

KEYNOTE 1

Professional Learning for Academics and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

As a rule, new university lecturers are not qualified to teach, nor are they prepared for teaching when they take up their first appointment. Three years of research training during a PhD, possibly with some part-time demonstrating or tutoring, is an inadequate preparation for such an important part of a lecturer's job. In times past when higher education was elite and reserved for the very best minds (or those with a privileged background), 'teaching' students was seen as unnecessary. Students would come to university and learn, either with or despite their lecturers. However, the neoliberal expansion to mass higher education of recent decades has altered this position and teaching has taken on new significance for the academic profession. At the same time as having to teach many more students with a greater range of abilities, the meaning of higher education itself has been challenged and its role in society questioned. Teaching now has to have an outcome beyond subject, and the university lecturer is faced with the double task of working out how to teach disciplinary knowledge and then how to align student learning with a range of possible outcomes. The question is how do teachers meet these challenges when there is no pre-service training (typical of high school education) for the university lecturer? A range of in-service academic development opportunities have been introduced in many institutions and lecturers can take part in teaching workshops, attend formal courses with a teaching qualification, or engage in what has been termed the 'Scholarship of Teaching and Learning' (SoTL). SoTL is predicated on two questions: 'how can I improve my teaching?' and 'what am I trying to achieve with my teaching?' In this keynote I will explain why SoTL is a worthwhile option for academic professional formation and argue that to be successful, it requires a critical focus on teaching skills in the context of a reasoned argument about the purposes of a higher education.