

Experience-Based Insights Precede SoTL in Faculty

¹Vederhus, Lillian & ²Allern, Marit

¹Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Psychology (IPS), University of Tromsø, Norway. Lillian.Vederhus@uit.no,

²Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, Department of Education. Marit.Allern@uit.no

ABSTRACT

Identifying indicators and domains of scholarship requires thorough empirical and theoretical explorations. The importance of within-faculty propositions and consensus on indicators has been addressed in order to enhance scholarship, promote teaching portfolios, and ensure discipline-specific knowledge to enrich general models.

We found that faculty, when asked to individually propose statements on scholarship of teaching in the first phase of this modified Delphi-study on consensus-formation in SoTL, suggested statements that could be qualitatively structured into five areas. From the second phase, there was a strong tendency toward consensus within faculty on statements they considered to be good indicators of SoTL. Statements with lower agreement had higher dispersion, indicating more specific than general qualities.

INTRODUCTION

Previous studies following Boyer's (1990) principles on scholarship of academic work have explored the scholarship of teaching and learning with the purpose of defining and refining the concepts (eg. Kreber, 2001, 2006; Smith & Simpson, 1995; Trigwell et al, 2000; Tigelaar et al, 2004). Realizing the need for clear and common contents, frameworks and models on general competencies have been suggested, based on theoretical reasoning and empirical studies of expertise knowledge. Developing scholarship in teaching and learning implies improving pedagogical thinking and skills, from lower-order- to higher-order-dimensions (eg. Trigwell et al, 2000; Kreber, 2006). Scholarly growth may still call for a bottom-up approach, due to emerging practises' influence on general conceptualizations. If the role of frameworks and models is connecting abstraction and applicability, they require evolution with societal and educational changes (Fig. 1). The purpose of this study is to explore the process of identifying indicators and domains in scholarship of teaching and learning, through a study of medical faculty currently involved in extensive curriculum revisions at the university. A Delphi-technique, originally invented to examine expert-knowledge and reach expert-consensus for forecasting (Clayton, 1997), was modified to examine qualitatively the ideas of scholarship of teaching in faculty, to quantify the degree of agreement with these statements, and the degree of agreement within faculty, that is consensus (Fig. 2). A planned third phase will reveal any potential change in thinking.

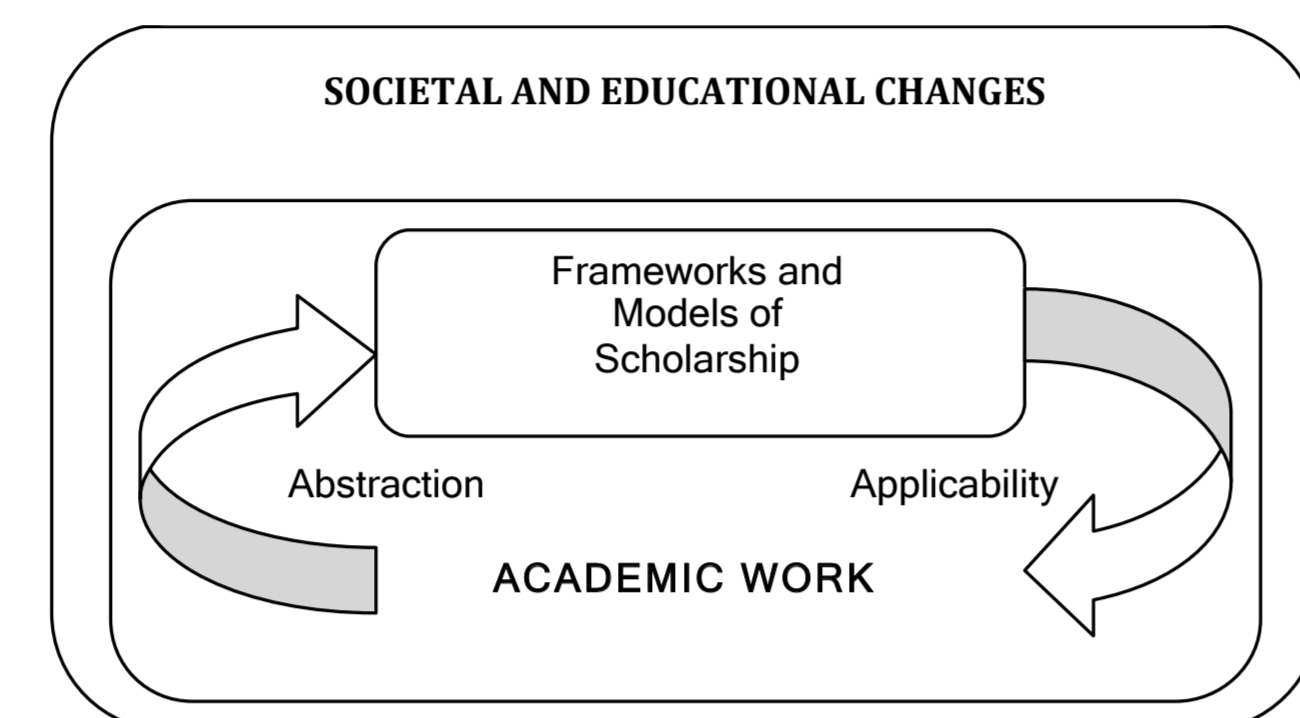


Figure 1. The dynamics of scholarship

METHODS

The design follows the procedure of the Delphi-technique, modified for the purpose of studying ideas of scholarship over a time-period of two years (Fig. 2).

Invited respondents (n = 97) were all medical faculty, listed by administration as somehow involved in teaching in first or second year of medical education, resulting in a responding panel of n = 36. Withdrawal was mainly due to the list including many temporary and terminated employments, and sabbatical leaves.

A request for three written statements characterizing scholarship of teaching was first sent faculty by email, with reminders two months later by email, and then by a phone-call, to get a pool of responses ranging from a few keywords to complete propositions, and even long essays on the subject.

Following the qualitative analysis of this material, a questionnaire containing 117 statements, unevenly organized into 5 domains, was constructed with a Likert-scale for indicating agreement, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

The questionnaire was also distributed to the panel by email, and ratings collected likewise, for analysis of agreement with statements (arithmetic means) as indicator of scholarship of teaching, and agreement within faculty (standard deviations) as consensus around these indicators, using SPSS 16.0.

The panel will have their individual and the collective responses marked on the questionnaire they receive for a third phase of this Delphi-study, asking them to rerate or confirm initial agreement with their statements.

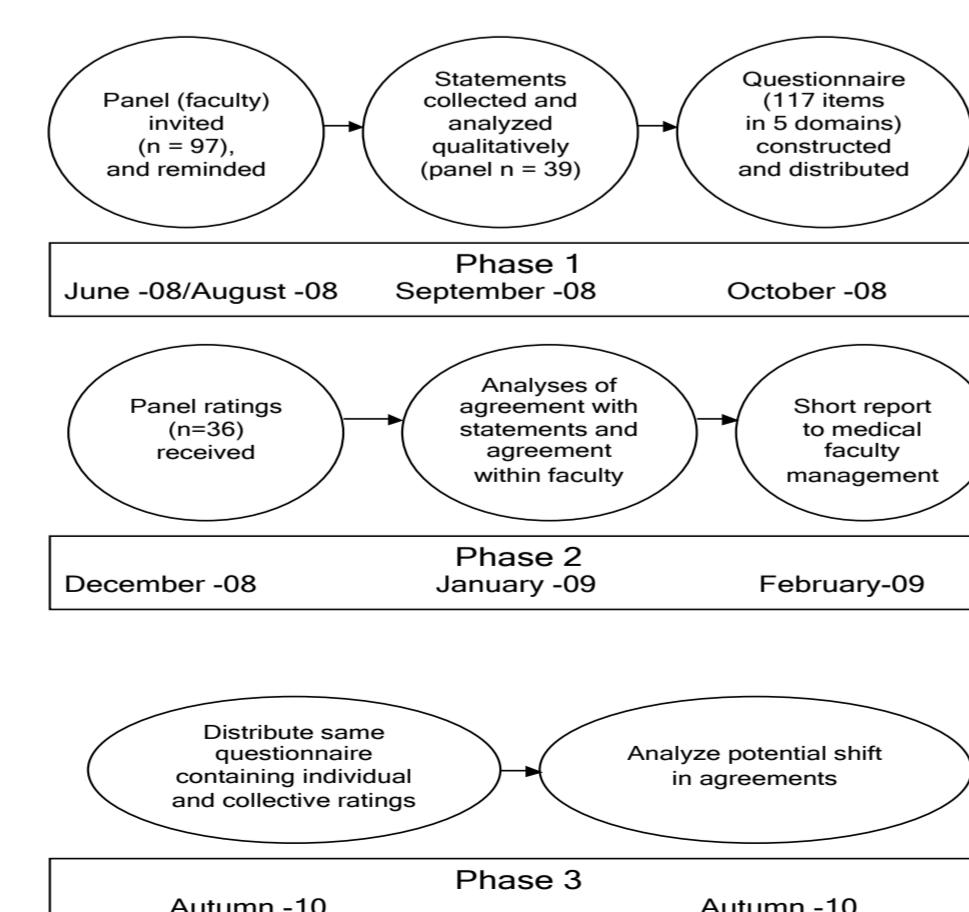


Figure 2. Modified Delphi-technique to study scholarship of teaching and learning in faculty

RESULTS

A total of 117 statements were extracted from first-phase-materials, and arithmetic mean (agreement with statement) and standard deviation (agreement within faculty) calculated for each after second-phase-ratings. The overall relation between means and standard deviations is shown in Fig. 3. The three items with highest mean rating in each domain is reported in Table 1, supplemented in Table 2 by eight other statements from three domains reaching agreement larger than 6.

Table 1. Faculty statements with three highest means, accompanied by their dispersion, in each of the five domains, on a 1 to 7 Likert-scale

	M	SD
Professional Qualifications (17 items)		
The teacher must have good pedagogical skills (not necessarily formal)	6.20	0.797
The teacher must be professionally confident with a good overview in the field	6.14	0.845
Teaching must be of high professional level and quality	6.08	0.996
Developing and Organizing the Curriculum (18 items)		
The study must let the students take active part	6.23	0.808
The study must result in students having good practical skills and tools when they leave to meet their patients	6.21	0.845
The education must be goal-oriented	6.13	0.937
Skills to Plan and Lead Different Forms of Teaching and Learning (22 items)		
Students must be urged to develop their skills to co-operate and reflect	6.34	0.725
The students must be involved	6.31	0.668
Teaching must be adjusted to the description of learning outcomes	6.22	0.866
Skills to Carry Out Different Forms of Teaching and Learning (Communication) (53 items)		
The lecturer must have the capability to communicate knowledge to the students	6.56	0.607
The lecturer must be able to communicate the subject in a comprehensible way	6.44	0.746
A lecturer must show interest in students' learning the topic	6.23	0.808
General Social Skills (7 items)		
Personal engagement is important. It stimulates the students learning on their own	6.09	0.947
The person lecturing must be motivated and enthusiastic	5.91	0.951
One must be able to guide and inspire the students to high achievements and in-depth study	5.88	1.008

Table 2. Eight additional statements obtaining mean > 6 on the 1 to 7 scale of agreement

	M	SD
The lectures must be structured	6.19	0.822
The university should work to make teaching more attractive and give it more recognition	6.19	0.920
The study must be on an adjusted professional level to meet the students' levels	6.17	0.737
The teacher must have the ability to simplify, explain in other ways, put things in connection	6.14	0.867
The lecturer must be able to pass on difficult subject matter so that the students understand, get curious and interested	6.12	0.880
The teacher must have good pedagogical quality with easy-to-follow and systematic lecture, logical structure, breaks with summing up	6.11	0.718
Students must be called on to ask questions of their own and to use text books and Internet to answer these	6.09	0.742
Teaching and instruction must give examples relevant to the target group	6.03	0.785

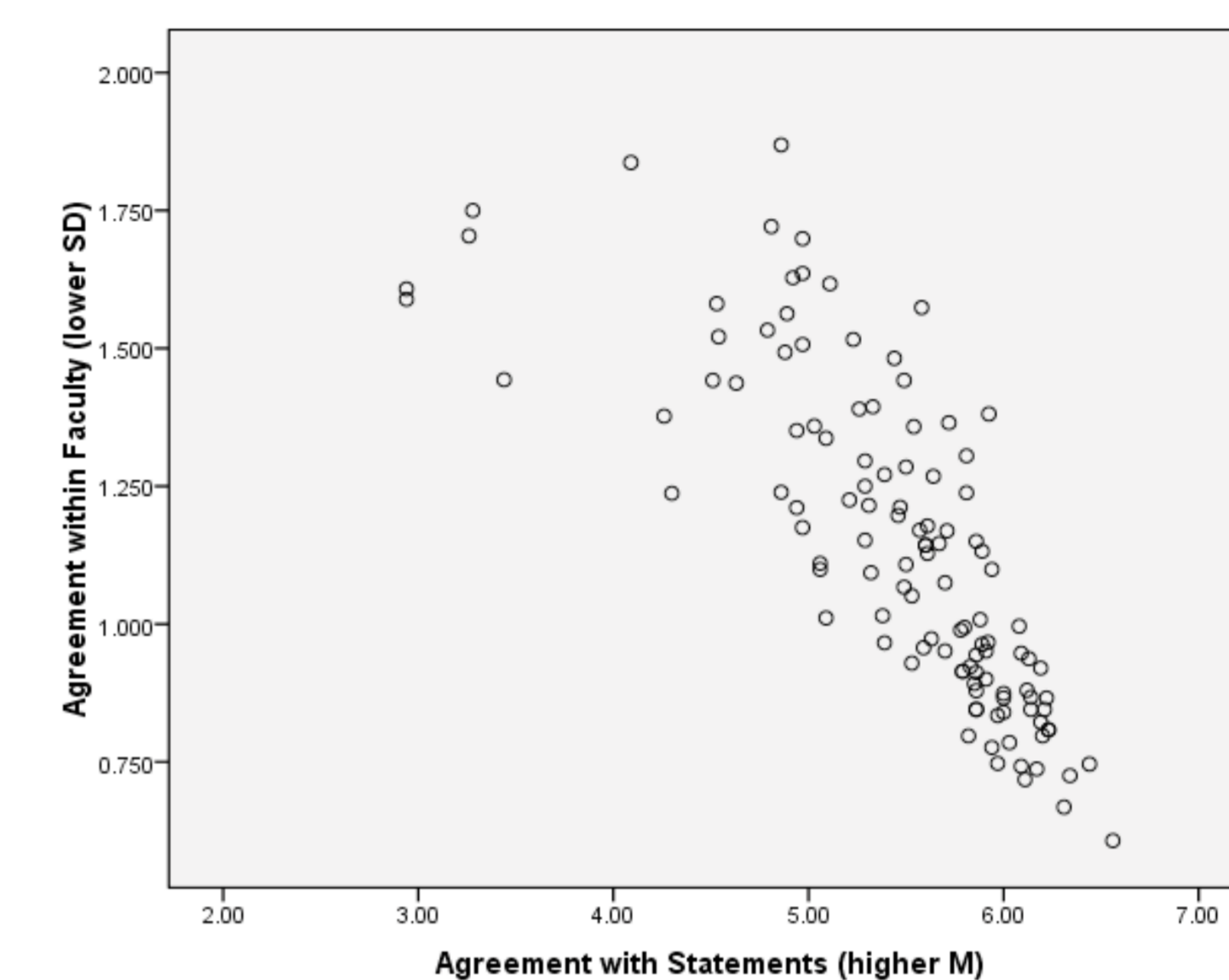


Figure 3. Relationship between agreement with statements (mean) and agreement within faculty (standard deviation) for all 117 statements

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Initiating scholarly work presupposes faculty ownership. Several reforms in Norwegian higher education have tired out faculty, so top-down decisions now often meet opposition and resistance. A Delphi-study might therefore be an appropriate method for involving faculty in reflections towards scholarship, giving opportunities also for evaluating substantial changes at an institutional level.

Withdrawal can be a considerable problem in this process, further complicated by a university practice of short-term appointments, and staff mobility.

Also, the question remains on whether consensus is a validation tool in SoTL, and whether deviating statements, often excluded from a third round in a Delphi-study, actually may anticipate evolving scholarship, or just express lower-level-dimensions in a SoTL-framework.

The connection between abstraction and applicability is a challenge for all researchers and scholars in this field. Hopefully, our study may contribute to stimulate research on faculty perspectives, to facilitate initiation of scholarship at faculty, and to enrich and elaborate existing models of SoTL.

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