

Editorial

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Navigating the Liminal Space Between Pedagogy and Subject Expertise



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Abstract

Higher education is at a crossroads. As students navigate an increasingly complex world shaped by digital transformation, global uncertainty, and shifting conceptions of knowledge, the traditional model of the university as a conduit for knowledge transfer is no longer tenable. This editorial argues that effective teaching today exists in a liminal space, between disciplinary expertise and the facilitation of learning, and that navigating this space requires a fundamental rethinking of the educator's role.

Rather than treating research and teaching as competing priorities, universities must embrace the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) as a mode of inquiry that is intellectually rigorous, contextually grounded, and unapologetically student focused. Drawing on influential frameworks by Boyer (1990), Trigwell et al (2000), and Felten (2013), the editorial contends that SoTL is not an optional supplement but a necessary condition for pedagogical integrity and institutional relevance. It calls on educators to reimagine their academic identity as one that integrates scholarly teaching with reflective practice, and on institutions to recognise, value and reward such work.

Keywords

Scholarship, SoTL, Research-informed teaching, Reflective Practice, Academic Identity.

Liminal Spaces

Higher education faces an ongoing challenge: the landscape of student learning is changing rapidly. Students enter university with diverse expectations, prior knowledge, and ways of engaging with information. They are navigating an increasingly complex world, shaped by digital transformation, evolving workplace demands, and shifting global challenges. The view of higher education as merely a conduit for knowledge transfer is increasingly inadequate.

The success of higher education depends not only on the advancement of knowledge within disciplines but also on our ability to translate that knowledge into effective learning experiences for students. In this context, the role of an educator shifts from being a transmitter of information to becoming a facilitator who creates the conditions for learning to occur. This perspective positions educators as designers of learning environments and facilitators of learning opportunities that encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and the application of knowledge in real-world contexts.

At its core, teaching in universities operates in a liminal space, the dynamic and sometimes uneasy intersection between deep subject expertise and the ability to facilitate learning. This liminal space represents the convergence of knowledge creation and knowledge transmission. The most effective teaching and learning occurs at this nexus of disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical skill, and it is here, in this space of continual negotiation and adaptation, that scholarship thrives.

Boyer (1990) argues that institutions must not focus on teaching in isolation. There is no space for disaggregation of research and teaching, rather institutions must recognise the value of the integration of scholarship in all aspects of their academic work. The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is not an optional extra it is an essential part in the rigorous evaluation and development of effective teaching and learning.

To ensure that teaching is responsive to the needs of learners, educators must engage deeply with research-informed teaching, an approach that uses evidence from scholarship to refine and enhance pedagogical practice. Trigwell et al. (2000) argue that scholarly teaching should be transparent in how it enables student learning. They propose that true scholarship in teaching is not just about being informed but also about inquiry, evaluation, documentation, and communication. This approach aligns with the principles outlined by Felten (2013), who emphasises that effective SoTL is focused on student learning, grounded in context, methodologically sound, conducted in partnership with students, and made appropriately public. These principles demand a critical engagement with evidence, ensuring that pedagogical strategies are neither static nor arbitrary but continually refined in response to changing learner needs and empirical evidence.

However, the dominant institutional narrative often positions research and teaching as competing priorities. Asarta et al. (2018) challenge this assumption, arguing that research-intensive institutions are increasingly recognising SoTL as integral to their scholarly work. They highlight the diffusion of SoTL research in business and management education, showing that many universities are already recognising its value. Despite this progress, the reality is that teaching-focused scholarship is often undervalued and often seen as less prestigious than traditional disciplinary research. Scholarship, however, enhances students' ability to engage with subject knowledge in ways that support effective learning.

Sharif (2020) emphasizes the importance of universities teaching students how to learn before diving into specific subject matters, which encourages engagement in intellectual and dialectical inquiry. By prioritizing the development of thinking skills (critical, creative, reflective, etc.) as a fundamental aspect of higher education, students are equipped to undertake rigorous analysis of subject matter and its application to real-world problems and scenarios. This approach does not provide ready-made solutions but focuses on enabling students to become discerning 'consumers' of knowledge and proficient problem solvers through advanced cognitive processes. By shifting back to making critical thinking a central aspect of higher education,

students are trained not just to seek answers but to develop the cognitive abilities necessary to tackle complex problems effectively.

Engaging More Fully in Scholarship

The future of higher education rests on the commitment of educators to continuously refine and improve their teaching. This is not just about individual professional development; it is about the collective responsibility of the academic community to ensure that students receive the best possible education. Educators must engage in SoTL through small-scale classroom research and reflective practice while also taking part in SoTL communities to exchange insights with peers. They must publish and share pedagogical research, making it accessible beyond disciplinary boundaries, and develop an academic identity that recognises teaching as a scholarly endeavour.

At the institutional level, universities need to promote, recognise and reward scholarship. They must proactively support cross-disciplinary SoTL collaborations that integrate subject knowledge with teaching innovations while also developing faculty development programmes that equip educators with research-informed teaching strategies. Institutional leaders have a critical role to play in embedding SoTL into strategic plans, ensuring that scholarship is aligned with broader research, teaching and engagement priorities.

As Trigwell et al. (2000) argue, scholarly teaching is about making transparent the methods by which learning is made possible. This transparency is vital if higher education is to remain a space of intellectual transformation rather than mere knowledge transmission.

If universities are to remain centres of intellectual transformation rather than knowledge repositories, they must embrace scholarship in its fullest sense – one that values not only discovery but also the dissemination of knowledge in ways that empower students. The question is not whether SoTL should be valued but rather: Can higher education afford to ignore it any longer?

Scholarship in Action

This issue of the *Journal of Scholarship and Innovation in Management Education* responds to the imperative set out in this editorial: to reframe teaching as scholarly practice, to place student learning at the centre, and to approach pedagogy as a site of rigorous inquiry. Each contribution exemplifies how management educators at Lancaster University Management School are navigating the complex, evolving landscape of higher education with creativity, courage, and care, developing teaching and learning practices that support and enable students to learn and achieve.

Several articles focus explicitly on critical thinking, reflection, and learning how to learn, aligning directly with the call to foreground intellectual development over knowledge transmission. Alam and George explore how authentic assessment fosters deeper engagement and critical thinking among entrepreneurship students. Meek and Francis, through their redesign of a final-year marketing module, illustrate how structured reflection and experiential learning can support the transition from student to graduate worker, while Newton, Holgate, and Scrivener demonstrate how integrating the LifeComp framework and digital tools like LinkedIn Learning cultivates self-awareness, resilience, and lifelong learning among postgraduate students.

Others contribute to the theme of equity, inclusion, and student voice, challenging us to rethink what it means to teach responsively and ethically. D'souza and Mortimer highlight how our world view informs our teaching perspective, whilst Gao's systematic analysis of EDI in UK accounting

programmes reveals both the progress made and the gaps that exist in aligning curriculum and assessment practices with principles of equity and inclusion. Jyoti and Suttill expose the often-invisible labour of pastoral care in higher education, calling for its recognition as a legitimate and necessary part of academic work that supports student wellbeing and belonging.

A third group of articles addresses the integration of pedagogy and professional identity, reflecting on how students learn to think, act, and feel like members of a professional community. Baguley's comparative study of experiential and problem-based learning traces how these pedagogies shape the capabilities of Gen Z and Generation Alpha learners. Khatri and Scrivener's work on environmental education examines the tensions students face between their values and the pragmatic realities of graduate employment, while Panteli's case study of a global collaboration project highlights how industry partnerships can develop both intercultural competence and professional confidence.

In the realm of digital and creative pedagogies, Francis explores how video-based learning can be used to strengthen engagement and scaffold reflective thinking, while Tarim uses imaginative narrative methods, asking students to write "future diaries", to foster deeper insight and more critical, creative engagement with job design and organisational realities.

Two further articles explore the role of curricular and institutional frameworks in shaping pedagogical practice. White's case study on PRME accreditation examines how global frameworks can support, but also constrain, the development of curriculum for responsible management education. Finally, Ralph, Dube and Ainsworth examine how learner-centred factors shape attendance patterns, and what this means for the design of inclusive and flexible learning environments.

Together, these articles not only reflect the diverse challenges and innovations in contemporary management education but also model the values of scholarly teaching and engaged pedagogy. They show that SoTL is not a separate endeavour but integral to how we understand, evaluate, and enhance learning in the disciplines we teach. By foregrounding intellectual development, inclusion, and real-world application, these contributions demonstrate a dedication to pedagogical integrity and reaffirm the journal's commitment to a vision of higher education that is both rigorous and responsive.

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