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Furthering the "Theory Debate" in the Scholarship of Teaching: A Proposal Based on MacIntyre's Account of Practices

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Abstract

Initiatives intended to support and advance the *scholarship of teaching* have become common in Canada as well as internationally. Nonetheless, the notion of a scholarship of teaching remains contested and has been described as under-theorized. In this conceptual study, I contribute to the ongoing "theory debate" in the scholarship of teaching, applying a philosophical lens. I propose that Alasdair MacIntyre's account of "practices," including concepts of *virtue*, *standards of excellence*, *internal goods*, and *transformation*, offers a useful theoretical framework by which to identify the nature and defend the purposes and desired outcomes of this domain of scholarship. I argue that the moral virtues of justice, courage, and truthfulness, identified by MacIntyre as fundamental to all social practices, are essential also for meaningful engagement in the practice of the scholarship of teaching, but that two additional and overarching virtues are needed: authenticity and *phronesis*.

Résumé

Les initiatives ayant pour but d'encourager et de développer la *scholarship of teaching* sont devenues courantes au Canada ainsi qu'ailleurs dans le monde. Toutefois, la notion même de *scholarship of teaching* demeure contestée et on a même dit qu'elle manquait de fondement théorique. Dans le présent article conceptuel, je contribue au « débat théorique » actuel en lien avec la *scholarship of teaching* en adoptant une perspective philosophique. Je suggère que les travaux d'Alasdair MacIntyre sur les « pratiques » – y compris sur les notions de *vertu*, de *normes d'excellence*, de *biens internes*, et de *transformation* – nous offrent un cadre théorique pouvant servir à

identifier la nature de ce type de science ainsi qu'à défendre ses objectifs et résultats attendus. Je soutiens que les vertus morales de justice, de courage et d'honnêteté, identifiées par MacIntyre comme étant fondamentales à toutes pratiques sociales, sont également essentielles pour un engagement profond envers la pratique de la *scholarship of teaching*, mais que deux autres vertus plus générales sont aussi nécessaires, à savoir l'authenticité et la *phronesis*.

The Contested Nature of the "Scholarship of Teaching"

Scholarship has always been fundamental to university teaching, but reference to a "scholarship *of* teaching" is a rather recent occurrence. In the widely cited report *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, Boyer (1990) offered a historical overview of how the meaning of scholarship had changed over the centuries, reminding his readers that the widespread understanding that scholarship equals the discovery of new discipline-specific knowledge is a relatively recent interpretation. Reconsidering scholarship, he argued, involved, on the one hand, *looking forward* and developing new conceptualizations, such as discovering but also integrating knowledge, and, on the other hand, *looking back* and reclaiming historical ones, such as applying knowledge and sharing knowledge. This more inclusive conception of scholarship was reflected in the four-faceted model of scholarship he proposed: the scholarship of discovery; the scholarship of integration; the scholarship of application; and the scholarship of teaching. Boyer did not make clear what he meant by a "scholarship *of* teaching"; he did, however, emphasize that academic teachers must "continuously examine" their pedagogical procedures (Boyer, 1990, p. 24).

Since *Scholarship Reconsidered* first appeared, others have engaged in the important task of trying to articulate the nature of a "scholarship of teaching" (e.g., Healey, 2003; Hutchings & Shulman, 1999; Kreber & Cranton, 2000; Shulman, 2000). One perspective in particular that has gained widespread acceptance and currency is the view that the scholarship of teaching refers to inquiries higher education teachers undertake into aspects of their own particular contexts of teaching, and that the insights gained from such inquiries then are made public (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999).

Although Boyer had coined the term "scholarship of teaching," later commentators added the words "and learning," resulting in the now popular notion of a "scholarship of teaching and learning," often abbreviated as SOTL (which I will use on occasion in this article). The reasons for adding "and learning" seem obvious enough: first, a message implicit in *Scholarship Reconsidered* was that university teachers have a professional responsibility to further student learning; second, an understanding had developed within our academic communities that teaching could be enhanced by focusing on, understanding better, and, indeed, inquiring systematically into student learning (think also of the so-called paradigm shift popularized through the work of Barr and Tagg [1995]); and third, there is an understanding, shared by many, that the scholarship of teaching would miss its mark if its purpose were not to support the learning (and, we might add, the development) of students.

Over the past several years, many countries, including Canada, have established initiatives designed to promote such inquiry or scholarship. Nonetheless, the notion of a scholarship of teaching and learning remains contested. While optimistic commentators suggest

that SOTL is gradually becoming intellectually richer as a result of inquiries academics undertake into teaching and learning that are shared across disciplines (Huber & Morreale, 2002), critics observe that the dominant discourse on SOTL is impoverished and "under-theorized" (e.g., Boshier, 2009; McLean, 2006). The point of this critique is not that examinations of classroom practices are irrelevant but rather that these often remain unrelated to any theoretical constructs, let alone explicit social and socio-political purposes.

Moreover, it could be argued (as I believe was the intention of an anonymous reviewer of this article, with whom I agree, although I here put my own spin on the comment that was made) that present interest in supporting and furthering SOTL is linked to two trends: (i) universities feeling increased pressure to demonstrate accountability, to both the public and governments, for the quality of teaching they provide (and thus for how tax payers' money is being spent); and (ii) universities feeling increased pressure to produce highly skilled workers, i.e., knowledge workers, who will eventually contribute to their local and national communities and, by extension, support the country's economic competitiveness in a global market. It is no coincidence that the need for highly qualified university graduates (who, it is anticipated, will contribute effectively to industry growth, to politics and international relations in a globally networked knowledge economy, and to research and innovation) is being emphasized in policy briefs on the purposes of higher education at the same time that SOTL initiatives are being encouraged. Both trends—towards increased performativity and the adoption of human-capital approaches to promote development—are, of course, not unique to Canada but observable in all countries affected by neoliberal policies. Note in this context that from 2005 to 2010, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), for example, invested £315 million into the establishment of 74 centres for excellence in teaching and learning (CETLs), each CETL receiving a capital sum ranging from £0.8 million to £2.35 million, plus £200,000 to £500,000 per annum for five years (Smith, 2006). The UK government white paper titled *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES, 2003), guiding higher education policy at the time, included chapters entitled "Research Excellence—Building on our Strengths," "Higher Education and Business—Exchanging and Developing Knowledge and Skills," and "Teaching and Learning—Delivering Excellence," presented in that order.

The purpose of the present article is not to offer an analysis of the socio-political context of SOTL. Instead, my intention is to engage in a philosophical analysis—informed by Alasdair MacIntyre's account of "practices"—aimed at contributing to debate about what SOTL is ultimately *for*, what its *nature* is, and, by implication, whether theory can help us in answering these questions. It should go without saying that the particular socio-political context within which present SOTL initiatives are being encouraged is relevant to this discussion, but as background only.

Despite an ongoing debate over "which theories are relevant" and "what should be the role and nature of theory" in the examination of teaching and learning (e.g., Clegg, 2009; Huber & Hutchings, 2008; Hutchings, Huber, & Ciccone, 2011), to my knowledge no one has yet taken a broader perspective and asked whether *theory* could guide us in answering these more fundamental questions about the nature and purpose of SOTL. One notable exception to this is a conference paper by University of British Columbia professor David Coulter (2004), who developed a rationale for, and intriguing interpretation of, the scholarship of teaching, through the lens of Hannah Arendt's notion of "action." Although

the arguments presented in his paper are different to what is suggested here, the underlying intent—namely, to use theory to grasp the meaning of SOTL, which then could serve as a guide for engagement—is similar.

While it might be suggested that the fundamental question of what SOTL is *for* has already been answered, given a widespread understanding that we engage in this work so as to improve the learning of students (e.g., Huber & Hutchings, 2005), my point is that this understanding, to date, has not been defended on the basis of a systematic and theory-guided analysis of SOTL itself, nor have we explored what "inquiry," in the context of SOTL, could mean next to formal/systematic empirical investigations into university pedagogy.

I propose that the philosophical notion of a *practice*, as developed by Alasdair MacIntyre (2007) in his now classic text *After Virtue*—particularly the concepts of virtue, standards of excellence, internal goods, and transformation—offers theoretical guidance for identifying and defending the nature and purposes of SOTL, and possibly reveals the wide range of ways in which we might engage with this domain of our academic practice. My purpose is to show how the virtues of justice, courage, and truthfulness, which MacIntyre highlights as being integral to all social practices, are critical to SOTL if it is to have personal, professional, educational, and social value. I furthermore propose that this particular social practice demands, and also furthers, the development of two additional and overarching virtues: those of authenticity and *phronesis* (or good practical judgement). I shall first spell out what MacIntyre means by a *practice*. I shall then explore whether SOTL meets the interrelated and yet distinct criteria of a practice that MacIntyre identified.

Is the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning a MacIntyrean Practice?

In a frequently cited section of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre (2007) states:

> by a practice I am going to mean any coherent and complex *form of socially established cooperative human activity* through which *goods internal* to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those *standards of excellence* which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that *human powers to achieve excellence*, and *human conceptions of the ends and goods involved*, are systematically extended. (p. 187, emphases added)

Practices thus take place within a community. Involvement in the practice helps us to realize certain goods and leads us to conceptualize these goods in a particular way. The goods internal to the activity in which we are engaged become available to us as we exercise certain "virtues" necessary for achieving the standards of excellence associated with the practice. Virtues "enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to 'practices'" (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 191). What we come to value about, and can gain from, the activity itself—that is, its internal goods—become accessible to us through practising particular virtues, and here he identifies in particular the moral virtues of justice, courage, and truthfulness. "Practices" are thus guided by a certain ethic. I shall now proceed to show that SOTL is strengthened if it is interpreted, and enacted, as a practice in this particular sense.

I should perhaps add that I am concerned here principally with the question of whether the activity of the *scholarship of teaching and learning* is usefully construed as a MacIntyrean practice, not whether *teaching* as such qualifies as a practice; the latter ques-

tion is a little different and has been widely debated in the literature (e.g., Dunne, 2003; McLaughlin, 2003; Noddings, 2003). MacIntyre himself, I add in passing, is not of the position that the activity of teaching qualifies as a practice, arguing instead that teaching is fundamental to all social practices (the latter being—to offer an example from the higher education context—the particular disciplines, with their distinct traditions and norms, into which we have become socialized and that we then teach to students). In other words, according to MacIntyre, teaching is an important aspect of all social practices, but teaching as such, or on its own, is not a practice. The counter-argument, I should also briefly mention, is that teaching has become an institutionalized activity with its own norms and traditions and therefore is a practice.

Whilst the debate around whether teaching is or is not a practice is indeed interesting, it is not at the core of my argument. I would like to stress that the compelling aspect of the *scholarship of teaching (and learning)* is precisely that it merges the practice of *teaching* with the practice of *inquiry into* teaching (and learning). We could, conceivably, witness a form of teaching that is not underpinned by any form of inquiry. The practice of SOTL includes teaching but goes beyond it through inquiry.

To qualify as a MacIntyrean practice, SOTL would need to fulfil four distinct yet interrelated criteria: (i) it would be practised within a community; (ii) it would lead us to recognize the internal goods to be gained from the activity; (iii) these internal goods would be realized through virtues that also help us achieve certain standards of excellence; and (iv) it would involve a transformative process leading us to reconceptualize, and eventually achieve, the internal goods. I will consider each of these criteria in turn.

A Socially Established Activity That Is Practised Cooperatively

For MacIntyre, practices are cooperative human activities because they are guided by a shared rationality. It is through interactions with others that we learn what count as good reasons to act, and how to act well. In a later work, MacIntyre (2009) elaborates: "We become independent practical reasoners through participation in a set of relationships to certain particular others" (p. 99), and "[p]ractical reasoning is by its nature, on the generally Aristotelian view that I have been taking, reasoning together with others, generally within some determinate set of social relationships" (p. 107). Scholars of teaching and learning learn about the practice of SOTL by interacting with their peers, by opening the insights resulting from their inquiries to critique and evaluation, by enabling others to build on this work, or simply by going public (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999). It follows that SOTL is practised cooperatively within a community of scholars who are bound by a shared rationality, and who adopt an inquiry-oriented approach towards their teaching. The community, therefore, is necessary for the advancement of the practice of SOTL.

A Practice Offering Internal Goods

Internal goods are accessible only through the particular activity itself and can be understood as the reason we choose to involve ourselves in this, and not in another, activity. Although the internal goods are experienced or enjoyed by the individual involved in the practice, they ultimately benefit the entire community engaged in this practice and, thus, constitute community property. People who choose to engage in certain practices do so

because they appreciate, and take pleasure in, the internal goods these practices provide. The internal goods are related to the essence of what the practice is about.

It is not so easy to put one's finger on what the internal goods are in relation to SOTL. However, Sellman (2000), discussing the practice of nursing, argues that the internal goods of this practice lie in "the satisfaction of helping others" (p. 28). Noddings (2003), discussing the practice of teaching, identifies "some responsibility for the development of students as whole persons" (p. 249) as the internal good. Extrapolating from these two practices and their internal goods to the practice of SOTL, we might conclude that the internal goods available to us through SOTL include the enjoyment, achievement or satisfaction we experience by

- inquiring into significant questions relating to teaching and learning,
- deepening our understanding of these issues,
- growing into ourselves and becoming critically aware of the inner motives that guide us in this work, and
- *doing what is in the important interests of students.*

The last point I understand in line with Noddings's (2003) emphasis on our "responsibility for the development of students as whole persons" (p. 249). To make this link a little clearer, and thus to unpack what the important interests of students are, I will take momentary departure from MacIntryre and turn to other theorists. I will return to MacIntyre's criteria of a practice once the meaning of the students' important interests has been established.

Interlude: Furthering the important interests of students. In understanding the students' important interests it is helpful to draw on philosophical literature that is chiefly concerned with highlighting aspects of our existence that are distinctly human qualities, or "interests." Human interests arise from an experience of fundamental need that must be satisfied for humans to flourish. Heidegger (1962), for example, saw the distinctiveness of human existence in our potential openness to our own particular possibilities. Separating from a state of unawareness of our deepest inner motives and moving closer to our full potential of being he saw as a fundamental human need (in order to live a meaningful, fully flourishing life). Habermas (1971), although arguing from a different philosophical perspective, similarly identified emancipation, personal growth, or self-development as a fundamental human interest (next to the technical interest in controlling one's environment and the practical interest in living in harmony with others). To move to yet another philosophical perspective, proponents of the capabilities approach to human development (Nussbaum, 2000; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993) recognize that being able to choose a life one has reason to value is a fundamental human interest. Nussbaum (2000) proposed that "to be able to search for an understanding of the ultimate meaning of one's life in one's own way is among the most important aspects of a life that is truly human" (p. 179). What can we conclude from these ideas?

Recognizing, yet reconciling, the differences between the philosophical perspectives just outlined, I argue that what is in the students' *important interests*, as compared to their felt interests or needs (for a difference, see, for example, Brookfield [2005]), is nothing less than the furthering of the students' *authenticity*. How might one justify such a claim?

It is of course important that chemistry students learn the periodic table and eventually develop an advanced understanding of chemistry, math students gain knowledge of calculus, history students learn how to critically analyze social events, and music students learn to interpret and create music, and that all of them learn to use evidence to substantiate conclusions, and so forth. And yet, ultimately, what is in the *important interests* of all students is that higher education offers them space, or opportunities, to strive towards *authenticity*—through the study of their discipline(s). To put it differently, what is important is that higher education affords students opportunities for transformation in understanding (subject matter) *and* being (self).

Highlighting *authenticity* and *being* as important to student learning in higher education is no longer a new idea. In recent years, the higher education literature has made reference to the "ontological turn" (e.g., Barnett, 2004, 2005; Dall'Alba & Barnacle, 2007). It is increasingly recognized that what matters is not merely whether higher education affects what and how students *know*, and what they can *do* with this acquired knowledge, but also, and importantly, who they are *becoming* (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 2009; Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006). However, authenticity is a complex and contested notion that "suffers from inextricable ties to various ideologies and philosophies" (Vannini, 2007, p. 65). Nonetheless, three philosophical perspectives can typically be distinguished: the existential (Heidegger, 1962); the critical (Habermas, 1971), and the communitarian (e.g., Taylor, 1991). I will briefly outline what students coming into their authenticity would look like when interpreted from each of these perspectives, as doing so offers some further clues as to what serving the important interests of students might mean.

The *existential* perspective suggests that students come into their authenticity as they grow into themselves, develop a disposition to learn for themselves (Entwistle & McCune, 2009), become "disencumbered" from other voices (Barnett, 2007), and become authors of their own lives (Baxter Magolda, 2009). Students grow into an awareness of their own unique possibilities and strive towards these. Students coming into their authenticity, then, often involves that they develop greater knowledge of a particular subject (and of themselves); but importantly, they do not just come to know more but come to know differently than they did before. This qualitative change in knowing is often accompanied by a shift in their identity and a greater sense of personal commitments.

Building on this, the *critical* perspective suggests that students become conscious of how the socially constructed beliefs and expectations they hold about what is possible for them have limited their choices up to now. Students grow into their authenticity as they become aware of their real possibilities through critical reflection and critical *self*-reflection.

Finally, the *communitarian* perspective suggests that students come into their authenticity as they begin to recognize their social interrelatedness and understand themselves as members of a wider social community (Taylor, 1991), if not as citizens of the world (Nussbaum, 1997) towards which they feel a commitment and responsibility. Baxter Magolda (2009) argues that an important purpose of higher education is to promote the students' relational maturity, including an "understanding of and commitment to one's own interests in interaction with understanding and commitment to the interests of others" (Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 144).

Furthering the students' authenticity, Barnett (2004, 2005) argued, is the important task of higher education in the present age of epistemological uncertainty and "super-

complexity" (Barnett, 2004, p. 252). He uses the latter term as a shorthand to refer to the multi-level challenges students are exposed to in making sense of their experiences. Students' authenticity here is understood as a fundamental personal disposition (a way of *being*) that is necessary to cope in a world where students cannot take refuge in established discourses and ready-made solutions, but are required to take a stance on issues and commit themselves to their claims (Barnett, 2004, 2005).

Thus far, I have argued that (i) SOTL offers internal goods; (ii) these internal goods include finding value, purpose, or satisfaction in furthering and inquiring into how to further the important interests of students; and (iii) furthering the important interests of students involves helping students grow into their authenticity (and I have discussed, in outline, what students coming into their authenticity implies). Having digressed from MacIntyre in order to establish what the important interests of students are, based on a reasoned argument drawing on a wide range of philosophical ideas concerned with fundamental human needs, I shall now return to MacIntyre's criteria of a practice to explore what SOTL, when understood as a MacIntyrean practice, would look like. Whether the internal goods are realizable through a process of trying to achieve the standards of excellence associated with SOTL—and, if so, how—I explore next.

Standards of Excellence in SOTL

MacIntyre (2007) asserts that all practices are associated with particular standards of excellence. Diamond (1993) summarized the standard of excellence expected of scholarship as the work requiring a high level of discipline-specific expertise, breaking new ground, and being replicable, documentable, peer-reviewable, and of significance or impact. Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997) proposed a different standard, arguing that the work of the scholar should demonstrate clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methodology, effective presentation, significant results, and reflective critique. Andresen (2000) stressed the importance of a deep knowledge base, an inquiry-orientation, critical reflectivity, peer review, and going public. Although not speaking of scholarship *per se* but about the distinctive nature of learning in the context of higher education, Barnett (1992) suggested that "[c]ontained within the idea of higher education are the notions of critical dialogue, of self-reflection, of conversations, and of continuing redefinition. They do justice to the idea of higher education" (p. 29). Critical dialogue, self-reflection, conversations, and continuous redefinition describe the nature of learning in the context of higher education; but are these descriptors not also brilliant descriptors of scholarship itself? The distinctive nature of learning in higher education is that is it characterized by a process of scholarship. Dictionary definitions of the term scholarship also point to the process of inquiry (e.g., "serious detailed study," according to the online *Collins English Dictionary*). Barnett's standards of learning are also standards of scholarship when the latter is understood as a process of inquiry. Commenting on SOTL specifically, rather than scholarship in general, Shulman (2000) proposed that SOTL implies that our work as teachers becomes public, peer-reviewed, critiqued, and exchanged with members of our professional communities. So clearly, the practice of SOTL has been associated with certain standards. While all the standards mentioned here are interesting, the subsequent discussion will be limited to those proposed by Andresen (2000) and Barnett (1992), because their emphasis on critical reflectivity seems particularly relevant to "practices."

The question to be answered is this: can SOTL's internal goods, principally the value we experience in supporting the students' important interests through inquiry, be attained by striving to achieve the above standards of excellence? And, if so, how might virtue guide us in this process? As was noted earlier, MacIntyre (2007) argues that practices are sustained by the moral virtues of truthfulness, courage, and justice, and these virtues themselves are further developed as we engage in the practice. Why SOTL should be sustained through these virtues, and the virtues be further developed through our engagement in SOTL, will concern us next.

The Virtues of Truthfulness, Courage, and Justice

Truthfulness is a multi-faceted concept. It may simply refer to "not cheating," "being honest," and "being sincere," but it can also have a more complex meaning. It may also pertain to "being honest with oneself"—as in becoming aware, through critical self-reflection, of how one's assumptions have been distorted, thereby developing a more valid perspective on issues. *Courage* refers to a disposition to do what one believes the situation requires while being aware of the risks involved. Finally, *justice*, or fairness, in SOTL clearly goes beyond judging our colleagues' (or students') work according to agreed-upon criteria (although this is part of it); being just or fair, as a scholar of teaching, refers also to our own practice as teachers and involves making sure that students have an equal chance to succeed, by inquiring into how our practice can become more just or fair. Being just or fair, as a scholar of teaching, means ensuring that students (or communities) who are disadvantaged are supported in asserting their claims to recognition. Being just or fair in this sense relies on the virtue of courage (and, as Nixon [2008] suggests, compassion). The virtues of truthfulness, courage, and justice are therefore interrelated. Being truthful, and being fair or just, both require courage. My purpose here is to highlight that inquiry into our teaching practice, or SOTL, relies on these virtues. But more can be said: these same virtues are also critical for attaining the standards of excellence we associate with SOTL (see also Kreber [in press]).

The standard of excellence of constructing a valid "knowledge base" (Andresen, 2000), the latter referring to the processes (and policies and purposes) of university teaching and the content that we teach, would be impossible to attain without being *truthful*—that is, accurate, sincere, honest, and "true to ourselves." We build and extend our knowledge base as we adopt an "inquiry-orientation" (Andresen, 2000), thereby ensuring that this knowledge is never taken for granted but instead is continuously re-examined (Boyer, 1990). But engagement in true inquiry is inconceivable without a willingness to take risks or be *courageous*.

Moreover, an inquiry-orientation is supported by yet another standard of excellence, that of "critical reflectivity" (Andresen, 2000; Barnett 1992). The latter implies stepping back and considering whether conclusions we have reached about what we think we know or understand about university teaching and learning, as well as the discipline itself, are accurate and/or desirable and whether alternatives are possible. (Critical reflectivity also includes reflecting on why universities support SOTL at this point in time, as was noted at the beginning of this article, why certain kinds of SOTL activity are encouraged, and whether those that are encouraged—and rewarded—are indeed the most important to

pursue.) Critical reflectivity is inconceivable without the virtues of *truthfulness* and *courage*, but it also requires the virtue of *justice* or fairness. Being *just or fair* means that everything is open for examination, not only those questions that are easy to inquire into, are straightforward to document or publish in the form of a refereed journal article, or leave unchallenged how things are ordinarily done.

The standards of "peer review and going public" (Andresen, 2000), or as Barnett (1992) put it, "critical dialogue and conversation with others," strengthen our inquiry and critical reflectivity, and these again require *courage* and *truthfulness*. Without the standards of "peer review and going public," our reflectivity would remain largely inward looking and we would be less aware of the assumptions we customarily take for granted. We need some form of peer review, critical dialogue, and public debate in order to challenge our thinking and revise our practices in accordance with the new insights gained. When the space in which questions and critique are encouraged is inclusive of different perspectives or "voices," the achievement of the standard of excellence of "peer review and going public" is underpinned by the virtue of *justice*. Conferences on teaching and learning represent only one of many spaces where such dialogue could take place—other venues include meetings with colleagues (department meetings, faculty meetings, etc.), policy makers, and students.

The moral virtues of justice, courage, and truthfulness, which MacIntyre highlights as being fundamental to all social practices, then also seem essential for attaining the standards of excellence associated with SOTL. Given the important role that virtues assume in relation to practices, MacIntyre (2007) furthermore concludes that a practice is "clearly never just a set of practical skills" (p. 193). Likewise, SOTL is never just a matter of knowing a lot about different learning theories, research methods, or how to carry out a reliable empirical investigation into teaching and learning. Abstract knowledge and skills or techniques are important but clearly not sufficient for SOTL. SOTL is based also on a practical rationality and involves (i) a disposition to ask or confront the right (and often difficult) questions or issues, (ii) an ability to choose the most appropriate approach to address these, and (iii) a willingness to honestly and accurately interpret and act on one's observations or insights, the last involving an openness to change. The virtues of truthfulness, courage, and justice are essential for these reasons.

The moral virtues not only underpin the attainment of the standards of excellence we typically associate with SOTL; they also help us to recognize and realize SOTL's internal goods. Why should this be the case? In pursuit of the agreed standards (a deep knowledge base, an inquiry-orientation, critical reflectivity, peer review, and going public), supported by the virtues of justice, courage, and truthfulness, the essential good to be gained from the practice reveals itself. If the standards are taken seriously, and this is just another way of saying if they are supported by virtue, we grasp the difference between the internal and the external goods to be achieved through participation in SOTL. The essential good to be gained from this practice of critical inquiry into teaching and learning, and the exchanges that this involves, is not first and foremost the acquisition of an external reward (as in securing promotion or tenure, publishing an article, winning an award, receiving a grant, etc.); rather, what we recognize as personally and professionally rewarding is to inquire into and work towards furthering the important interests of students. And this, we saw earlier, is nothing less than preparing students for the world (Baxter Magolda & Teren-

zini, 1999) by supporting the students' striving to achieve their own potential of being, or their "authenticity," through their programs of study, so they can cope with uncertainty and complexity (Barnett, 2004).

So far, my intent has been to show that MacIntyre's (2007) criteria of a practice offer useful tools for understanding the nature and purposes of SOTL. In the penultimate section of the article, I would like to move beyond MacIntyre's account of practices and develop an argument for the importance of two further and overarching virtues in SOTL: authenticity and *phronesis* (practical wisdom/judgement).

Authenticity and *Phronesis* in SOTL

Grimmet and Neufeld (1994) once suggested that teachers who find value and purpose in doing what is in the important interests of students are guided by an "authentic motivation" (p. 1). Similarly, I propose that guided by the virtues of justice, courage, and truthfulness, SOTL emerges as an "authentic practice," whereby scholars of teaching find purpose in furthering students' important interests (the latter, as was shown, being the students' own authenticity). Authenticity then emerges as a useful construct for understanding both the practice of SOTL and the students' important interests. However, as an "authentic practice," the scholarship of teaching also requires the development of *phronesis*, a virtue inextricably linked to authenticity.

Phronesis. The notion of *phronesis* refers to a special kind of knowledge needed to act and judge well in the realm of human relations, the latter by definition characterized by uncertainty and unpredictability. Dunne (1993) highlights that *phronesis* develops as part of a person's life history and experience and cannot be gained from books, established first principles, or manuals. It refers to the capacity to make judgements in a given situation when there is no security offered by rules and algorithms, or, as Hannah Arendt once put it, there are "no pillars and props" (Arendt, 1968, p. 10).

One of the critical functions of *phronesis* is to facilitate the mediation between the universal and the particular (Dunne, 1993). Importantly, then, *phronesis*, or good practical judgement, is not uninformed by theoretical, abstract, and systemized knowledge. This is relevant given the context specificity and contingency of a professional practice such as teaching (Squires, 1999) and of SOTL. Although SOTL is at times referred to as an "evidence-based practice," the notion of an evidence-*informed* practice would perhaps more readily convey the important role of *phronesis* in the interpretation of the potential applicability of research findings from large-scale, (quasi-)experimental studies to particular contexts. Apart from the role *phronesis* plays in the interpretation of "research evidence," its function is of course broader, extending also to making informed and reasoned judgements about what is the most desirable thing to do in a particular situation, and then acting on those judgements.

Aristotle famously distinguished moral virtue (such as courage and justice) from intellectual virtue (such as *phronesis*), but as Simmons (2012) observes, "what is often overlooked is their interconnectedness. The moral virtues require phronesis to be realized and phronesis rests upon a prior ground in moral virtues" (p. 25). *Phronesis*, then, does not develop independently of the virtues of justice, courage, and truthfulness, but it is supported and made possible by these virtues. Moreover, *phronesis* helps us to decide just what being appropriately just, courageous, and truthful means in a given situation. It is,

therefore, ultimately through *phronesis* that we discern what goods to pursue through SOTL (and can take appropriate actions to attain these goods, in particular situations and with particular students). But here we should keep in mind as well that *phronesis* is not positive knowledge (Kemmis, 2012), that is, an actual, documentable body of knowledge, but is more accurately construed as a readiness or personal disposition to make wise decisions under conditions of uncertainty. So, *phronesis* is really the virtue concerned with *how to act* in the midst of uncertainty and with ethical deliberation.

Phronesis is intimately bound up with the final virtue that concerns us: authenticity. This point becomes clearer as we explore whether SOTL meets MacIntyre's final criterion of a practice, which is the transformative function that engagement in a practice entails.

Authenticity and Transformation. MacIntyre (2007) argues that through our engagement in social practices, the virtues, and our conceptions of the purposes and goods to be gained from each practice, "are systematically extended" (p. 187). He is making two points here. The first is that the virtues underpinning the practice are extended or developed through participation in the practice. The second is that practices, despite being grounded in traditions, are not static but can change in accordance with how, over time, we come to conceptualize the purposes and goods of the practices. I would like to come at this same observation from another angle, arguing that not only the practice changes over time, but through our engagement in the practice *we* change over time.

We already saw that *phronesis* develops over time through experience, and, we might say, through engagement with SOTL (when underpinned by the standards of excellence and moral virtues). Gallagher (1992), highlighting the connection between *phronesis* and authenticity, emphasizes the transformative character of developing *phronesis*. Gallagher argues that the person involved in responding to the contingency and unpredictability of his or her environment is constantly "drawn out of himself towards his own possibility and is remade by his experience" (p. 189). The person who develops *phronesis* does not just acquire new knowledge; he or she is also changed as a result of this process. The person engaged in the practice of SOTL, and who through this involvement develops *phronesis*, is implicated in a self-transformative process (Kreber, 2013; Mezirow, 1998), moving towards greater authenticity. Striving towards certain standards of excellence also involves extending and transforming oneself through this process. SOTL, thus conceived, is essentially a process of becoming. It is a process of professional development, of finding professional and personal purpose and value in furthering, and in inquiring into how to further, the important interests of students, thus affording them the opportunity to move towards their own authenticity (Barnett, 2004, 2005).

Conclusion

I began this article by highlighting the contested nature of SOTL, arguing that the fundamental question of what SOTL is *for* had not yet been defended on the basis of a theoretical analysis. In an attempt to do that, I carried out a systematic examination of SOTL, principally based on MacIntyre's account of *practices*. I showed how the MacIntyrean notion of a practice offers helpful constructs for developing a theory-based rationale for the purposes and nature of SOTL, which could also provide guidance for how to engage in this work.

Moving beyond MacIntyre, I further argued that when it is underpinned not only by the moral virtues of justice, courage, and truthfulness but also by the overarching virtues of *phronesis* and authenticity, SOTL emerges as an *authentic practice* characterized by an "authentic motivation" (Grimmet & Neufeld, 1994, p. 1) to further the important interests of students. The important interests of students, I argued in reference to a wide range of philosophical ideas concerned with fundamental human aspirations and needs, relate to students' coming into their authenticity (Barnett, 2004, 2005; Kreber, 2013), and I explained, in outline, what this would mean.

The concept developed here is obviously markedly different from a widespread perspective that understands SOTL exclusively as formal empirical inquiry into teaching and learning processes. Of course, at times, our inquiries aimed at promoting our students' important interests may evolve into formal investigations, but often they will not, and they certainly do not need to for our inquiries to be valuable. As I intended to show, inquiry, or critical *reflective* inquiry, into teaching and learning, which I understand SOTL to be, is encouraged through critical dialogue and debate and in community with others. Such inquiry includes asking meaningful and often difficult questions about what teaching and learning in higher education are for, what role teaching plays in our academic and perhaps personal lives, and what we consider to be really significant learning on the part of students. Such inquiry, sustained by the virtues of justice, courage, and truthfulness, is essential for both *phronesis* and authenticity to develop. All five virtues are integral to SOTL.

Implied in the above considerations is the understanding that the "SOTL community of practice" is not limited to those who carry out systematic empirical investigations into teaching and learning and publish these in SOTL journals, or attend SOTL conferences; rather, SOTL is part of every higher education teacher's "academic practice." The present discussion revealed an ideal practice of SOTL defined as formal or informal, critically reflective inquiry into teaching and learning, underpinned by virtues and standards of excellence, directed at promoting the important interests of students. SOTL, thus construed, happens also in the classroom, in committee meetings, in engagement with students and colleagues, and so forth.

As new initiatives to support and advance SOTL become a more regular occurrence in our universities, it is both timely and important to ask what essential goods and ends we hope these will achieve, and how these can be achieved. I suggested that MacIntyre's account of practices offers some useful tools that can help us think this through; and I added the virtues of phronesis and authenticity to this analysis, as I consider these essential for any professional practice, including SOTL.

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