

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Engagement and Awareness in VPET in Hong Kong

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Abstract

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is widely promoted and used in USA, Canada, UK and Australia since 1990s. SoTL encourages teachers to plan and evaluate the relationship between learning and teaching when practicing their teaching pedagogy. Through the process, research capability of teachers will be enhanced. As in the Report of the Task Force on Promotion of Vocational Education in 2015, it has recommended that enhancing the research capability of Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET) institutions is one of the strategies to strengthen the promotion of VPET. To assist the growth of research capability, SoTL can be one of the approaches to be considered. This study aims to explore the engagement and awareness of using SoTL in VPET in Hong Kong. A questionnaire was designed based on the structure of CASTL survey from the Carnegie Foundation. Teaching staff in Vocational Training Council, who attended the research and teaching skills training workshops during March to June 2019, were invited to fill in the questionnaire. 69 completed questionnaires were collected and analysed. The findings provided the initial review on VPET teachers' awareness and engagement in SoTL in Hong Kong. It could be used as reference for the policy establishment that supports the VPET research capability development in the future.

Keywords: Vocational and Professional Education and Training, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, educational research

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Introduction

In Hong Kong, Vocational Education and Training (VET) has more than 80 years of history. The major focus of VET was in providing education and training opportunity to young people before employment (VPET Repository, 2017). Until 2015, the Task Force on Promotion of Vocational Education of Education Bureau of Hong Kong SAR Government had reviewed the VET in Hong Kong and published a report. The report pointed out that the development of VET in Hong Kong had to be enhanced in order to prepare the youth to face the challenge in the future. To facilitate the development of the VET, action for reversing the misconception on VET in Hong Kong society must be taken. The Task Force recommended three strategies which were i) rebranding VET as Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET), ii) strengthening the promotion of VPET, and iii) providing the public more information of VPET and the related career (Task Force on Promotion of Vocational Education, 2015).

Riding on the second strategy: Strengthening the Promotion of VPET and its recommendation on enhancing the quality of programmes offered by VPET providers and research capability, VPET providers are encouraged to consider engaging in more research activities, including action research, applied research, technology-oriented research, and other academic research to inform teaching and learning (Task Force on Promotion of Vocational Education, 2015).

Research capability of the VPET institutions can be enhanced through innovating new product or service with research and development activities or progressing the learning and teaching (L&T) practices with scholastic perspective. Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) could be one of the perspectives for consideration.

SoTL is a concept that encourages educators to systematically investigate or examine the relationship and practices between L&T. It has been widely discussed and embedded in L&T of the western academia since 1990s (Maxwell & Ball, 2010; Geertsema, 2015). However, SoTL has not yet widely discussed in VPET institutions in Hong Kong.

Hence, the research team had conducted a survey to explore the engagement and awareness of SoTL in Vocational Training Council, which is the largest VPET institution in Hong Kong. We hope that the findings of the survey could provide information on the SoTL development in Hong Kong so as to facilitate the discussion of policy establishment for research capability enhancement.

Usage of SoTL in Western Society and Hong Kong

In 1990, Ernest L. Boyer firstly suggested the concept of Scholarship of Teaching. Boyer thought that teacher had the responsibility to develop their teaching planning carefully. Examination on the pedagogical procedures used in teaching had to be conducted as well. With the evidence collected from student learning process, teachers could analysis the relationship between learning and teaching (Maxwell & Ball, 2010; Geertsema, 2015; Voelker 2016).

SoTL then became a trend in L&T in post-secondary level in the past decades. Definition of SoTL is variate from scholars. Different scholars demonstrate different practice on SoTL. Investigation on the classroom practice, inquiring the L&T process in post-secondary institution, public sharing and review on L&T study, and research-informed teaching are the activities of SoTL. The major aim of conducting SoTL is to enhance the educational quality, so the SoTL practice should also be appropriate to the disciplinary epistemologies and college mission. It was recognised that SoTL had brought impacts on L&T by promoting the realisation of values, encouraging student engagement in investigation and reflection on particular topics, facilitating peer review, knowledge sharing and cross-disciplinary collaboration (Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, n.d.; Fanghanel et al., 2016; Chng & Looker, 2013; Maxwell & Ball, 2010; Geertsema, 2015).

SoTL has been widely used in the western countries, include USA, Canada, UK and Australia. Teachers in USA thought that SoTL was important to their professional development in post-secondary sector and the learning of students. USA institutions had engage in the use of SoTL in different levels and subjects. A survey tool called “CASTL” was being used by institutions to self-evaluate the SoTL development within the institution (Fanghanel et al., 2016; Maxwell & Ball, 2010; McKinney et al, 2003; Mincer & Hessinger, 2012; Witman and Richlin, 2007). A national framework and funding on SoTL were operated in Canada. Official organisation “Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education” and its journal “Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning” were established to promote and assist the development of SoTL in Canada (Hughes, 2017; Poole, 2010). In UK, the main focus of SoTL work were the research output and student participation in research process. Collaboration and knowledge sharing through social media were highly valued (Fanghanel et al., 2016). Standard of SoTL was well developed in Australia. The Australian University Teaching Criteria and Standards project set the standard of SoTL and facilitated more than 60% of Australian universities to use the standards in their institutions (Fanghanel et. al., 2016; Australian University Teaching and Criteria and Standards, n.d.).

In Hong Kong, SoTL is a new concept to the city. Zou (2018) discussed that Hong Kong educators might have already practiced SoTL in other terminology. The competitive culture of Asian examination system obstructed the development of SoTL that encourage the knowledge sharing and exchange. The “face” concept in Chinese society discouraged students to participate in open discussion and to raise disagreement in the public. Hong Kong students tended to be gentle, polite, not confronting with others and avoid to take risk of conflict. This made the development of SoTL in Hong Kong slow (Chng & Looker, 2013; McNaught, 2012).

As mentioned, SoTL could be one of the aspects to consider for the enhancement of research capability of VPET in Hong Kong. The discussion of SoTL in Hong Kong is still in a preliminary stage. Therefore, the research team distributed questionnaires to teaching staff of VTC to find out the engagement and awareness on SoTL in the largest VPET institution in Hong Kong.

Methods

CASTL survey is the tool that established for institution to paint a broad-brush picture of the SoTL in the institution (Carnegie Foundation, 2004). Universities or academic departments can conduct the investigation by using the survey tool or formulating a questionnaire with some questions in the survey that consider proper for their own situations (McKinney et al., 2003; Maxwell and Ball, 2010; Mincer and Hessinger, 2012). In reference to the SoTL investigation practices of University of Florida in 2010, Armstrong Atlantic State University in 2012 and Illinois State University in 2003 (McKinney et al., 2003; Maxwell and Ball, 2010; Mincer and Hessinger, 2012), the research team decided to formulate a questionnaire based on the CASTL survey tool.

The questionnaire consists of three parts. The first part aims to find out the respondents' engagement on SoTL. The second part is to figure out the respondents' awareness and attitude towards SoTL. Basic demographic information will be collected in part three in anonymous. As SoTL is a concept coming from the western countries and not a popular term in Hong Kong (Zou, 2018; McNaught, 2012), new questions are added and wordings in the questions are being modified to familiar terms of Hong Kong educators.

Convenience sampling was used for data collection. Teaching staff who attended five sessions of the research and teaching-related training organised by the Centre of Learning and Teaching of Vocational Training Council from March to June 2019 were invited to fill in the questionnaire.

Findings

69 completed questionnaires were collected from five sessions of research and teaching-related training provided to teaching staff of Vocational Training Council. The average years of teaching in VPET institutions was 7.83 years, while the average years of research experience was 2.07 years. This reviewed that the participants were experienced teachers with few research experience. 97% of the respondents were frontline teaching staff, who were in the positions of Teaching Associate, Lecturer, Assistant Professor, Instructor and Teaching Fellow. 95.4% of the respondents obtained Bachelor Degree or above qualification, which meant that the respondents would probably receive some trainings on research before their graduation.

Engagement in SoTL

In the first part of the questionnaire, participants were asked to declare whether they had participate in any SoTL related activities in the past 12 months.

The engagement of respondents in SoTL was quite low in their research participation, training attendance and research output. There were only one third of respondents had conducted SoLT research and participated in co-research project in their own institution (A1, A2). Less than a quarter of respondents had the experience in joining cross-institutional research (A3). There were less than 12% of respondents had received research funding (A9). Only 15.9% of respondents were currently working on SoLT research project (A10). Participation in SoLT training and academic

conference were only 26.5% and 31.9% (A4, A5). There were only 17.4% of respondents presented in conference or uploaded their research onto the internet (A6, A8). 20.3% of participants had research publications (A7). Details of the responses are listed in Table 1 as below.

Table 1. Teaching Staff's Engagement in SoTL in Past 12 Months

Statement	Yes	No
A1. I have defined and conducted research on questions about teaching and learning within my teaching.	22 (31.9%)	46 (68.1%)
A2. I have worked with colleagues at my institution in defining and conducting research on questions about teaching and learning.	25 (36.2%)	44 (63.8%)
A3. I have worked with researcher beyond my institution in defining and conducting research on shared concern of teaching and learning.	15 (22.1%)	53 (77.9%)
A4. I have participated in institutional research training that related to teaching and learning.	18 (26.5%)	50 (73.5%)
A5. I have attended a session about teaching and learning research at an academic conference.	22 (31.9%)	47 (68.1%)
A6. I have presented my teaching and learning research at an academic conference.	12 (17.4%)	57 (82.6%)
A7. My teaching and learning research has been published or accepted for publication in a journal or a book.	14 (20.3%)	55 (79.7%)
A8. I have made my teaching and learning research available on a website.	12 (17.4%)	57 (82.6%)
A9. I have received funding for a project on teaching and learning research.	8 (11.6%)	61 (88.4%)
A10. I am currently working on a project in teaching and learning research.	11 (15.9%)	58 (84.1%)

Awareness and Attitude on SoTL

Respondents were invited to rate the statements with 5-point scale. 1 meant strongly disagree, and 5 meant strongly agree. Respondents tended to agree with the value of SoTL, however, they tended to disagree to take action related to SoTL. Respondents tended to agree that SoTL had practical value to teacher, students and VPET institutions with mean value higher than 3.27 (B2, B3, B4). Respondents agreed that knowing SoTL was good for teaching with mean value in 3.27 (B6). The potential value of SoTL in improving the education quality was recognised with mean value higher than 3.24 (B9, B11, B13, B14, B15). Research collaboration is also recognised with mean value 3.22 (B10).

Though SoTL is valued by the respondents, the respondents did not agree in taking action related to SoTL. Respondents did not agree to use SoTL in their teaching and conduct SoTL research with mean value in 2.89 and 2.96 (B5, B7). Respondents had low intention in conducting SoTL research individually and in collaboration with mean value 2.65 or above (B16, B17). This may because of respondents were unfamiliar with SoTL with mean value 2.24 (B1) and not enough resources for SoTL research with mean value 2.52 (B8). Details of the result in the awareness and attitude on SoTL is listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Respondents' Rating on the Awareness and Attitude of SoTL

Statement	Mean
B1. I am familiarised with SoTL.	2.24
B2. SoTL has practical value for teachers.	3.30
B3. SoTL has practical value for students.	3.27
B4. SoTL has practical value for VPET institutions.	3.38
B5. Results from SoTL research are used/applied in my teaching.	2.89
B6. Knowing the SoTL is important for good teaching.	3.27
B7. Teacher should do some SoTL research.	2.96
B8. There are enough resources for SoTL research.	2.52
B9. The curriculum should be updated with the recent research results/findings.	3.24
B10. Cross-disciplinary collaboration in L&T research is important for good teaching.	3.22
B11. Systematic inquiry on L&T process is important to educational quality.	3.44
B12. I want to practice research-informed teaching in my teaching.	3.09
B13. Engaging students in research process improve students' learning.	3.33
B14. Sharing the L&T research findings with peers and the public is important for enhancing the educational quality.	3.35
B15. Discipline chooses the appropriate methods to conduct L&T research helps enhancing educational quality.	3.32
B16. I want to conduct SoTL research in the coming twelve months.	2.65
B17. I want to develop SoTL research collaboration in the coming twelve months.	2.60

Conclusion

To enhance the research capability of the VPET institution, SoTL could be considered as one of the perspectives to assist the enhancement. The result shows that the engagement in SoTL is low in research participation, research training attendance and research output production. Though the VPET teaching staff were not familiarised with SoTL and did not want to take action on SoTL in the coming 12 months, they still recognised the value of SoTL.

As SoTL is a concept that being used and invented by western society, the understanding of SoTL may not be familiarised by Hong Kong VPET teaching staff. Hence, it is suggested that more training on SoTL and resources for research have to be provided in order to assist VPET teaching staff to enhance the research capability. Further study on the teaching staff's needs in conducting SoTL research should be conducted.

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