Integrating the Scholarship of Teaching, Learning and Assessment into One Institution’s Homegrown Professional Learning Resources

Maria T. Northcote  
*Avondale College of Higher Education*, maria.northcote@avondale.edu.au

Anthony Williams  
*Avondale College of Higher Education*, tony.williams@avondale.edu.au

Kevin Petrie  
*Avondale College of Higher Education*, kevin.petrie@avondale.edu.au

John Seddon  
*Avondale College of Higher Education*, john.seddon@avondale.edu.au

Sherry J. Hattingh  
*Avondale College of Higher Education*, sherry.hattingh@avondale.edu.au

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Recommended Citation

4. Integrating the Scholarship of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment into One Institution’s Home-grown Professional Learning Resources

Maria Northcote. Director of the Centre for Advancement of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, Australia. Corresponding Author: maria.northcote@avondale.edu.au

Anthony Williams. Director of Academic Governance and Performance, The University of Wollongong Global Enterprises, Wollongong, Australia. Adjunct Professor, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, Australia.

Kevin Petrie. Dean of the Faculty of Education, Business and Science. Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, Australia

John Seddon. Research Project Manager. Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, Australia

Sherene Hattingh. Primary Education Course Convenor, Faculty of Education, Business and Science. Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, Australia

Abstract

Many professional learning (PL) programs in universities aspire to support tertiary educators to perform duties associated with teaching, student learning, and assessment. Additionally, because much of a university academic’s work is associated with conducting scholarly research and supervising students’ research, PL programs also need to provide support associated with supervision and research activities. Faced with these multiple PL demands, one small Australian higher education institution developed a suite of resources to support faculty teaching staff and researchers in their professional capacities using a heuristic (self-determined) approach to resource development. The content of the resources drew on the principles of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and a participatory research methodology was adopted to develop the resources. This chapter outlines
almost a decade of scholarly work that has resulted in the construction of a collection of PL resources which have been developed to improve the quality of the institution’s SoTL and research.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an account of a suite of home-grown professional learning (PL) resources that were created at one small higher education institution in Australia across almost one decade within the organisational structures of a number of funded research projects. These resources were designed to support researcher education, postgraduate supervision, and the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), especially in the areas of online teaching and authentic learning. This collection of PL resources has been developed for the purposes of improving the quality of the institution’s SoTL and research. The theoretical framework is also described, including the pedagogical principles on which the resources were built and the research methodology adopted to develop these resources. The chapter does not report on the evaluation of the use and impact of these resources but the outcomes of such evaluations have been reported elsewhere (for example, Boddey & Northcote, 2015; Northcote & Williams, 2014; Northcote, Williams, Carton, Petrie, & Lemke, 2017, in press; Petrie, Anderson, de Waal, et al., 2016).

**Theoretical Framework**

SoTL, especially the type of scholarship espoused by Trigwell (2013) and Boyer (1990), provided the foundational core on which the PL resources outlined in this chapter were designed. The SoTL commonly refers to the practice of inquiring about teaching and learning, and then sharing and publicizing the findings of such inquiries to enhance the quality of teaching and, consequently, the quality of the students’ learning experiences. Specifically, the nature and content of the resources outlined in this chapter are intended to support high quality teaching, learning, research, and assessment, and inquiry into these areas at the institution, in ways that promote sharing of knowledge and public scrutiny of the resources. Trigwell (2013) suggests teaching and learning become more scholarly “when teaching is seen as scholarly and inquiring and when it is made public and peer reviewed” (p. 95), reminding us that the whole purpose of the SoTL is “to enhance students’ experience of learning” (p. 95). Trigwell’s
(2013) suggestions along with Boyer’s (1990) definition of the SoTL as being a systematic inquiry of teaching and learning that is shared and open to public scrutiny and evaluation, all align well with the current focus of Avondale College of Higher Education. The institution is currently harnessing its resources to build a research-intensive institution that augments a strong scholarly culture in which teaching and learning are highly valued by all stakeholders of the institution. For a higher education institution that is on track to becoming a university, the SoTL approach provides a strong theoretical foundation to guide the advancement of scholarly teaching and learning, and goes hand-in-hand with SoTL-informed research practices. The SoTL pedagogical principles underlying the content of the resources were complemented by a participatory research methodology that was adopted to develop the resources. This methodological approach is outlined below.

**Research Methodology**

The resources outlined in this chapter were devised and created by adopting participatory forms of research and evaluation methodologies. These methodological approaches were characterized by involving as many stakeholders as possible in the design, development, and evaluation of the resources. The primary form of research methodology used to develop these resources was a utilisation-focused evaluation research methodology (Patton, 2012, 2015), an approach that is particularly helpful in engaging stakeholders and resource-users in the process of developing educational resources. Through mixed methods research approaches, data were gathered by conducting focus groups, questionnaires, and interviews with undergraduate and postgraduate students, faculty members, postgraduate supervisors, and administrative staff. For some resources, panels of experts were also consulted to gather specialist advice about the nature, content, and presentation of the resources. Data collected from these various sources were compared, analysed, and triangulated to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings identified during the development of each resource (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Further comparative analysis with relevant literature was conducted to ensure the resources were aligned with current best practice in the field of PL and higher education.
The use of Patton’s (2012, 2015) utilisation-focused evaluation research approach ensured that processes adopted to design, develop, and evaluate the resources were evidence-based, being informed by locally gathered research data. In each case, these processes were actively researched and data were gathered in an ongoing way to inform the continual appraisal of these resources. This ensured that the resources themselves were characterized by the SoTL (Boyer, 1990; Kreber & Kanuka, 2013; Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin, & Prosser, 2000). Because many of the resources were intended to reach faculty members across disciplines and to present knowledge that was applicable in nature, they represent examples of the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of teaching, and the scholarship of application, as described by Boyer (1990). Each of the resources outlined in this chapter undergo regular evaluation. Although this is not the focus of this chapter, the outcomes of the resource evaluations have been reported elsewhere.

**Results: Homegrown Professional Learning Resources**

Over the past eight years, scholars, researchers, administrators, and educators at Avondale have worked together to design and develop a range of scholarly PL resources. The funding and support for these projects has been provided mainly through external funding from competitive grants provided by the Office for Learning and Teaching in Australia. These external grants were supplemented by in-house funding and in-kind support. Each resource is now described.

**The Researcher’s Little Helper**

The development of the *Researcher’s Little Helper* has provided a central online repository that both students and staff can access to support their research endeavours (see Figure 4.1). Housed within Moodle, the Learning Management System (LMS) used by the institution, the structure of this resource is organized into topics that cover the key skills that are central to successful academic research, including: selecting a research topic, writing a literature review, methodological approaches, and ethical considerations. These topics are specific to the needs of higher degree research (HDR) students as they plan and complete their thesis/dissertation, including: advice about developing a research proposal, tips for writing a thesis/dissertation, examples of completed theses/dissertations, and links relevant to the institut-
tion’s policies. In addition to providing support for the development of core research skills, the site provides links to resources that assist in embedding a researcher into a sustainable and active research community, such as sites that promote collaboration with other researchers, as well as sites that provide advice about reporting research and securing research funding. For those faculty members who wish to develop further skills in the supervision of higher degree research students, a link within the site provides access to the newly developed Research Training Support Framework, outlined in the following section of this chapter.

**Figure 4.1 The Researcher’s Little Helper homepage.**

* A website within Avondale’s Moodle

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**Research Training Support Framework**

The Research Training Support Framework was developed to encourage and empower current and potential supervisors of higher degree research students (Petrie, Anderson, Carton, et al., 2016) (see Figure 4.2). The development of the Framework was funded by an Extension Grant from the Office for Learning and Teaching in Australia. The Framework was developed in collaboration with a number of national and international experts (Petrie et al., 2015). Initiated in response to identified needs of both staff and students, it is based on the premise that developing a pedagogy of supervision (Nulty, Kiley, & Meyer, 2009) is central to supporting an active institutional research culture. The Framework provides advice for each step of a
typical HDR student’s progression through their degree, beginning with admission into an HDR program, the selection of a supervisor, and the subsequent confirmation process that is required in many HDR programs in Australian universities. The Framework focuses on skills specific to guiding a student in managing their research project, the development of appropriate writing skills, and the process of publishing and presenting research findings. A number of brief fact-sheets are included in each of the Framework’s stages, providing advice within areas such as the supervision of part-time students, working effectively with distance students, and cross-cultural considerations. Each area of the Framework provides links to other Avondale webpages (e.g., policies) that guide students’ progression through their postgraduate degree and set institutional expectations for their postgraduate supervisors.

**Figure 4.2 A screenshot of the research training support framework website. It is available at [http://www.avondale.edu.au/research-training](http://www.avondale.edu.au/research-training)**

**Moodle’s Little Helper**

*Moodle’s Little Helper* was initiated in 2012 and developed to assist academic staff with their online teaching and course design (see Figure 4.3). Moodle is the LMS platform used at this institution and so the plain and coherent name of this tool was chosen to easily identify it when needed by staff. This self-help PL resource provides accessible and flexible instructions and resources in an online context to assist faculty members in 12 identified areas related to online teaching and online course design (Northcote & Boddey, 2014), namely: setting up courses, structuring a course, uploading materials, promoting learner interactivity, assessment portals, media enhancements, examples of best practice, quality of online courses, contact-
Integrating the Scholarship and monitoring students, Turnitin, literature about online learning, and PL workshops. The resource is designed in a way that enables faculty members to instantly access the area in which they require help. Quick access is enabled through a hyperlinked menu to video tutorials, text-based instructional resources, best practice showcases, course exemplars, and workshop materials (Northcote & Boddey, 2014). Staff access this online resource tool regularly and independently for guidance and help as required. This resource is regularly monitored and updated for ongoing faculty PL, and for teaching and course design developments.

**Figure 4.3 The Moodle’s Little Helper homepage.**
A website within Avondale’s Moodle.

Assessment @ Avondale

Many universities, both in Australia and internationally, have put much effort into providing cutting-edge resources for assessment (Cox, Bradford, & Miller, 2016; Dawson, 2015; The Higher Education Academy, 2012). In response to this trend Avondale created an assessment website (see Figure 4.4). The Assessment@Avondale (A@A) website has been funded by internal in-kind support from the Office of Academic and Research of Avondale. The website aims to offer a collection of high quality resources for faculty members to use in their consideration of best practice in the design and use of assessment tasks in their courses. A@A is a portal that provides a collection of assessment resources which are mainly pre-existing resources from other universities and higher education sources. The audience is intended to be those involved in teaching and assessing higher education students at Avondale. As the resource develops in
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the future it will expand its audience by offering information to help students make the most of their assessment tasks, grades, and the various forms of feedback lecturers offer them.

The A@A website elucidates the important areas of good assessment alongside references to the relevant institutional policies affecting assessment at Avondale. It is comprised of sections covering principles and standards (Boud & Associates, 2010; Shapland, 2011); assessment construction and processes (Biggs, 2014; Kandlbinder, 2014); a large collection of examples and types of assessment, student understanding and reflection tips, and PL and research resources. The website supports those involved in learning, teaching, and assessment, with easy access to information across the multi-faceted nature of the modern approach to assessment taken at Avondale.

**Figure 4.4 Assessment @ Avondale website. Available at:** [http://assessment.avondale.edu.au](http://assessment.avondale.edu.au)

**Transformational Assessment Toolbox**

The *Transformational Assessment Toolbox* is a collection of Avondale resources and outcomes funded by a Seed Grant from the Office for Learning and Teaching in Australia, and accessed via a tab on the Assessment@Avondale website, presented in the section above (see Figure 4.5). The resource aims to encourage and provide assistance for course designers and lecturers to rethink and plan their assessment feedback process within the higher education sector. This toolbox has
four sections. The first section provides the background information on this resource. The second section provides videos and reports of three case studies that used adaptively released assessment feedback (ARAF) strategies in the tertiary education sector. The third section provides direction for the practice and implementation of ARAF strategies through the use of questions, and implementation of staged practical guidelines for pre-semester and during semester practice as well as recommendations on the timing of these. This section also includes suggestions for future research directions in assessment. The fourth and final section of this resource provides detailed information on the research project that initiated this toolbox as well as publications, key readings and other relevant references for ARAF.

Figure 4.5 A screenshot of the transformational assessment toolbox website. It can be accessed at:  
http://assessment.avondale.edu.au/toolboxtat
The Threshold Concepts for Novice Online Teachers resource was developed as one of the key products of a research project, funded by a Seed Grant from the Office for Learning and Teaching in Australia, which aimed to identify the threshold concepts that novice online teachers require to teach effectively in online courses (see Figure 4.6). The resource consists of a collection of threshold concepts about online teaching with an explanation of the features of these threshold concepts. For example, two of the threshold concepts noted on the website include “Online course design is critical to the success of online teaching and learning” and “Students can learn without the teacher being present.” These threshold concepts represent some key focus points of learning for novice online teachers. Also, practical curriculum design guidelines are provided; these guidelines are intended for use when developing curricula for transformative PL of novice online educators in higher education contexts. In addition to the list of threshold concepts and PL curriculum guidelines, the online resource provides: 1) a summary of the students’ and teachers’ perceptions of online learning environments; 2) references and links to online resources about threshold concepts; and 3) details of the scholarly publications and presentations that were produced to disseminate the project’s findings. Overall, the main intention of this online resource was to provide research-informed guidance for how to design PL programs, activities, and resources for novice online teachers in higher education contexts.
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Tutor’s Den – Supporting Academic Assistance to Students

*The Tutor’s Den* database has been developed to help those who run a student assistance and academic support centre with a purpose-driven, digitized, and online application. As Avondale already employs the Moodle LMS, its internal database was considered the most appropriate platform to keep the data used to provide tutoring services to students secure. The database supports the documentation of a cycle of assistance provided to students by the tutors at Avondale. The cycle begins with students interacting with lecturers and teachers. When either the students or the lecturer identifies there may be some benefit to be gained through utilizing Avondale’s tutoring service, the student can be referred to the service. Tutors work with a student to scaffold the development of their core academic and scholastic skills, increasing their confidence in their capacity to be successful in their degrees.
The various information and reports being generated between students, their teachers, and the tutors can be kept securely in an accessible online place. Secondly, this solution allows the tutoring team to work in collaborative and streamlined ways to support their student clients. Any tutor assisting a student can access records for the individual student case. With up-to-date records, the tutors can respond with interventional learning activities that are most constructive to the individual learner’s needs in their current academic circumstances. Utilizing a simple database saves much time and has a positive organizing effect on many of the tutor’s tasks.

**Scholarly Significance**

From the resources outlined above, it is clear that a higher education institution, such as Avondale, is advised to invest in the PL of staff in order to raise the profile of scholarship. One of the challenges however within smaller institutions is that often the resources required for high-quality PL programs are lacking (Allen & Kelly, 2015). While isolated pockets of innovation may occur among the institution’s faculty, such initiatives are not always sufficiently resourced as part of an institutional strategic plan. Often there is little funding devoted to the enhancement of the activity of scholarship itself, or activities that constitute the foundations of scholarship such as those associated with teacher development, course enhancement, or teaching innovation.

An important part of SoTL is sharing teaching and learning experiences as well as sharing the developed initiative (in this case, a suite of PL resources). Traditionally this was only done in conferences. Institutions need to further develop forums for such activities and build them into their calendar to ensure they become regular components of the institution’s calendar of events. The scholars themselves are responsible for sharing such work with peers and colleagues, both within and outside their institution. It is important for a small institution to develop its faculty members’ capacity to engage in the activity of communicating their scholarly activities as well as imparting training (Petrie et al., 2015).

The activity of sharing as a scholarly activity is also valuable to other small institutions. As an Adventist institution, Avondale has many sister institutions, especially those in developing countries. There is the potential, especially through such mediums as communicating through video conferencing and accessing online schol-
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Early resources, to involve and engage staff at these institutions in our scholarly sharing times. The Christian education community, which is extensive in Australia, also provides additional sharing opportunities. These communities can be invited to share and contribute to our institutional scholarly activities as well as sharing and using the resources developed as part of that scholarship.

Conclusion

When developing its PL resources, Avondale has been mindful not to fall into the one-size-fits-all trap. Instead, it has been strategic in developing its resources and PL around the themes of diversity. The temptation to make all resources and training narrow for ease has been avoided and the focus of the scholarly and development activities has been directed towards capacity building; enabling staff to take ownership of their own PL and scholarly activities. Avondale offers a diverse range of courses for its size and there are specific disciplinary cultures which exist within the institution. Importantly, not all staff are at the same point in their PL. By developing these resources there have been a number of benefits for Avondale as an institution, including: ongoing individual self-directed support for existing and new staff; a supportive teaching and learning climate; and a positive change in the culture of innovation and scholarship. Intrinsic to the initiatives presented in this chapter is the attribute of ensuring the PL resources are as flexible as possible so as not to exclude staff based on where they are at in their PL journeys. Our desire has always been to enable, empower, and support, rather than to develop uniformity. To sustain this attitude and to sustain the diversity of activities in an institution looking to enhance both its teaching and learning practice, but also its research capacity, scholarly resources must be tailored in ways to support these initiatives.

Acknowledgements

The research projects reported in this chapter were supported by the Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) in Australia under the Seed Grant Program, grant no. SD15-5203, grant title: Using online teaching threshold concepts in transformative professional learning curricula for novice online educators. In-kind research support was provided by the following institutions: Avondale College of Higher Education, NSW, Australia; Texas A&M University, Texas, USA; and Australian Catholic University, ACT, Australia.
Maria Northcote

Maria Northcote is the Director of the Centre for Advancement of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) at Avondale College of Higher Education. Maria is an experienced higher education teacher, leader, and researcher and has successfully led an Office for Learning and Teaching Extension Grant through to completion during 2014-2015, and is currently a co-researcher on an Office for Learning and Teaching Seed Grant focusing on higher education assessment. She has led and contributed to a range of research projects in three higher education institutions between 1999 and 2015. Before beginning her work at Avondale, she worked at Newcastle and Edith Cowan Universities, in lecturing, research, and staff development roles. She was recently appointed a Fellow of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) in recognition of her service to higher education and her commitment to ongoing professional development to enhance teaching and learning.

Anthony Williams

Anthony Williams recently joined the University of Wollongong Global Enterprises Unit. The unit manages universities and colleges in four locations in Wollongong, Dubai, Hong Kong and Malaysia. Anthony manages the Academic Governance and Performance Portfolio across the institutions. Before taking up the Wollongong assignment, he was at Avondale where he was Vice President (Academic and Research) of Avondale College of Higher Education. He provided leadership in research and scholarship. Prior to that role, he held the position of the Head of School of Architecture and Built Environment at the University of Newcastle NSW. He has extensive experience in project management in the domain of professional education. He is a winner of multiple University Teaching Awards as well as a National Award for Teaching Excellence. He is highly regarded in this area having worked as a curriculum consultant nationally and internationally.

Kevin Petrie

Kevin Petrie is the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Business and Science at Avondale College of Higher Education, NSW, Australia. His research areas include school bullying, classroom management, mathematics education, preservice teacher education, and the professional development of researchers. Before working in higher educa-
tion, Kevin’s experience involved working as a classroom teacher and principal in a number of primary schools. His Doctoral thesis reported on the relationship between student-peer bullying, school climate, and peer popularity.

**John Seddon**

John Seddon is currently employed as a project manager for a large Office for Learning and Teaching research grant. He has a PhD in tertiary teaching with a keen interest in how we understand student learning and how improving students’ understandings of their own learning and assessment can deepen learning experiences and outcomes. John has worked as a university lecturer and a researcher in online education. During his doctoral studies he investigated the role of reflection in the development of new tertiary teachers’ conceptions of teaching. Using an online tool he developed as part of his study, the Reflective Practice Website, Jack’s study tracked the way in which new tertiary teachers engaged in reflective practices and the effects this had on their conceptions of teaching. Jack has recently facilitated online and face-to-face professional development sessions for higher education teachers who are developing online course design and teaching skills.

**Sherene Hattingh**

Sherene Hattingh is the Primary Course Convenor in the Faculty of Business, Education, and Science at Avondale College of Higher Education. She has worked in the Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary education sectors as a teacher, lecturer, and administrator. Her education experience spans four countries where she has actively engaged in mainstream classroom teaching, ESL pedagogy, and more recently research in these areas. Her research passions include innovative teaching and learning, internationalisation, ESL students, and pedagogy. She is currently involved in teaching higher education courses on-campus and online where she is creatively working to improve these learning modes and the assessments attached to them.
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