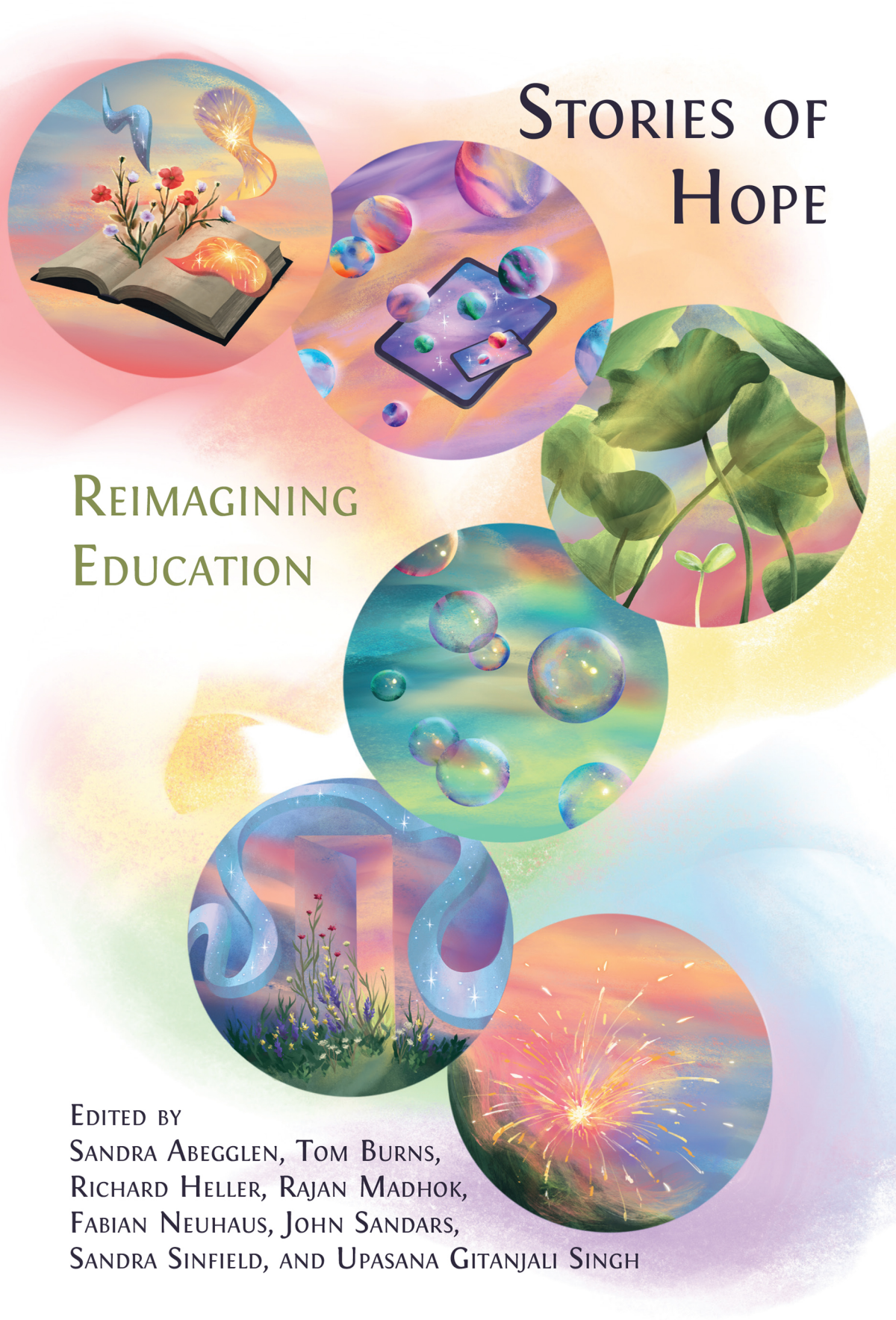# Stories of Hope

Reimagining Education

Edited by
Sandra Abegglen, Tom Burns,
Richard Heller, Rajan Madhok,
Fabian Neuhaus, John Sandars,
Sandra Sinfield, and Upasana Gitanjali Singh

Cover concept and image by Rachel Denbina, CC BY-NC
Cover design by Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

6. The human and nothing but the whole human:
With head, heart, and hand

Nathalie Tasler

Abstract

This chapter emphasises the central role of both educators and learners in the educational process, highlighting that teaching is deeply context dependent. It argues that educators require as much care and support as their students, as both are engaged in ongoing identity negotiations through learning and teaching. The concept of unconditional positive (self)-regard is proposed as a valuable framework for fostering a supportive and empathetic environment in Higher Education. By integrating this concept, educators can create a nurturing space that encourages growth, self-reflection, and mutual respect, ultimately enriching the learning experience for all involved.

Keywords: Higher Education; teaching; wellbeing; coaching; unconditional positive regard

Introduction

I am a senior lecturer in academic and digital development (also known as faculty or learning development), so my students are also my

colleagues and peers. During the last years, it seemed as if my focus of teaching in the Postgraduate Certificate and Master's in Academic Practice went more and more towards supporting students to make it through the process rather than students having the headspace for playful experimentation, which initiated my writing of this chapter.

I propose that pedagogies of hope, for a more humane future of Higher Education, entail that we need to work on our own development as educators, to embark on the journey towards unconditional positive self-regard. This in turn will have positive impact on how we interact with, and support, our learners (Wilkins, 2000).

This chapter's structure is based on the three domains the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) considers as cutting across all the key competencies they propose within Education for Sustainable Development: the cognitive (head), socio-emotional (heart), and behavioural domains (hand) (UNESCO, 2017). Each section explores themes that are directly affecting us as educators in Higher Education. Followed by prompts, the chapter is a self-coaching guide offering incentives for reflections (Denkanstöße) aiming to help you establish a post-pandemic equilibrium. While I am working in the UK context, this is very likely to ring true for colleagues in other countries.

Head—cognitive foundations

> Learning is part of human existence and takes place always and everywhere (trans. from Goll, 2021, p. 168).

Numerous authors (e.g., Dougall et al., 2021; Hadjisolomou et al., 2022; Imad, 2021; Khattar et al., 2020) have been addressing the increased stressors experienced during the last years in Higher Education both for students (Maguire & Cameron, 2021) and staff (Imad, 2021). Liz Morrish (2019), focusing on the UK, and Angel Urbina-Garcia (2020), exploring English language publications, demonstrated that the state of play with regard to poor mental health of faculty already preceded the impact of the pandemic, showing increasing cases of mental health issues. While colleagues in Hungary didn't find a significant decrease in mental health in faculty through the pandemic, they still saw a need "to raise teachers' psychological wellbeing by more efficient mobilisation of

their internal resources" (Sipeki et al., 2022, p. 8). This recommendation constitutes a good segue into the chapter.

Experientially the need for psychological wellbeing has become more immediate across my networks, although a systematic analysis is still required. Mays Imad (2021), exploring the issues from the faculty development perspective, points out that faculty members likely not only experience traumatic stress directly but also secondary traumatic stress through their students. They elaborate as follows:

> Our work during this time of burnout and existential anxiety is necessarily emotional. In our society in general, and in higher education in particular, we often view emotions as the antithesis of reason. Yet the role of emotions in the human experience, including learning and healing, is indispensable (Damasio, 2000) (Imad, 2021, p. 13).

One argument that resonates strongly is that the nature of university work is never finished and constantly evolves and moves. Mike Thomas (2019) stresses that:

> It has always been like this, but that incessant drive should be for real improvement and not artificial measures which compromise the mental wellbeing of colleagues (Thomas, 2019 in Morrish, 2019, p. 5).

I think part of this incessant drive sits not just within institutional structures but is as much an integral part of our professional identities (Macfarlane, 2016; Kalfa et al., 2018; Warren, 2018). Deliberately becoming aware of these mechanisms in which we perpetuate structures over agency of our work might be a useful practice for a more balanced future.

I have been pondering lately how to find our equilibrium again. Our pre-pandemic workloads not only increased due to ever-growing student numbers (Morrish, 2019), but also in terms of other aspects of workload such as pastoral care (Imad, 2021).

Additionally, much of the online presence from lockdown remains, even as we return to in-classroom teaching. So, the workload has increased due to maintaining both the pre-pandemic physical presence and the pandemic digital presence. How have many of us had time to reflect on which areas of physical presence and which areas of digital presence are the most effective to keep and which ones we should let go of, during the last years of reactive firefighting?

This is your official space to think about this. Even if you just take five minutes to write down a few bullet points in response to any of these prompts, it's a valuable start.

<div align="center">Points for reflection</div>

- Where am I at, right now?
  - What are my concerns? What are my joys?
  - What can I let go? What should I keep?
  - Who has my corner?
- What do I have control of? For instance:
  - How I interact with my learners.
  - How I plan my teaching.
  - Who I work on projects with.
- Can I sit with the idea that there is no such thing as catching up?
  - How does this feel?
  - How can I work with this concept?

Now that we have had some time to think about where we are, we can begin exploring where we want to go.

Hand—what is it you do?

In many UK Higher Education institutions, providing evidence of the impact of our teaching practice is an integral part of career development and progression, and is often also a component of the overall assessment of an institution (for example, through initiatives like the Teaching Excellence Framework). Proving the impact of our teaching remains difficult, and additionally collecting the evidence and writing about teaching often falls behind the immediate demands of day-to-day teaching (Martin et al., 2021; Negretti et al., 2022).

Does the following sentence sound familiar?

I only need a day or half a day to sit down and work on this.

And does the subsequent, longed-for day or half-day then end up looking something like: working through an email backlog, having an inquiry come in that needs a response, being stuck getting my head around where I stopped last time and where I should pick up again, meeting a colleague I have meant to catch up with for months, and eventually not being able to focus on writing?

This is where I would like to propose the idea of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), one of the engagements by which we evidence our teaching practice and its impact, as (daily) practice (Cuthbert et al., 2021) to you. Often, SoTL is approached in a pragmatic circle of:

1. run teaching intervention,

2. collect data about it,

3. analyse,

4. publish,

5. move on.

While there is nothing inherently wrong with approaching SoTL as a research process (Tasler, 2022), there is also more to SoTL than that. Some colleagues offer the helpful perspective of either "being SoTL" or "becoming SoTL" (reach out to Dr Anne Tierney[1] or Dr Sarah Honeychurch[2] for further discussion) as this reflects the dimension of SoTL as not only reflexive practice but as intentional practice. In this framework, the focus is not on squeezing in a research-style project, but on embedding the evidence of our teaching practice and its impact as an integral part of being an educator.

So, what does this mean?

I present the following proposition: SoTL is an act of self-care. Now let's get the cynical part out of the way first: if you are in a teaching-focused role, then it is very likely in many of the English-speaking countries that SoTL is part of your career progression evidence. That is one aspect. The other aspect is that teaching is highly contextual and personal, and it

---

1   See https://www.linkedin.com/in/anne-tierney-67756317/
2   See https://www.linkedin.com/in/sarah-honeychurch/

is identity negotiation; building in regular (if not daily) reflections on our teaching practice aides us to develop our tacit knowledge, makes us more confident as educators, and contributes to building this body of evidence we need for promotion or fellowship applications. In other words, SoTL becomes self-care.

How does this sound?

- I am scrolling through social media of my choice (Mastodon or Threads) where I follow a whole host of other educators, learned societies, or associations, and I come across an article or resource that informs my thinking about teaching. I keep a note of it.

- I have a chat with a colleague and one thing leads to another and we bounce ideas about a teaching dilemma; I take notes of the date, time, colleague's name and the idea that emerged from this conversation.

- I read a scholarly publication, or research, on teaching and learning and it informs my thinking. I keep a record of this.

- Something happens during a lecture, lab, workshop, or seminar. Either I notice something interesting, something challenging, or something joyful. I take note of this.

All of this is building a body of evidence of our teaching practice and the influences that inform our decision making.

Can you still remember when you first began including memes in your teaching resources? I do, because I engage in SoTL as practice and share my "working out loud" pieces (Tasler, 2012). Use any tool that works for you: a note-taking app, a simple text document, spreadsheet, database, or RSS collator. But be deliberate (see further Garfield, 2018, on the "working out loud" movement).

The next step is critical engagement with these resources. Maybe one event in your classroom was so significant you want to publish a thought or ideas paper, or a blog post. For example, I had a very positive experience with an ad hoc improvisation and simply shared it (Tasler, 2023). That is engaging in scholarship, as part of the overall SoTL process. While this is not evidence of the impact of your teaching practice, it is evidence of your practice, which is a core part for most

fellowship applications (Kern et al., 2015). Additionally, when sharing these reflections openly, there will be colleagues picking them up and trying them out themselves, and letting you know about it, which then turns into evidence of impact (Kim et al., 2021; Martinovic et al., 2022).

The more evidence you collect, the easier it will be to eventually write a peer-reviewed publication. Consider thinking about writing as a form of inquiry (Healey et al., 2020; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). You will never have a blank page to start from again. Additionally, even the brief notes, thoughts, and ideas you keep will help you develop your writing voice for SoTL, which can be very challenging for colleagues from non-cognate disciplines. A good starting point is to explore how your own experiences are reflected in publications about learning and teaching in Higher Education. Have others experienced similar things? Would a thought or ideas paper and publication help you formulate this more clearly and establish a need for a project in which you collect data to answer questions?

When we set out on our career-long, life-wide quest of self-emergence as educators (teachers), reflexive practice is an integral part of teaching—and of being SoTL. And keeping notes, evidencing this journey, is an act of self-care as it ultimately feeds into our process of becoming SoTL.

We established our current position in the previous section. Now, by considering SoTL as practice, we can reflect on where we want to go.

Points for reflection

Pragmatic points for reflection:

- What is my next goal/dream?
- Where is my wiggle room to engage in daily practice?
- How do I prioritise?
- What would happen if I were to engage in regular SoTL practice?
- What would happen if I didn't?

Value points for reflection:

- What are my values?

- Are they my own, or are they external values?
- Whose expectation am I fulfilling here?
- How do they relate to my work?
- Can they inform which projects to keep and which ones to let go off?
- Set yourself timeframes within which to review your values and goals.

Hopefully by now we have established, at least to some degree, our starting position and future objectives; now comes the most difficult part—accepting that we deserve the good stuff.

Heart—unconditional positive (self)-regard

Teaching is about you. The main factor influencing your students' learning is you as the educator and how you relate to your learners. Teaching as identity negotiation embodies complex dimensions of human experience. Michalinos Zembylas (2007) captures this by proposing an extension of the concepts of pedagogical content knowledge and emotional knowledge traditionally held by teachers (educators). He introduces the concept of knowledge ecology, which involves multiple agents, such as learners and places (see also Tasler & Dale, 2021), and that centres on the interaction between teachers and learners. The knowledge ecology is defined as:

> a system consisting of many sources and forms of knowledge in a symbiotic relationship: content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, knowledge of learners, emotional knowledge, knowledge of educational values and goals and so on (Zembylas, 2007, p. 356).

One could argue that a condition for self-acceptance is that of self-understanding, which Geert Kelchterman (2009, p. 261) defines as an ongoing process of integrating experiences and their impact into the negotiation of self-identity. The author argues that the "'self' pervades all aspects of teaching" (Kelchterman, 2009, p. 263) and thus is an integral part of a teacher's interpretative framework, and therefore part of SoTL.

Kelchterman (2009, p. 257) proposes the following statement to abstract: "Who I am in how I teach is the message". This links well to Sylvana Dietel's (2013) viewpoint that education aimed at self-observation and self-reflection creates a deeper understanding of our students—while also helping us appreciate and understand how our own projections may shape how we interpret the student's resistance to learning. According to Dietel (2013), this skill can reduce unnecessary stress in teaching situations by allowing us to differentiate between our inner life and outside influences. Jerold D. Bozarth's (1998) view supports this idea, explaining that understanding where we might project on to the other (learner, colleague) does help us to keep meeting others with unconditional positive regard, recognising our shared humanity. According to Jerold D Bozarth (1998), meeting the other with "unconditional positive regard" enables them to access their self-actualisation.

What is unconditional positive regard?

It doesn't mean we have to like everyone! Liking is based on shared values and ideas. Unconditional positive regard is about meeting the other with unconditional respect and the knowledge of our shared humanity (Bernard, 2013; Wilkins, 2000). This means we accept our emotional responses towards another person as a reflection of our selves and recognise that everyone can only act according to their current ability and skills. And while we may not be keen on what is brought to us, and need to set boundaries, we still respect and care for the other as a human being. For instance, we might get a harshly formulated email from a colleague, and recognise that this does not reflect the colleague as a person, but their current state of mind, such as being stressed etc. So, do we respond in kind, or do we respond kindly?

The other aspect enabling us to meet our learners with unconditional positive regard, is to extend this to ourselves and exercise unconditional positive self-regard. I know, I waited until the end for the most challenging aspect of these deliberations! We ought to not judge ourselves based on the performative tenets of our academic roles, but value ourselves merely for being. Albert Ellis (2013) argued that, since no one is perfect, it would be impractical to solely base our self-worth on how we performed in our roles. Instead, we should recognise the inherent value of our life.

And this is why unconditional positive (self)-regard is so important. From promotion criteria to key performance indicators (KPIs), our professional development is a performative measure. However, our identities are complex and often intrinsically linked to our work (Bennett et al., 2016)—we see ourselves as scientists, scholars, teachers, educators, researchers, and more. The performative aspects we need to evidence can seem to stand in contradiction to our values. Meeting our selves, as well as our learners and colleagues, with unconditional positive regard creates space within the performative structures for shared humanity.

Points for reflection

- Has a student interaction ever challenged you?
- Have you ever spent days pondering over student feedback you got for your course evaluation?
- What do you think were the actual drivers for that feedback or interaction?[3]
  - What are the conditions of worth[4] in your work environment?
- How do your values match with these conditions?
- How could you exercise unconditional positive self-regard?

Steps toward hope

- The educator needs as much care as the learner—with the human and humanity taking centre stage in education as hopeful practice.
- Unconditional positive (self)-regard is a useful concept to foster in Higher Education teaching—and can be deepened by reflective and reflexive practice that also facilitates meaningful entry into SoTL.
- Download an open-access copy of the Scholar's Career Reflection Workbook here to aid reflection and build positive (self)-regard: https://doi.org/10.25416/NTR.24542482

3　For an easy first venture into exploring judgement biases, see Silva, 2024.
4　See Joseph, 2014.

References

Bennett, R., Hobson, J., Jones, A., Martin-Lynch, P., Scutt, C., Strehlow, K., & Veitch, S. (2016). Being chimaera: A monstrous identity for SoTL academics. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *35*(2), 217–228. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2015.1087473

Bernard, M. E. (Ed.) (2013). *The strength of self-acceptance: Theory, practice and research*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-6806-6

Bloom, S. L. (2013). *Creating sanctuary: Toward the evolution of sane societies* (revised ed.). Taylor and Francis.

Bozarth, J. D. (2013). *Person-centred therapy: A revolutionary paradigm*. PCCS Books.

Cuthbert, K., Irving-Bell, D., Stinson, L., & Tasler, N. (2021). Scholarship and impact [poster]. *National Teaching Repository*. https://doi.org/10.25416/edgehill.16602089.v2

Dietel, S. (2013). Emotionen als ein Quell pädagogischer Reflexion unter Gestaltungsanspruch. In B. Käpplinger, S. Robak, & S. Schmidt-Lauff (Eds.), *Engagement für die Erwachsenenbildung: Ethische Bezugnahmen und demokratische Verantwortung* (pp. 55–65). Springer Fachmedien. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-19116-4_6

Dougall, I., Weick, M., & Vasiljevic, M. (2021). Inside UK universities: Staff mental health and wellbeing during the coronavirus pandemic [preprint]. *PsyArXiv*. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/23axu

Ellis, A. (2013). The value of a human being. In M. E. Bernard (Ed.). *The strength of self-acceptance: Theory, practice and research* (pp. 65–72). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-6806-6_4

Garfield, S. (2018). Working out loud revisited. *Medium*. https://stangarfield.medium.com/working-out-loud-revisited-3c0c6c6b567f

Hadjisolomou, A., Mitsakis, F., & Gary, S. (2022). Too scared to go sick: Precarious academic work and "presenteeism culture" in the UK higher education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Work, Employment and Society*, *36*(3), 569–579. https://doi.org/10.1177/09500170211050501

Healey, M., Matthews, K. E., & Cook-Sather, A. (2020). *Writing about learning and teaching in higher education*. Elon University Center for Engaged Learning. https://doi.org/10.36284/celelon.oa3

Imad, M. (2021). Transcending adversity: Trauma-informed educational development. *To Improve the Academy: A Journal of Educational Development*, *39*(3). https://doi.org/10.3998/tia.17063888.0039.301

Jones, A., Martin-Lynch, P., Scutt, C., Strehlow, K., & Veitch, S. (2016). Being chimaera: A monstrous identity for SoTL academics. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 35(2), 217–228. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360. 2015.1087473

Joseph, S. (2014). Recognize your conditions of worth. *Psychology Today*. https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/what-doesnt-kill-us/201403/ recognize-your-conditions-worth

Kelchtermans, G. (2009). Who I am in how I teach is the message: Self-understanding, vulnerability and reflection. *Teachers and Teaching*, 15(2), 257–272. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600902875332

Kern, B., Mettetal, G., Dixson, M., & Morgan, R. K. (2015). The role of SoTL in the academy: Upon the 25th anniversary of Boyer's Scholarship Reconsidered. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 1–14. https:// doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v15i3.13623

Khattar, A., Jain, P. R., & Quadri, S. M. K. (2020). Effects of the disastrous pandemic COVID-19 on learning styles, activities and mental health of young Indian students—A machine learning approach. In *2020 4th International Conference on Intelligent Computing and Control Systems* (*ICICCS*) (pp. 1190–1195). IEEE. https://doi.org/10.1109/ICICCS48265.2020.9120955

Kim, A. S. N., Popovic, C., Farrugia, L., Saleh, S. A. F., Maheux-Pelletier, G., & Frake-Mistak, M. (2021). On nurturing the emergent SoTL researcher: Responding to challenges and opportunities. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 26(2), 163–175. https://doi.org/10.1080/136014 4X.2020.1842743

Macfarlane, B. (2016). Collegiality and performativity in a competitive academic culture. *Higher Education Review*, 48(2).

Maguire, C. & Cameron, J. (2021). *Thriving learners: Initial findings from Scottish HEIs* (*2021*). *Executive Summary*. The Mental Health Foundation. https:// www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHF-Thriving-Learners-Report-Executive-Summary.pdf

Martin, A., Tarnanen, M., & Tynjälä, P. (2021). Narratives of professional development in a teachers' creative writing group. *New Writing*, 18(4), 480–495. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790726.2021.1900274

Martinovic, D., McGinn, M. K., Scott, R. M., & Obradović-Ratković, S. (2022). Conceptualizing generous scholarship. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 10(1), 1. https://doi.org/10.14297/jpaap.v10i1.494

Morrish, L. (2019). Pressure vessels: The epidemic of poor mental health among higher education staff. *HEPI*, Occasional Paper 20. https://www.hepi. ac.uk/2019/05/23/pressure-vessels-the-epidemic-of-poor-mental-health-among-higher-education-staff/

Negretti, R., Persson, M., & Sjöberg-Hawke, C. (2022). Science stories: Researchers' experiences of writing science communication and the implications for training future scientists. *International Journal of Science Education, Part B*, 12(3), 203–220. https://doi.org/10.1080/21548455.2022.2060530

Richardson, L., & St. Pierre, E. A. (2005). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 959–978). Sage Publications Ltd.

Kalfa, S., Wilkinson, A., & Gollan, P. J. (2018). Playing the game: Academics have bought into the competition and become complicit in their exploitation. *Impact of Social Sciences, LSE*. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2018/07/16/playing-the-game-academics-have-bought-into-the-competition-and-become-complicit-in-their-exploitation/

Silva, S. (2024). How to identify cognitive distortions: Examples and meaning. *Psych Central*. https://psychcentral.com/lib/cognitive-distortions-negative-thinking#list-and-examples

Sipeki, I., Vissi, T., & Túri, I. (2022). The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of students and teaching staff. *Heliyon*, 8(4), e09185. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e09185

Tasler, N. (2012). My meme, your meme, everybody wants meme meme. *Nathalie Tasler*. https://nathalietasler.blog/2012/05/20/memes/

Tasler, N. (2022). SoTL development: A pragmatic approach. *Nathalie Tasler*. https://nathalietasler.blog/2022/11/06/sotl-development-a-pragmatic-approach/

Tasler, N. (2023). Tip: Covering a colleagues teaching last minute. And their PowerPoint doesn't make sense!. *Nathalie Tasler*. https://nathalietasler.blog/2023/04/28/tip-covering-a-colleagues-teaching-last-minute-and-their-powerpoint-doesnt-make-sense/

Tasler, N., & Dale, V. H. M. (2021). Learners, teachers and places: A conceptual framework for creative pedagogies. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 9(1), 1. https://doi.org/10.14297/jpaap.v9i1.450

UNESCO (2017). *Education for sustainable development goals: Learning objectives*. UNESCO. https://doi.org/10.54675/CGBA9153

Urbina-Garcia, A. (2020). What do we know about university academics' mental health? A systematic literature review. *Stress and Health, 36*(5), 563–585. https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2956

Warren, C. (2018). Professors eat their own young: How competition can stifle good science. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2018/jan/29/professors-eat-their-own-young-how-competition-can-stifle-good-science

Wilkins, P. (2000a). Unconditional positive regard reconsidered. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, *28*(1), 23–36. https://doi. org/10.1080/030698800109592

Zembylas, M. (2007). Emotional ecology: The intersection of emotional knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge in teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 23*(4), 355–367. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.12.002