Venturing into the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Universities are now recognising that excellence in teaching and learning, in addition to excellence in research, is vital to their success and the success of their students, and are supporting teaching and learning with the appointment of Senior Education-Focused Academics. The role of Education-Focused Academics is to provide a high standard of teaching and learning, lead curriculum design and delivery, promote research into the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) to provide evidence-based practice, and to be leaders in education.

Like many academics following this path, I moved from research in biochemistry to research into teaching and learning. Attending the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOLT) 2010 conference in Liverpool, UK, gave me the opportunity to interact with a wide range of academics (both discipline-based and educational developers) and present my work. I chose this conference as the aims of ISSOLT (www.issolt.org) are to encourage scholarly work on teaching and learning, promote cross-disciplinary conversation, facilitate collaborations, and advocate for support, review and recognition of teaching and learning.

The conference commenced with an excellent opening keynote by Professor Graham Gibbs (53 years experience in pedagogic research) in which he emphasised the need to pay attention to contextual variables in SoTL and to be cautious when generalising theory or evidence from one context to another. This set the scene for much discussion of context in the following sessions. The opening address was followed by a walking tour of Liverpool, and as any tour of Liverpool would, included The cavern Club where the Beatles' popularity was born.

The conference had many parallel sessions of high quality, of particular note was 'Becoming a skillful teacher - a conversation with Stephen Brookfield'. Stephen's work on adult learning and self-directed learning and teaching is enormously influential in the field. This was followed by the conference dinner, which had music by the Fab Beatles. The conference closed with a plenary by Professor [name] on the topic of threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge.

I then visited Leeds University, firstly to the Centre for Biosciences, and then the Medical Education Unit. The Centre for Biosciences (www.biosciences.leeds.ac.uk) is part of the UK Higher Education Academy (HEA), which is an independent organisation funded by UK Higher Education funding bodies, universities and grants/contract income. The HEA's strategic aims are to identify, develop and disseminate evidence-informed approaches to teaching and learning, encourage sharing of effective practices, support universities/collages in bringing about strategic changes, inform, influence and interpret policy, and raise the status of teaching.

The Centre for Biosciences is one of 24 discipline-specific Subject Centres of the HEA, which supports a large network of teaching and learning practitioners and covers a broad range of disciplines including Biochemistry, Cell Biology and Molecular Biology. It provides funding, events, resources and opportunities to network with biosciences teaching and learning practitioners from a variety of institutions and roles. It also initiates, gathers and disseminates examples of good practice in learning, teaching and assessment, including a freely available online image bank containing over 7000 images and many other online and printed resources. I met with both Dr David Adams (Director) and Professor Ian Hughes. David discussed the role and structure of the centre, resources available and one of David's current interests - Creativity in the Biosciences. Ian has been co-director of the centre and has published widely on teaching and learning.


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scientists and clinical academic staff, we had very useful discussions of the curriculum and ways to improve it. My trip ended appropriately when I joined a network of new colleagues and potential collaborators. I am full of ideas to improve the student experience and outcome.

Biopools Australia

Wheat is Australia's most important grain crop valued at over $5 billion annually. It is a staple food crop for the world's population and Australia is one of the world's largest exporters. Biopools Australia is investing in the development of the world's highest quality wheat, using the latest tools of biological sciences. The project has three main aims: to develop new varieties of wheat that are more resistant to disease and pests; to develop new technologies that allow farmers to grow wheat more efficiently; and to develop new markets for Australian wheat.

Advancing Australia's Food Security through Investment in Wheat Genomics

In 2010, Australia's Food Security through Investment in Wheat Genomics was launched by the Australian Government to improve the sustainability of Australia's wheat industry. The project aims to increase the productivity and resilience of Australian wheat, while also reducing the environmental impact of farming. A key part of the project is the development of new varieties of wheat that are more resistant to disease and pests, as well as the development of new technologies that allow farmers to grow wheat more efficiently.

The project is led by a team of researchers from Biopools Australia, a group of companies and organisations that are working together to advance the genetic improvement of Australian wheat. The team includes scientists from the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC), the Australian Centre for Genomic Biotechnology (ACGB), and the University of Sydney. They are working on a range of projects, including the development of new varieties of wheat that are more resistant to disease and pests, as well as the development of new technologies that allow farmers to grow wheat more efficiently.

The project has received funding from the Australian Government and is expected to be completed in 2020. The results of the project are expected to have a significant impact on the sustainability of Australia's wheat industry, as well as on the global food security.