

Bringing credibility to teaching and learning research

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Scholars who conduct teaching and learning research are faced with challenges in the academic workplace. Despite increasing calls within higher education for pedagogical research, institutions vary in their capacity and willingness to integrate and support such cross-disciplinary work (McKinney, 2006), even when formalised within a position description. Lack of status and appropriate criteria for assessing teaching and learning research have been cited as problematic. In addition, individual researchers may encounter difficulty finding colleagues with similar research interests and experience a steep learning curve if research methodologies used in teaching and learning research are different from those used in their discipline. Such challenges may lead to tension or conflict as scholars map out their career pathway and attempt to establish the credibility and value of their research within the workplace.

Six researchers in an International Collaborative Writing Group designed a project to investigate how researchers understand and establish credibility as related to teaching and learning research. An exploratory interpretive approach was utilised; data was collected through semi-structured interviews with common questions to ensure consistency across the study locations. Analysis was undertaken by two members of the team. An initial coding framework was developed around the standard questions and then inductive thematic analysis was performed for each response set using NVivo. Early findings indicate that researchers define 'credibility' related to teaching and learning research in various ways that frequently reflect their priorities. When credibility is viewed as positioned in the wider academic domain, researchers describe conventional and externally-driven methods of gaining credibility, such as journal submissions and presentations. When researchers undertake their research for personal reasons, rather than as a career-focused decision, they perceive credibility as being derived from the social value and the student-related outcomes of the research. Study participants described tensions around the ways colleagues and universities value and recognise teaching and learning research and cited proactive approaches that they had taken to establish their work as an academically valid practice. Participants frequently read the political and academic landscape around them, tailoring their work to operate within acceptable cultural norms and carefully selecting work to present to stakeholders. Our research identifies optimism in the research community, for despite the challenges, our participants indicated that their work is gaining visibility and impact in the tertiary sector.

McKinney, K. (2006). Attitudinal and structural factors contributing to challenges in the work of the scholarship of teaching and learning. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 129, 37-50.