

## Editorial

### The significance of SOTL in the South

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It gives me great pleasure to write the editorial for the first issue of a new journal, *SOTL in the South*. Possibly the first thing to occur to many readers is the question, 'why would you ever want to start a new journal? Are there not enough journals in existence already, all jostling for readers, for prestige, for accreditation? It is such a lot of work, and takes so long before it is included in the important lists, such as IBSS, EBSCO and Scopus.' The answer is simply that the issue of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL) requires more attention from academics in the global South, and it requires more attention to what the scholarship of teaching and learning means for the South. This is not a topic or a focus that should be ignored any longer. The geopolitics of knowledge is being opened up for questioning, but there is continual deference to the globally renowned, and scant attention is given to institutional contexts and what these contexts mean for scholarship and for teaching and learning.

A second question, or voice of doubt, that readers might express is: 'why focus on the global South? Is this not reinforcing yet another tired dualism, that of North and South? Is it not essentialising the politics of identity of place?' On the contrary, we would argue, it provides the opportunity to open up issues about North/South relations of power and, provided that one maintains this as an open dialogue, the opportunity to take this line of questioning further. The question of what characterises the global South is particularly interesting and perplexing. Does it mean 'below the Equator'? Does it mean 'in the margins' of domains of power or the margins of cultural and epistemological hegemony? Or does it mean 'indigenous or first-nation'? Does it mean 'having a low resource base'? What makes these questions so interesting is that the answers themselves might vary according to socio-historic context. For example, writers in the Anglophone world might refer to those who are not indigenous as 'settlers' (see for example Tuck and Yang 2012), but from Latin America there is the notion that those whose ancestors stem from Europe might have the choice about whether to view the world from a Southern perspective:

Of course, European immigrants in former colonial worlds, such as Argentina, do not have the same experience as Native Americans. However, both groups experience the colonial difference that can either be narcotized or revealed. They both choose to reveal and think from it. (Mignolo 2002: 68)

Furthermore, where does the conversation in or about the global South begin and end? This conversation would be sorely depleted if only those from the South participated in it. Mignolo (2002) contends that for those not of the South, understanding how coloniality works is feasible, but it is more likely to be rational, rather than experiential.

And yet a third question might emerge: 'why take a concept like SOTL, which originated in the global North – North America to be exact, initially inspired by the seminal work of Boyer (1990) – and literally transplant this to the South?' The answer to this question is that SOTL has enormous generative power in its ability to unleash lecturers' learning through enquiry about teaching and learning, and in its ability to bring teaching and research together under the concept of 'scholarship'. However, in order to perform this generative function, SOTL needs to be reconsidered, opened up for questioning, and given a flavour that will render it appropriate for its audience.

Finally, a reader might ask, 'does the concept of SOTL unnecessarily bracket off a small portion of scholarly endeavour from a broader range of enquiry about higher education, social justice, teaching and learning and scholarship?' The answer to this is 'not necessarily'; let us jointly decide, through the debates and the examples in this journal, what SOTL can usefully mean for academics and scholars in the global South and, in this way, enrich a global conversation about SOTL. Let us systematise and support Southern scholarship and, in doing so, contribute to a broader conversation (Connell 2007). If the concept of SOTL remains a tightly bracketed field, this may well hamper the ability to use it to mobilise dialogue, discussion and introspection about teaching and learning in higher education, especially as it is presently not a common activity in very many parts of the global South.

Many of these questions are signalled in this first issue of the volume. Carolina Guzmán-Valenzuela looks, pertinently, at the trends of publishing on SOTL in Latin America. She argues that although there has been a growth spurt, this is limited to a few countries, and the articles tend not to focus on the implications of the setting in which the research takes place. Michael Samuel also looks at trends exhibited in papers on the scholarship of teaching and learning, in his case in South Africa. He maintains that scholars need to face the challenge that SOTL tends to focus on the micro level, and that they need to be able to bridge the micro and the macro, the systemic or societal, in their contributions. In the spirit of rebelliousness and questioning, he urges scholars to exhibit 'epistemic disobedience'. In their article on access and participation across the Brazilian higher education system, Ana Maria Carneiro, Helena Sampaio, Cibele Yahn de Andrade and Marcelo Knobel further challenge us to look at the borders of where SOTL begins and ends, exemplifying Samuel's call to bridge the micro and the macro. They call for the image of higher education in Brazil to be reconsidered. If this dominant image were to change, this would have important challenges and implications for teaching and learning which, they maintain, is an area of little risk-taking and transformation.

Banda and Banda offer examples of what SOTL in the South might mean by taking us to a very different place: the world of everyday knowledge and experience, and indigenous knowledge. They provide examples of how students' everyday knowledge, and that of their communities, can be mobilised in order to demystify research for students. Their paper is part argument and part example. It is a demonstration of the very varied styles that can constitute SOTL in the South. This is important if we do not wish to bracket off SOTL, both in terms of narrowing down the topic, and in terms of imposing

a one-size-fits-all style on scholars. Liezl Smit, Rhoda Meyer, Ilse Crafford and Dianne Parris provide yet another example of SOTL in the South as writers conducting a study in a programme in which they were students. This opens up the issue of role and identity: who is a scholar? Are students included in this conversation? Hopefully, readers of this journal will agree that they are. Smit *et al.* do make an important, if not sobering, point: that moving from the position of disciplinary expert to novice in the field of education studies can be enormously challenging for mid-career professionals. This is something SOTL in the South, as well as SOTL more generally, sorely needs to take into account. Meegan Hall, Peter Adds, Mike Ross and Phillip Borell take up another exciting challenge, that of crossing boundaries between indigenous knowledge, in this case Maori studies, and SOTL concepts that are still effectively Northern, such as the notion of threshold concepts. Interestingly, they call Maori Studies 'Troublesome' – a good, against-the-grain kind of word that is an appropriate place to end this editorial.

## References

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