

GETTING STARTED IN SOTL

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SoTL is a distinctive form of educational scholarship with an explicit strategic and transformational agenda that is directed within and across the disciplines in higher education settings. SoTL focuses on systematic, rigorous educational inquiry and dissemination for peer review.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) contributes to the quality of teaching and learning in higher education as well as a growing body of educational literature. Empirical SoTL research, supported by literature-informed, rigorous methodological inquiry, and peer-disseminated findings, provides a practical and complementary undergirding for research into learning and improvement in higher education. Conducting and disseminating SoTL research operates as a bridge between excellence in teaching and excellent research on teaching; those who engage in SoTL are stewards of their professions as both researcher and teacher (Shulman, 2000). The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, both in its programs and practice, provides a compatible way for higher education to support and engage in research, teaching, and innovation (Webb, 2020).

WHAT CAN WE DO

The aim of practice based SoTL is:

- To better understand and improve practice
- To disseminate practice in peer reviewed contexts within the diverse contexts of higher education.

In addition to curiosity about teaching and learning, SoTL is often focused on a diversity of contexts - institutional initiatives, curricular & pedagogical shifts, internal & external projects, such as graduate attributes or responding to changing accreditation.

When starting out in SoTL, you will want to consider where you want your inquiry to have an impact. Are you looking to problematize practice-based issues about:

- Organizational level: Issues pertaining to strategic development, processes, impacts, effectiveness, efficiencies, improvements (E.g., institutional, faculty-specific, and/or programme level)
- Program level: Issues pertaining to strategic development, implementation, impacts, effectiveness, efficiencies, improvements (e.g., learning preferences, effective group work, assessment)

“the scholarship of teaching and learning has been, and will continue to be, a transformative concept in higher education.”

(Hutchings, Huber, & Ciccone, 2011, p.45)

- Disciplinary context or Pedagogical level: Issues pertaining to professional accreditation, strategic development, processes, impacts, effectiveness, efficiencies, improvements (e.g., mechanical engineering, 1st year, large classes).

Once you have determined a strong question, then you select a research design that collects and analyzes data that best answers the question. Finally, dissemination in peer reviewed contexts could take many forms; micro, meso, macro, mega. This could include traditional scholarly outputs (research paper presentation at academic conference, grant funding application, published journal article) as well as more informal ones (institutional presentations, collaborations with colleagues, demonstrating significant impact in the field).

In order to make a difference in curriculum and pedagogy in higher education, SoTL can be helpful in building local capacity.

This capacity-building can include:

- Institutional support for SoTL projects, such as training programs, resource people, release time
- Funding resources. For example, seed funds for SoTL projects, support for dissemination or conferences
- Validation of SoTL, such as internal recognition, career advancement that recognizes SoTL.

“the mechanism through which the profession of teaching itself advances, through which teaching can be something other than a seat-of-the-pants operation.” (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999, p.14)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

SoTL is the systematic study of teaching and learning through empirical inquiry in context. It is driven by a research question, informed by literature, methodologically rigorous, and disseminated for peer review.

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NOTES

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