CONSTRAINTS TO ENGAGING IN SOTL

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Research has identified six key constraints to doing SoTL in higher education. These constraints have been clustered into three themes.

Joining the SoTL Community

All disciplines have their own communities. The theme of membership in SoTL is the most prominent theme, and it captured several of the constraints related to being part of a new field of study.

Shared definitions. The difference between scholarly teaching, SoTL, and SoTL Leadership was identified as a stumbling block (Hubball et al., 2015; Kanuka, 2011; Svinicki, 2012). While scholars understand the definition of rigorous scholarship within their disciplinary fields, the appreciation of rigor within SoTL research was unclear. This is especially true for those more familiar with quantitative research paradigms.

Shared language. The discourse and conventions of SoTL experts and educational scholars is frequently identified as a barrier to understanding the field of SoTL. The language of SoTL can be a barrier until scholars can make sense of the connotative, contextual meaning of the language. The entrance into a new field requires knowledge of a new language, literature, theories, and research paradigms. This constraint is connected to disciplinary conceptions of research; for example, highlighting the differentiation of "method versus methodology".

Shared culture. Ingrained disciplinary cultures often slow novice SoTL scholars' enculturation into SoTL and leave some people unable or unwilling to let go of specific disciplinary ways of thinking. Novice SoTL scholars frequently suggest that they would like to be able to do more SoTL research but feel constrained by their responsibilities to research or the expectations of promotion.

"STUDENTNESS"

The willingness to engage in a challenging learning experience can be extremely intimidating and potentially time consuming. Navigating the complexities of a new field, such as SoTL, requires adopting a mindset of curiosity and "studentness" (Cousin, 2012).

Wanting to engage and **Try something new**. Changing conceptions of research requires willing engagement by educational leaders in higher education contexts.Based on the multidisciplinary context of SoTL research, many novice practitioners are anxious about wading into an unfamiliar field where they are not confident. Finding discipline specific and useful additional resources presented two challenges: one, wading through the resources that are available to find personally relevant literature and two, moving outside the suggested resources.

> *"SoTL has troubled our identities, but has simultaneously led us to new understandings of ourselves. We see this unsettling of identity as inherent to the processes of engaging with SoTL and that normalizing it as such may be helpful to others."*
>
> **(Simmons et al, 2013, p.10)**

IMPOSTER SYNDROME

It is possible to spend very little time exploring teaching and learning before being required to teach courses in higher education. As a result, a lack of confidence inhibits many people from seeing themselves as educational leaders with a contribution to make. Not having a strong self-concept as a SoTL scholar confounds their confidence in doing SoTL. The challenge lies in recognizing that they have a contribution to make and then implementing that into practice.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Becoming active in SoTL requires both skills and dispositions. We can acquire the skills through training and practice, but the dispositions require significant shifts in the way that we think about those skills.

> *"As we move to do things better and do better things in SoTL -- in an effort to make a greater difference and increase our impact -- we move beyond our discipline and classroom."*
>
> **(McKinney, 2012, p.5)**

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Research supports three specific recommendations to build faculty development initiatives that mitigate the constraints and support the development of SoTL.

Institutional Support for SoTL. It is important to foster institutional cultures that predispose, enable, and reinforce educational leaders to actively engage in SoTL. This includes recognizing and validating SoTL with traditional institutional infrastructure such as recognition, promotion, and funding for SoTL research. It is a barrier to have this work as additional to professional responsibilities; therefore differentiated workloads, and institutional resources are exceptionally valuable to supporting SoTL.

Strategic Approaches to Faculty Development Programs in SoTL. Strategic approaches to faculty development in SoTL may be formal and informal. Formally, a professional development program for educational leaders will develop increased capacity for leading SoTL research with guidance into the language and culture of a new field. A specifically designed program with a multidisciplinary cohort can explicitly introduce SoTL conventions, research methodologies, and methods (Webb, Hubball, Clarke, & Ellis, 2020). Informal SoTL initiatives may include time to develop and sustain communities of practice in order to support flexible, multidisciplinary institutional cultures (Danielson, 2012; O'Brien, 2008).

Specific Support for SoTL Research. It is often taken for granted that those who do SoTL are excellent researchers. But this assumption misses the key and fundamental issue that they are engaging in scholarship in a new field, which may or may not connect with the field/discipline of their training. Strategies to specifically support SoTL research could include connecting novice educational leaders with SoTL mentors, engaging a librarian to assist participants with their literature reviews, or having educational experts modeling the different methods that could be used to approach a research question through different methodologies (Chick, 2018). As well, a workshop on epistemologies, ontologies, methodologies, and methods could be developed in order to support rigorous SoTL research design (Chick, 2104).

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