Getting Started in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

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Getting Started in SoTL

- What is SoTL?
- Why does it matter?
  - *To me?*
  - *To my students?*
  - *To others?*
- How do I get started in SoTL?
- How can I connect to other SoTL scholars?
- Where can I read more about it?
- Where can I publish my own SoTL work?
- What cautions are there about engaging in SoTL?

Description of SoTL

The chief aim of SoTL, through its lens on the processes of teaching and learning within and across courses, is to contribute to practitioners' understanding of these processes.

▫ **Scholarly teaching** makes use of the literature to improve practice
▫ **SoTL** uses empirical study to improve practice and makes the results public

History of SoTL

- 1990 – Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered*
- 2004 – The International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSoTL) formed (www.issotl.org)
- 2004 – In Canada, the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) "Advancing SoTL" as a 'pillar' (www.stlhe.ca)
- 2005 - STLHE SoTL Leadership Forum
- 2008 – STLHE SoTL Advisory Panel formed
- 2009 – Partnership between STLHE and ISSoTL
- 2010 – 2nd SoTL Leadership Forum
- 2010 – Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning launched (peer-reviewed, open access)
- 2010 – June 15 – Google "Scholarship of Teaching and Learning" = 76,200 hits
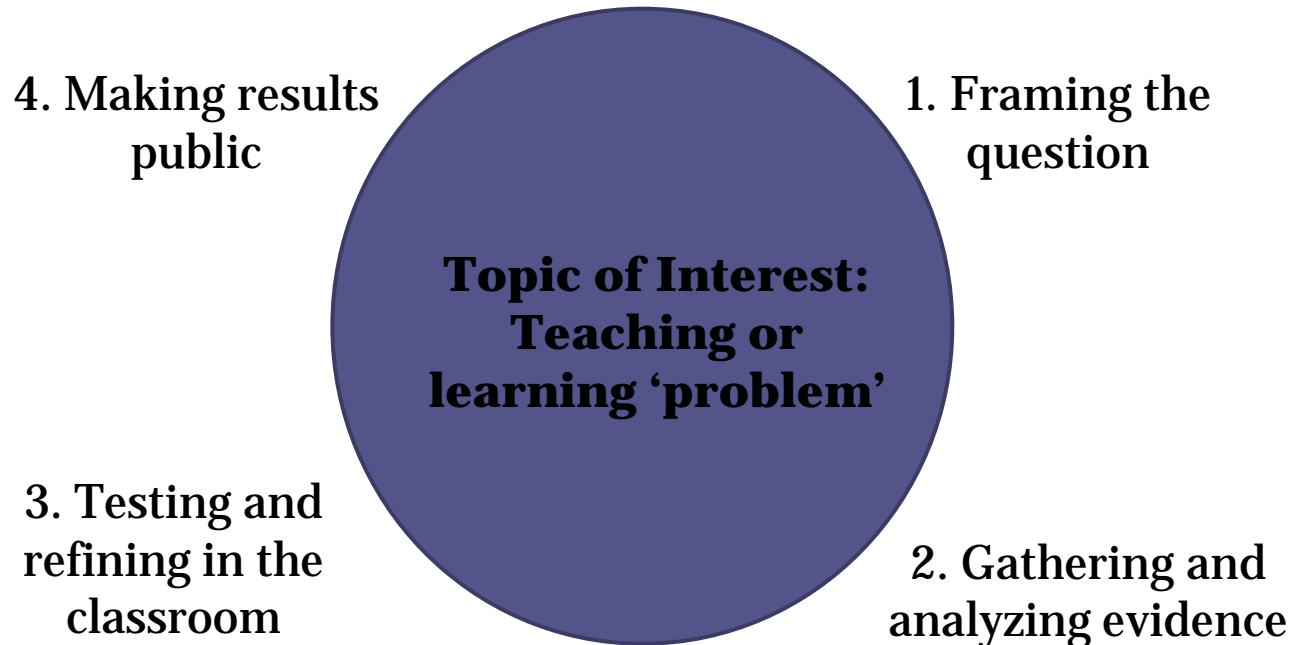
Scholarship Assessed

- Clear goals
- Adequate preparation
- Appropriate methods
- Significant results
- Effective presentation
- Reflective critique

(Glassick, Huber, Maeroff, 1997)

SoTL research

- "SoTL research provides a big tent with room enough for all different disciplines and interdisciplinary approaches." (Hubball & Clarke, cited in Fenton & Szala-Meneok, 2010)

- Quantitative/positive paradigms, ethnography, grounded theory, case study, narrative, phenomenology, phenomenography, hermeneutics, action research, mixed methods, curriculum design, etc.

Cycle of SoTL

4. Making results
public

1. Framing the
question

**Topic of Interest:
Teaching or
learning 'problem'**

3. Testing and
refining in the
classroom

2. Gathering and
analyzing evidence

Adapted from Fenton & Szala-Meneok, 2010; Huber & Hutchings, 2005

Topic of interest

- Begins with "animating force" – "a compelling idea, problem, concern, or hunch that causes a research question to come into being" (Fello, cited in Fenton & Szala-Meneok, 2009)

- What issues do students have with learning in your class/discipline?

Questions of Interest

- Are we asking the right questions?
  - What have others done to move from pockets of innovation to widespread programs - and what might we do in this regard?
  - If we know so much about student learning, why aren't students doing better?
  - What factors contribute to the gap between research and improved practice, and how can we address them (or support others to do so)?
- What messages do we want to send, and to whom, and about what?
- SoTL meta research
  - What studies might address useful questions?
  - Who might be involved in these studies?
  - What value might there be in such studies?
- Advocacy
  - What can be done to increase SoTL supports and funding?
  - How can we best advocate for SoTL's recognition as scholarship?
  - What's our intended outcome?

Framing the question

- **Write 20 questions related to your topic**

- **Examine the questions – what theme seems most prevalent or most compelling to you?**

- **Get feedback from a partner. Consider:**
  - Is the question specific enough? Well bounded?
  - Could data be collected to answer the question?
  - Revise the question – 25 words or less!

Gathering and Analyzing Evidence

- **SoTL -both qualitative and quantitative methods**
- **Quantitative**
  - ▫ **Hypothesis testing**
- **Qualitative**
  - ▫ **Theory building**
- **Common methods include**
  - ▫ **Surveys**
  - ▫ **Focus groups**
  - ▫ **Interviews**
  - ▫ **Student journals/e-portfolios**

Gathering and Analyzing Evidence

- What kinds of evidence will answer your question?
- Which methods of data collection fit with your skills and the resources available?
- What will be acceptable evidence in your discipline?

Implementing the Results

- **Implementing a change in your course is a process.**
  - Expect that the process may be unsettling – for both you and the students – course evaluations may drop, but can be supported by being explicit with students about what you are changing – and why
  - Keep notes about how the new process is going – and be prepared to revise for subsequent course offerings

Making Results Public

- Talk to your liaison librarian about possible venues
- What are some 'alternative' possibilities for going public?
- Consider various levels for greatest impact
  - Micro: individual capacity
  - Meso: department and faculty
  - Macro: institution
  - Mega: discipline and interdisciplinary, national and international impact

(Poole, 2009; Simmons, 2008; Simmons & Taylor, 2008, 2009; Weston, Berthiaume, Matsushita, Tovar, & Timmermans, 2009)

SoTL at the University of Waterloo

- **Micro**
  - ▫ Individual researchers and their classes
- **Meso**
  - ▫ Department-wide discussion and pursuit of SoTL
- **Macro**
  - ▫ Teaching-Based Research Group, grants, conference, SoTL support from CTE, language in P&T guidelines
- **Mega**
  - ▫ Presentations at discipline and SoTL conferences, (including OND), publications, involvement in national and international societies

Other Considerations: Ethics

- Before any data is collected, you must go through ethics
- Support for this is provided through my office and also research ethics
- You will need to consider respect for and confidentiality of participants – arm's length data collection
  - In your group, talk about what ethics questions you have

Other Considerations: Funding

- Is your question important beyond your course?
- What 'deliverables' are there that will benefit the wider community?
- Have you established that your work is different from what has already been done?

What do I need to know about

- **Connecting to other SoTL scholars?**
- **Finding relevant reading?**
- **Where to publish?**
- **Cautions about SoTL?**

Other resources

- http://www.issotl.org/ - International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning; includes SoTL tutorial
- www.sotl.ilstu.edu Kathleen McKinney's SoTL site at Illinois State
- http://academics.georgiasouthern.edu/ijsotl/index.htm International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
- http://www.cjsotl-rcacea.ca/ The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

SoTL Meta-view

- **Create infrastructure** (Poole, Taylor, & Thompson, 2007)
- **Tie to institutional goals** (Poole, Taylor, & Thompson, 2007)
- **Education and promotion** (Ehrmann, 2008)
- Teaching chairs linked to SoTL research
- Provide grants for SoTL research
- Provide opportunities for dissemination
- Support conversations and collaborations

Palmer's Model of Change

- Stage 1: "Isolated individuals make an inward decision."
- Stage 2: "Individuals begin to discover one another and form *communities of congruence.*"
- Stage 3: "Communities start *going public.*"
- Stage 4: "System of *alternative rewards* emerges to sustain the movement's vision and to put pressure…on the standard institutional reward system."

(Palmer, 1998, p. 166)

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