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The scholarship of educational leadership in research-intensive university contexts: Implications for promotion and tenure supervision

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ABSTRACT

This essay draws on inquiry and experience in research-intensive university (RIU) environments to provide a theoretical framework for the scholarship of educational leadership (SoEL), as well as practical examples for its strategic use within the context of supervising promotion and tenure (P&T) processes. We argue that the SoEL has significant benefits for RIUs: SoEL is strategically aligned with RIU mandates for sustained and productive scholarly activity; SoEL fosters an institutional culture of educational scholarship aimed at enhancing effective, efficient, and strategically aligned curricula and pedagogical practices; and SoEL has the potential to have a significant and strategic impact on P&T supervision. Based on communities of practice and inquiry-based learning, we reason that SoEL is central to well-founded and richly informed institution and Faculty-level educational reform. Applications of SoEL for P&T supervision are provided, as well as key institutional challenges and potential causes for optimism.

INTRODUCTION

Research-intensive universities (RIUs) around the world are increasingly recognizing the strategic importance of educational leadership on their campuses. High quality educational leadership is required to spearhead excellence and respond to widespread educational reform efforts that are fundamentally changing RIUs (Council of 3M National Teaching Fellows, 2014; Mohrman, Ma, & Baker, 2008), as well as promotion and tenure (P&T) guidelines within these institutions (Bunton & Mallon, 2007; Jones, Beddoes, Banerjee, & Pawley, 2014). However, P&T guidelines for educational leadership and the enactment of localized scholarship directed at supporting and enhancing educational leadership practices in RIUs remain very much in their infancy (Hubball, Clarke, Webb & Johnson, 2015). Others have demonstrated similar and related challenges that exist within RIUs and call for further research (Clemente, 2008; Dobebe, Rundle-Thiele, & Kopanidis, 2014; Smith, Crookes, Else, & Crookes, 2012). The intention of the scholarship of educational leadership (SoEL) is to better understand and improve both educational leadership and educational practices, such as P&T supervision, while also enhancing their effectiveness and impact. In this paper, we attempt to provide the beginnings of that research and argue that SoEL has significant benefits for RIUs:

- SoEL is aligned with RIU mandates for sustained and productive scholarly activity
- SoEL fosters an institutional culture of educational scholarship aimed at enhancing effective, efficient, and strategically aligned curricula and pedagogical practices
- SoEL has the potential to have a significant and strategic impact on P&T supervision.

This essay draws on our collective research and institution-level leadership experiences related to teaching and learning on the campuses of The University of British Columbia (UBC) and the National University of Singapore (NUS), both Tier 1 RIUs. This includes mentorship of hundreds of university leaders engaged in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL); service on P&T committees at the departmental, Faculty, and university level; and strategic collaborations between UBC and NUS to develop institution-level SoTL leadership. These experiences in RIU contexts provide a scholarly underpinning to SoEL, as well as practical examples for its strategic use in the supervision of P&T processes. In these contexts “promotion” includes promotion, tenure and reappointment. The imperative for SoEL is compelling, especially when one considers that educational leaders are expected to respond to and enhance RIU profiles (Times Higher Education, 2014), as well as effectively oversee and adjudicate complex P&T cases in these higher education settings (Bean, Lucas, & Hyers, 2014).

CONTEXT

The University of British Columbia and the National University of Singapore are both routinely ranked among the top 30 universities in the world (Times Higher Education, 2014). UBC, located in Vancouver, Canada, educates a student population of 50,000 and offers over 250 graduate degree programs through 12 Faculties, 2 Colleges, and multiple Schools (see <http://www.ubc.ca/>). It is among the top 3 universities in Canada. The University’s Place and Promise 2020 visioning document professes a commitment to student learning and the application of new research on education in the service of review and revision of curricula and pedagogy (University of British Columbia, 2012). Stated goals are:

to ensure faculty are informed by leading edge research on how people learn; to simplify and streamline program requirements and course prerequisites whenever possible to enhance flexibility and self-directed learning; to ensure that periodic academic reviews include an assessment of educational outcomes for all programs; and to further align the University rewards and recognition systems with student learning goals (p.11).

According to UBC’s P&T guidelines, the scholarship of teaching and one’s professional

contributions rank equally with traditional scholarly research in career progression (University of British Columbia Human Resources, 2014). Criteria for evaluating the scholarship of teaching include factors such as originality or innovation, demonstrable impact in a particular field or discipline, peer reviews of scholarly contributions to teaching, dissemination in the public domain, and substantial and/or sustained use by others. Similarly, the evaluation of professional contributions takes into account evidence that might be viewed as demonstrating leadership, rare expertise, or outstanding stature within a field or discipline. In parallel to the rank of Full Professor in the traditional research stream, the new Professor of Teaching rank established at UBC in 2011 requires evidence of outstanding achievement in leadership provided within the university and elsewhere to advance innovation and excellence in teaching; contributions to curriculum development and renewal within the unit or Faculty; scholarly teaching with impact inside and outside the unit; and applications of and contributions to the scholarship of teaching and learning (University of British Columbia Human Resources, 2014, Sections 3.1.6 to 3.2.6, 3.4.1, and 4.4).

In contrast to some RIU contexts (e.g., in Australia), UBC largely leaves the nature, level, and extent of the educational leadership contributions open to interpretation. Further, although the criteria are often contested, UBC currently does not have an explicit requirement for scholarship for its Professor of Teaching rank. It is argued, for example, that in a highly ranked RIU such as UBC, educational scholarship aligns directly with the institution's research mandate, and provides rigorous peer reviewed (e.g., academic journal publications) evidence-based practice in order to enhance effective decision making for on-going curricula and pedagogical developments. Nonetheless, aspiring applicants to the Professor of Teaching rank are often strategically nominated and supported by their Deans to voluntarily undertake an institution-level SoTL Leadership Certificate program. This program is offered annually in online, blended, and face-to-face formats to educational leaders at UBC and, through invitation via cost-recovery, to partner universities around the world, including NUS (see <http://international.educ.ubc.ca/SOTL/>). Since 1998, over 400 faculty members with significant SoTL leadership experience and expertise in new forms of inquiry and scholarship have graduated from this program. Alumni of the program have made significant leadership and research contributions to the scholarship of curriculum and pedagogical practices in over 20 different countries. More than 40+ evidence-based co-authored articles have been published in international and national peer reviewed journals which have documented specific contexts, processes and outcomes related to program impacts in multinational multi-institutional and multidisciplinary settings. Indeed, it is the scale and combination of high levels of collaboration, engaged communities of practice, creativity, professionalism, sustained impact, and program-level scholarship that are the hallmarks of the International Faculty SoTL Leadership Program at UBC (Hubball, Pearson, & Clarke, 2013).

Similarly, the National University of Singapore, located in Singapore, is a leading Asian RIU that educates a student population of 37, 000. The P&T policies at NUS

contribute to a clear performance-based culture that has helped the institution achieve high standards in both education and research. These policies have also helped create a highly competitive workplace that is common in RIUs. The P&T process includes rigorous peer review by committees at all levels, from the departmental-level through to the central university-level. A revised Educator track took effect in January 2015 whereby there would be a common rank for both research and education (at the full Professor rank only), achieved through demonstrable evidence of outstanding contributions in these respective fields. This track is expected to make it possible for excellent NUS educators to rise to the rank of tenured Full Professor, thus ensuring that NUS's strategic educational initiatives are supported through research-informed and evidence-based curricular and pedagogical practices. This is particularly important to NUS's Quality Assurance Framework, where it has become increasingly necessary to articulate outcomes more explicitly to relevant stakeholders, as well as to establish authentic assessment of baseline data for strategic educational initiatives.

To support scholarly development of educational leadership, the NUS Teaching Academy was established in 2009 (Lakshminarayanan, Lim, Tan, & Chng, 2012). This unit consists of institutionally recognized outstanding educators who have keen interests in education issues. Among its projects was the impetus to spearhead an Asian perspective of SoTL, which led to the establishment of a quarterly journal, recently renamed the Asian Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (Chng & Looker, 2013; Lim & Geertsema, 2014). In addition to these efforts, over the last two years NUS has invested in the International Faculty SoTL Leadership Program offered by UBC in order to provide professional development for Teaching Academy Fellows and NUS administrators in the scholarship of educational leadership.

On the whole, therefore, the responses by UBC and NUS to current developments within RIU contexts represent significant advancements for SoEL. Building on experiences at these two institutions, we argue that educational leadership in Tier 1 RIUs should purposely target “scholarship” as an important next step in the process of building upon and advancing the current emphases on teaching and learning in Higher Education.

THE SCHOLARSHIP OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

What we urgently need today is a more inclusive view of what it means to be a scholar – a recognition that knowledge is acquired through research, through synthesis, through practice, and through teaching. We acknowledge that these four categories – the scholarship of discovery, of integration, of application, and of teaching – divide intellectual functions that are tied inseparably to each other (Boyer, 1990, p. 25).

Building on the foundations of scholarly approaches to education practice, and the scholarship of teaching in higher education (Boyer, 1990; Hubball, Lamberson & Kindler, 2012; Hutchings, Huber, & Ciccone, 2011; Zakrajsek, 2013), SoEL focuses

on specific practice-based inquiry in educational leadership contexts, as might be conducted by institution-level administrators. In SoEL, attention is placed on the depth and breadth of scholarship expertise (e.g., familiarity with the research literature, practice-based inquiry, diverse research methodologies, and venues for dissemination in higher education), as well as the expectations for organizational impact within and across multidisciplinary settings (Council of 3M National Teaching Fellows, 2014; Cousin, 2009; Hubball, Lamberson, & Kindler, 2012; Hubball, Clarke, Webb & Johnson, In press 2015).

Different terms are used in different contexts to describe the scholarship of educational leadership, including SoLE, SoEL, SoTL Leadership, and teaching and learning leadership. Diverse perspectives of SoEL are shaped by particular epistemological (i.e., how we know what we know), methodological (i.e., approaches to research design, data collection, and analysis), and ethical (i.e., informed consent) considerations. Further, knowledge construction is ontologically complex and draws upon appropriate context-specific frameworks (Hubball, Pearson, & Clarke, 2013). In this paper we use the term ‘SoEL,’ by which we mean a distinctive form of scholarship that is directed at academic leadership in RIU settings and involves integrating high-level educational leadership practice with its related research. It has an explicit transformational agenda to foster a networked community around inquiry to enhance the strategic impact and quality of educational practice (e.g., curriculum and pedagogy) within and across diverse disciplinary contexts. Thus, “educational leadership” takes the form of the “scholarship of educational leadership” through the introduction of systematic rigorous investigation; networked improvement communities; symbolic and cultural changing of the normative context that governs how professors do their work; peer review; and dissemination of theory and practice (Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2011; Bryman, 2007; de la Harpe & Mason, 2014; Grimmett, 2014; Quinlan, 2014).

Educational leadership is increasingly part of a larger process of institutional scholarship and educational reforms within higher education. SoEL includes strategic Faculty or campus-wide educational initiatives (e.g., program reform/curriculum renewal, evaluation of teaching, graduate supervision, academic leadership programs, P&T practices) undertaken by nominated institution-level educational leaders in diverse university contexts. Thus, effective professional development for SoEL include responsive on-site SoTL inquiry that fosters communities of practice, and involves “state of the art” technology-enabled professional learning experiences supervised by recognized experts in institution-level educational leadership and higher education scholarship (Friedman, 2006; Hubball & Clarke, 2010).

SOEL: IMPLICATIONS FOR P&T SUPERVISION

As noted above, SoEL has the potential to have a significant and strategic impact on the supervision of P&T processes within RIUs. Traditionally, there has been a lack

of systematic preparation of knowledgeable Faculty and institutional leaders and a reliance on a single pre-P&T submission workshop offering for candidates. These approaches often result in less than optimal mentoring experiences and confusion about the roles, responsibilities, and ethical accountabilities of department heads, internal and external reviewers, and candidates (Acker, Webber, & Smythe, 2012; Ambrose & Cropanzano, 2003; Lumpkin, 2011; Lunsford, Baker, Griffin, & Johnson, 2013; Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007). Institutional approaches to the SoEL thus have the potential to alleviate in substantial ways uninformed, ill-advised, or poorly implemented P&T practices, including reliance on ‘snap-shot’ summative evaluations rather than strategic, formative, and developmental approaches.

As an example, the flexible and iterative framework illustrated in Figure 1 is centred on SoEL and has been adapted for institution-level educational leaders in diverse settings and across various university campuses. These include the Faculty SoTL Leadership Program, the Peer Review of Teaching Leaders Program, the Curriculum Scholarship Development Program, and the Graduate Supervision Leaders Program at UBC (Hubball & Clarke, 2010; Hubball, Clarke, & Poole, 2010; Hubball, Clarke & Pratt, 2013; Hubball et al., in press; Hubball & Edwards-Henry, 2011; Hubball & Pearson, 2009; Hubball, Pearson, & Clarke, 2013; Hubball, Clarke, Webb & Johnson, In press 2015; Wang, Peng, Pearson, & Hubball, 2011). This framework takes into account diverse ontological, epistemological, methodological, and ethical considerations for SoEL and invites institutional leaders to draw upon appropriate context-specific frameworks for P&T supervision.

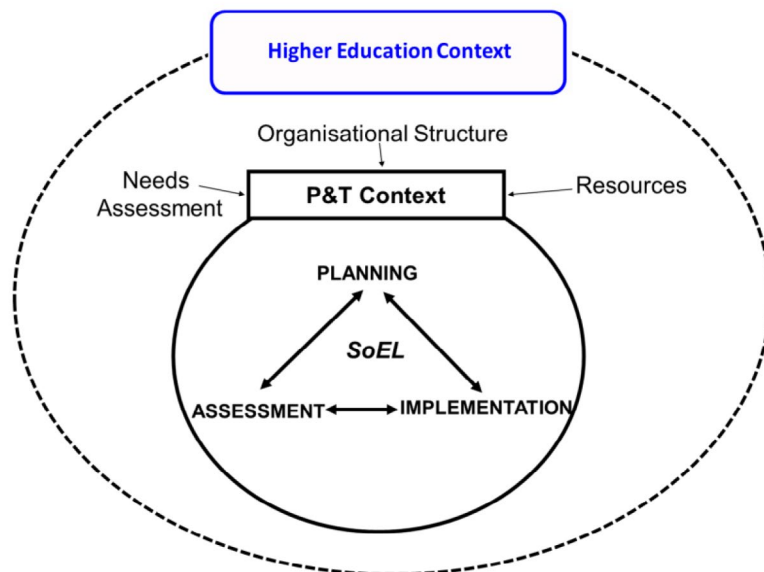


Figure 1. Heuristic framework for the SoEL and P&T supervision in diverse university contexts.

SoEL [P&T supervision] *context*. The SoEL context takes into account relevant P&T literature and the ‘big picture’ factors that support optimal environments for career progress. These factors include institutional and discipline-specific strategic planning goals, political structures, promotion and tenure expectations, prioritized resources available for P&T, training of institution-level P&T committee members, and SoEL-based P&T leaders programs that foster networked improvement communities for P&T practices (Green, 2008; Huizing, 2012; Shapiro, 2006). For example, all stakeholders, including candidates, should be ‘students’ of localized P&T policy guidelines. Appendix A illustrates complex processes and pathways for the adjudication of P&T cases in the UBC context.

SoEL [P&T supervision] *planning*. SoEL planning takes into account all components of the conceptual framework to develop strategic long-term, intermediate, and short-term P&T goals with the candidate (Cawyer, Simonds, & Davis, 2002; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Hubball, 2014; Nir & Zilberstein-Levy, 2006). For example, candidates have different starting points, different degrees of readiness for P&T and different career pathways and contributions, and thus should be actively engaged in their complex P&T trajectories, especially from Year 2 to Year 6 of their appointment (see Appendix).

SoEL [P&T supervision] *implementation*. SoEL implementation takes into account all components of the conceptual framework to implement progressive and strategically aligned pedagogical strategies that respond to the diverse needs and circumstances of candidates. These include fostering P&T communities of practice and a culture of peer review, offering technology-enabled P&T learning experiences including workshops, and providing mentoring opportunities that can support progressive academic impacts and effective P&T case presentations (Hawkins, Graham, & Hall, 2007; Hubball et al., in press 2015).

SoEL [P&T supervision] *assessment*. SoEL assessment takes into account all components of the conceptual framework to focus on strategic and systematic assessments for the candidate’s case file. These include formative assessments, especially from Year 2 to Year 6, and summative assessments, which may take the form of self-assessment or feedback from peers, groups, the department head, and external reviewers. Individuals participating in assessment of candidates should be knowledgeable and informed by P&T guidelines in order to enhance the impact of P&T supervision (Crawford, Burns, & Hartmann McNamara, 2012).

The framework provides a heuristic for strategic and systematic approaches to P&T supervision. It invites institutional leaders in diverse university settings to engage in SoEL and appropriate context-specific practices in the iterative phases of planning, implementation, and assessment for P&T supervision. In the UBC context, for example, the authors’ experiences on the university’s Senior Appointments Committee, the Faculty of Education P&T Committee, as well as Department Chair have witnessed strategic

applications of this heuristic framework including: fostering a departmental culture of P&T supervision support; mentoring, for long and short-term goal setting regarding research and teaching development; and, formative peer review at various stages and for diverse academic career pathways.

CHALLENGES, AND POTENTIAL CAUSES FOR OPTIMISM

As a strategic form of academic leadership, SoEL is still very much in its infancy, both theoretically and practically, on research-intensive university campuses around the world. We have attempted to provide a theoretical framework for SoEL, as well as practical examples for its strategic use within the context of P&T supervision drawn from our experiences at UBC and NUS. Although the examples presented from both institutions are still works-in-progress, significant developments and commitments to educational leadership have been made in both contexts. However, they are not without unique/substantive challenges either.

At UBC, for example, changes in senior administration and funding priorities over the last few years have supported strategic implementation of educational technologies. As such, there has been a noticeable shift from previous emphases on developing capacity for institution-level leadership for the scholarship of teaching and learning. Competing institutional priorities (e.g., disciplinary research foci and criteria for merit, tenure, and promotion), exacerbated by already-heavy educational leader workloads, often constrain efforts to fully institutionalize the SoEL across the campus. Even under supportive institutional conditions, however, it is far from easy for many educational leaders to engage in SoEL (Boshier, 2009). Notable challenges for those involved in SoEL within the context of P&T supervision, for example, include confusion regarding how to evaluate the relevance of journals, single versus multiple-authored works, and quantity of publications versus quality of scholarship and impact on institutional practice.

However, we argue that SoEL would be taken up more substantially on RIU campuses if senior leaders were engaged in the scholarship of their own practice, such as implementation of strategic planning initiatives or, in this instance, supervision of P&T processes. As noted at the outset, we contend that SoEL has significant benefits for RIUs. SoEL is strategically aligned with RIU mandates for sustained and productive scholarly activity; SoEL fosters an institutional culture of educational scholarship in order to enhance effective, efficient, and strategically-aligned curricula and pedagogical practices; and SoEL has the potential to have a significant and strategic impact on P&T supervision. Further, we suggest that educational leadership in a Tier 1 RIU should have “scholarship” as one of its foci. Accordingly, SoEL could be the basis for the progression of individuals through the ranks to Full Professor, especially in emerging Educator and Professor of Teaching streams. As with other forms of scholarship, there is an expectation for evidence of dissemination in peer-reviewed contexts, such as one journal article and one conference presentation per year as well as reviewing and judging

relevant journals, addressing issues around authorship and contribution, and overcoming disciplinary biases for particular research methods and practices. These should be at the national or international level to demonstrate impact beyond the host university.

Consequently, RIUs and their academic units need to engage in the strategic use of SoEL, beginning with strategic visioning and followed by explicit programmatic and institutional support structures (Hubball et al., in press) for SoEL. They also need to consider the work of educational leadership as a form of pedagogy and scholarship (Grimmett, In press 2015). While there are still many challenges and areas for improvement, an institutional commitment to SoEL can be the basis for high impact and systematic approaches to improve the quality of undergraduate and graduate education. We reason here that SoEL is central to a well-founded and richly informed institution and to university and Faculty-level educational reform. Despite various challenges, there are encouraging signs of progress in universities around the world. We are beginning to see more international collaborations, institutional support, scholarship, and expertise within this field. For example, in addition to the two UBC and NUS cases cited in this paper, positive change in this regard is also evident at Zayed University (UAE); The University of the West Indies (Trinidad); University of Salamanca (Spain); Beijing Universities of Higher Education (China); Universities of Wollongong, South Australia and The College of Law (Australia); University of Iceland (Iceland); and, Tokyo International, J.F. Oberin, and Keio Universities (Japan).

The literature and our experience indicate that attending to educational leadership in terms of SOEL reaps rich rewards for institutions and positively impacts the teaching and learning experience of both faculty and students. Further, recognition of teaching and learning excellence and the progression through the ranks that that now warrants at places like UBC and NUS signals significant attention to the full mandate of universities and their ability to serve the communities in which they reside.

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Appendix A

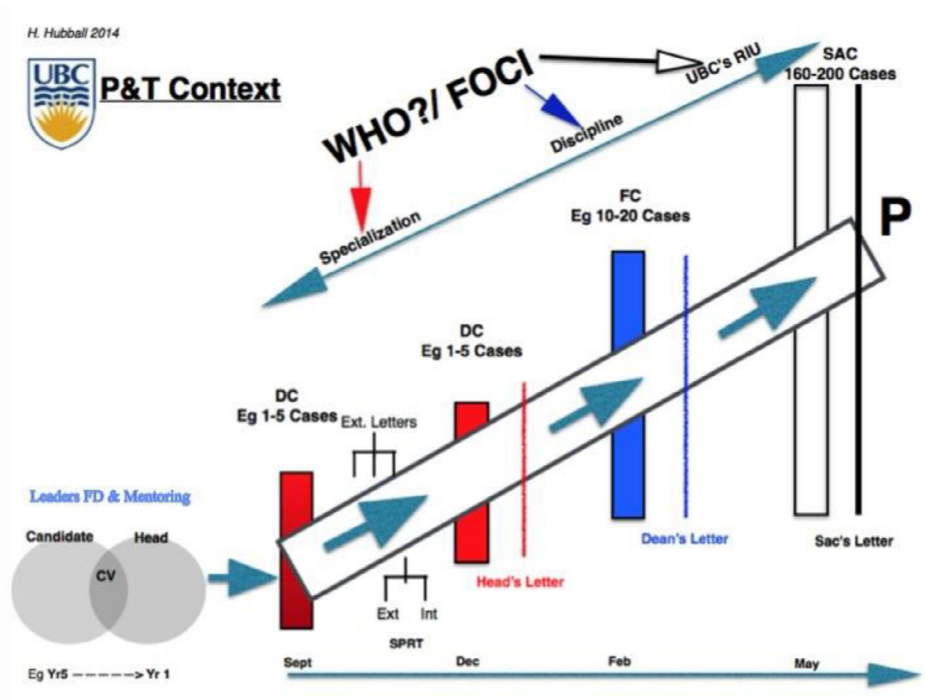


Figure 2. Navigating complex case constructions and adjudications through UBC's P&T processes: Implications for SoEL (Hubball, 2014).

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