reviewed publications, the gold standard by which scholars are judged. The win for teaching and learning is the promotion of better teaching through the attention these publications draw to pedagogy and the long-term outcomes of teaching and learning.

A third and closely related purpose of SoTL is the improvement of pedagogy. As noted earlier, many scholars enter the professoriate with the aim of generating cutting-edge research, and teaching is an afterthought with which they are confronted after entering the field. Others may enter the field wanting to teach but lacking knowledge of the methods and foundations of good teaching. SoTL helps raise awareness of the methods and foundations of good teaching across disciplines. Generating discussion across the academy of the importance of teaching has therefore been a primary purpose of SoTL (Hutchings, 2002). Indeed, over the past twenty years, many colleges and universities have opened (or transformed) centers to support faculty development in teaching and learning. Previously, these centers were aimed at remediation of faculty deficits and therefore were often expressly avoided by most faculty. But the transformation generated through SoTL has changed these centers into enlivening spaces where faculty share ideas, concerns, and enthusiasm for teaching and learning as scholarship on their campuses and in their respective fields. This transformation has resulted in improving how we teach as well as how (and sometimes how often) we publish.

Finally, the spirit of SoTL is best captured through the concept of the learning commons—a community of learners producing knowledge together. “The commons” is a conceptual space for the exchange of ideas (Huber & Hutchings, 2005). As we pause to reconsider the intentions and outcomes of our teaching and learning practices, we rediscover the communal dimension of teaching and learning. Our love of learning is not only an individualized experience but also something shared with others. This sharing may take place through a community of scholars—through peer-reviewed publications—or through faculty development seminars, presentations at conferences, or even informal groups of faculty who gather to share insights about their teaching and learning. This activity, at the heart of transformative practice, requires a level of engagement with “others.” It requires that we examine the learner, the teacher, and the researcher, perhaps in ways we have not done before in higher education. As we search for exemplary practices and innovative pedagogies within the academy, we also necessarily must account for the experiences of members of the community of learners. Every learner must be counted while teachers strive for the improvement of learning. Conversations of diversity, differentiation, experience, epistemology, approaches to learning, and modalities of teaching and learning have to be explored. It is through this exploration that social justice and equality can emerge.

The discerning reader will no doubt have picked up on the interwoven relationships between each of these purposes of SoTL. This weaving together of purposes creates a very strong thread, characterizing SoTL as supportive of “good teaching” through publishing and sharing knowledge, which in turn ignites and reignites our passion for the teaching and learning scholarship continuum. This keeps us ever mindful that teaching and scholarship do not have to be opposing forces vying for our limited time and attention. Rather, teaching and scholarship are recognized through SoTL as a mutually supporting dynamic continually renewing those passions that brought us into our respective academic disciplines in the first place.

Thus the concept of the commons cuts across the previously noted purposes of SoTL and paves the path we (the authors of this edited volume and others who contribute chapters or otherwise join us on this journey) take toward a social justice agenda through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Just as SoTL in general redirects our attention toward integration of scholarship and teaching, the commons redirects our passions toward the deeper meaning and purpose of scholarship and teaching: they can help us live better lives. We learn to value how we, and others, view the world and construct meaning. We can challenge our own notions of teaching and learning to develop more reciprocity within our relationships in this process.

Several aspects of the commons explicitly and implicitly support moves toward social justice. Although many of these aspects are difficult to discuss individually, they all warrant being clearly identified. Engaging in community requires accountability, such as peer review and public evaluation. Our work must hold up to the scrutiny of others in our community. This accountability also comes with responsibility, including being responsive to the needs of others as well as relevant and timely to the context. These contexts are simultaneously local and global or international. SoTL scholar Lee Shulman (2002) notes that engagement in scholarly teaching supports “moral action aimed at cultural change” (p. vii). Engaging in the commons also brings to the forefront our commonality as we seek similar means and ends in a community of like-minded others. Raising this specter also highlights the opposing and equally powerful dynamic of diversity. We need more than interactions solely with those who look like us, think like us, and agree with us. To remain vibrant, a commons, a community of scholars, also needs fresh ideas, diverse perspectives, various theoretical frameworks, and even *arguments*. And last, engagement in the commons highlights the idea that commitment in SoTL carries moral and pedagogical imperatives. As Shulman (2002) states, we have an “obligation to inquire into the consequences of one’s work with students” (p. vii). In this way, the concept of the commons paves the pathway for SoTL’s social justice agenda.

Value Base and Essential Characteristics of Critical Pedagogy: Theoretical Foundations for Social Justice

Until now, we have avoided defining what we mean by “social justice.” We have skirted over differences of opinion and conflict as well as the grim reality that justice

for one may be injustice for another. Although these differences of perspective are important—indeed, they are key to establishing social justice—they can become a distraction to the pursuit of social justice. That is, although one must know what constitutes social justice in order to realize it, if one gets bogged down in the theoretical morass trying to determine how to meet *all* the needs of *all* the people *all* the time, or hierarchizing (Lorde, 1984) whose issues are more important, making the changes needed to bring about greater social justice can get lost.

We are not saying that theory is unimportant or that philosophizing about social justice is a waste of time. In fact, we believe quite the opposite. Theory and philosophy are fundamental. Proceeding without a theoretical base leaves one open to meandering aimlessly and ultimately accomplishing little to nothing.

This text, however, is not about establishing exacting criteria regarding what constitutes social justice. Rather, this text is about how SoTL, while enlivening passions of teaching, learning, and scholarship, may also enliven passions about advancing social justice. In this pursuit, providing a narrow definition that limits this passion to only perspectives that advance economic, racial, or gender equalities (or even all of the above) places an unwarranted damper on this passion. Therefore, this edited volume seeks to make space for exploring the broadest avenue upon which SoTL may advance social justice.

In constructing this avenue, we have somewhat arbitrarily created two subheadings for establishing foundations of social justice: The first we have labeled “critical pedagogy” and aligned with the theoretical foundations for social justice. The second we have labeled “transformative education” and aligned with perspectives that highlight theory-informed practice, also termed “praxis.” We have deliberately used the term “pedagogy” for our theoretical base because this term highlights our conviction that theory is imminently practical, and practice without theory is malpractice.

Now that we have established that separating theory from practice is more for the purpose of explanation than a reflection of real differences, we may proceed to discuss the value base for critical pedagogy.

We are using “critical pedagogy” as an umbrella term to encompass a variety of theoretical perspectives that encourage learners (both students and teachers are learners in the context of SoTL) to think critically. These include perspectives such as multiculturalism (Banks & McGee Banks, 2013), postmodernism (Peters, 2010), deconstructionism (Biesta, 2010), constructivism (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002), critical theory (Apple, 2001), feminism (Mayo & Stengel, 2010), black feminist thought (Collins, 1990), critical race theory (Lynn & Dixson, 2013), and critical race feminism (Wing, 2003). These are only a few of the major perspectives that establish the general parameters of what is meant by “critical.”

These perspectives differ vastly in philosophical and theoretical underpinnings. Some postulate truth as discoverable, or at least socially constructed from empirical evidence (e.g., constructionism), while others deconstruct conceptions of truth and are vehemently opposed to any and all “master narratives” (e.g., postmodernism and

deconstructionism). Still others hold positions somewhere in between, postulating that social locations (positions of privilege and oppression in society, feminisms, and critical race theories) yield differing understandings of truth. These views maintain that with oppression comes an epistemic privilege that yields a more complete picture on which we can base our actions (Moya & Hames-Garcia, 2000; Harding, 2004).

Acknowledging that these perspectives conflict with one another, our purpose in this volume is to explore points of relative agreement in order to pave that broad avenue mentioned earlier. In spite of their differences, all of these theoretical perspectives share significant insights that are relevant to advancing social justice.

First, they all concur that we do not already live in a world that is socially just. Rather, there is injustice in the world, and we need to change this. All critical pedagogy perspectives agree there *is* oppression, inequity, and injustice. There is a power imbalance by which some are oppressed. The results of this oppression privilege some over others. Thus, *all* critical pedagogy perspectives seek to raise awareness and generate conversations about imbalances of power and how to take action to generate social justice and equity. This is the primary component linking these various perspectives under the umbrella of critical pedagogy.

A second and related link between critical pedagogy perspectives is that investigations of power are central to improving the well-being of those who are oppressed. Questions such as “Who benefits?” “Who are the oppressed?” “Who is privileged?” and “How is power obtained, maintained, and wielded?” are all fundamental to this aspect of critical theory.

Another significant component of critical theory is an investigation into what is meant by “who” in the above questions. For example, during the 1960s, black women were active in two simultaneous civil rights movements—one of which addressed their race—but the “who” of oppression was characterized as male. The other movement addressed their sex, but the “who” of oppression was characterized as white. Ultimately, these women found that neither movement accurately addressed them as the “who” in oppression. Through black feminist thought and similar theoretical perspectives, the intersections between race and gender (and eventually other aspects of one’s being) became highlighted, adding concepts such as intersectionality (Collins, 1990) and essentializing (Spelman, 1988) to the vernacular of critical pedagogy.

As the perspectives of critical theory have matured, it has become commonplace to recognize diversity as one of its complex and multifaceted components. Further, concepts of commonality and similarity, essential qualities defining who “belongs” in which category and why, have all come under closer scrutiny and interrogation.

Nonetheless, and we would argue because of this interrogation, the critical pedagogies underneath this umbrella supporting social justice press on toward enacting the moral imperatives Shulman (2002) identifies as necessary for SoTL to create a better, more equitable and socially just world.