Introduction to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL)

A. Pre-Writing

1. Think of an aspect of teaching and learning that surprises, perplexes, or troubles you. Choose something that is consequential enough to be worth your time looking at it. Write it in the form of a question.

2. What have you already observed about this aspect of teaching and learning?

B. Background: SOTL and the Big Picture

As a “scholarly teacher,” you have looked at the literature on how to design a course and effectively assess students’ learning. What then is the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning?

Diagram adapted from https://my.vanderbilt.edu/sotl/understanding-sotl/why-sotl/

Ernest Boyer coined the term, “scholarship of teaching,” in his 1990 book, Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate. The concept had been used in many disciplines prior to Boyer’s work, but he placed it in a larger context and gave it a name.

Boyer (1990) proposed four areas of scholarship (pp. 15-25):

- **Discovery**: new and unique knowledge is generated
- **Integration**: connections are made among disciplines to understand a broader context
- **Application**: bridges the gap between worlds inside and outside the academy, centered in context of disciplinary understanding
- **Teaching**: bridges are built between the teacher’s understanding and students' learning; “When defined as scholarship, however, teaching both educates and entices future scholars (p. 23)” [This definition has been developed and refined since Boyer, 1990]
“What we urgently need today is a more inclusive view of what it means to be a scholar – a recognition that knowledge is acquired through research, through synthesis, through practice, and through teaching.” Various kinds of academic work (or, intellectual functions) interact dynamically and form an interdependent whole (pp. 24-25)

C. Definition of Scholarship of Teaching & Learning (SOTL)

- Inquiry to understand or improve (a) student learning in higher education and (b) the teaching approaches and practices that affect student learning
- Informed by relevant research on teaching and learning
- Conducted by members of the educational community from across campus drawing from their disciplinary expertise
- By gathering and analyzing relevant evidence from the learners in their own specific contexts
- Shared broadly to contribute to knowledge and practices in teaching and learning.

Nancy Chick SoTL Guide

Circle the key concepts you see in the definition above.

What was new or surprising for you in the definition?

Also see VIDEO: Scholarship of Teaching and Learning vs. Scholarly Teaching (8 min)

Presented by the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) & The Center for Engaged Learning at Elon University. SOTL Scholars Dan Bernstein, Mary Taylor Huber, Pat Hutchings, and Gary Poole compare Scholarly Teaching and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. This video was produced for ISSOTL Online 2013.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eedxoj1CPnk
D. 5 Principles of Good Practice in SOTL (Felten, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles of Good Practice in SoTL</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry focused on student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded in context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodologically sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducted in partnership with students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appropriately public</td>
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</tbody>
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E. Typical Components of a SOTL Project

1. Start with a question about student learning – what surprises, troubles, or perplexes you? A bottleneck, obstacle, learning that’s superficial, resistance, new kinds of knowledge or skills needed, a new pedagogical strategy, or new technology used. Consider the context and motivation for conducting research on this question. Hutchings (2000) framework for questions:

   **What works?** Questions that seek “evidence about the relative effectiveness of different [teaching] approaches.”

   **What is?** Questions that seek to describe, but not evaluate the effectiveness of, different teaching approaches. These are also questions that seek to describe how students learn.

   **Visions of the possible:** Questions related to goals for teaching and learning that have yet to be met or are new to the faculty member asking the questions.

   **Theory building:** Questions designed to build theoretical frameworks for SoTL similar to frameworks used in other disciplines.


Look back at page one. What kind of question did you ask?
2. Review **relevant literature** - Just like other research fields, it’s important to contextualize SoTL in the larger research picture. This is challenging because it is different from researching in your discipline where you have expertise. But it’s crucial to looking at teaching and learning from different angles and seeing how it relates to larger questions. See MacMillan, 2018.

   a. Consult with CTE or Gumberg Library on how to search
   b. Consider research in your discipline as well as related fields – related to the teaching/learning issue you have selected
   c. Look for calls for this kind of research, existing models, theories, potential replications, related issues researchers/disciplinary association have raised. Each field approaches it differently. See in Resources lists of disciplinary journals that publish SoTL.

What journals, conferences or websites do you already know about?

What might be your key search words for finding articles?

What are related topics? How might your specific question relate to larger issues in teaching and learning?
You will be wearing TWO hats: teacher & researcher

3. **As teacher** – write the learning goals you have for students. Plan the teaching/learning strategies. What will the teacher be doing? The students? Who else is involved (e.g., in clinical or community setting)? How will you assess student learning for a course grade?

4. **As researcher** – write the research questions and plan your methods for gathering and analyzing evidence of learning related to these questions. What theoretical framework will you use?

Look for the most natural ways integrated into normal teaching and learning activities? (This way you get the best student work = strongest evidence).

Conduct a quick mental inventory of the student learning data you already have at your fingertips, or can easily get (e.g., writing, presentations, exam results, skills tests, reflections, preceptor evaluations):
5. Involve your students.

   a. Institutional Review Board – Follow federal IRB guidelines for the use of human respondents if you plan to present research findings on student learning in presentations or publications. Good news: beginning in 2019, most SoTL studies will be exempt, but you need to follow a process for determining exempt status. See Duquesne University Human Subject Research Policies and Procedures. You have to do this BEFORE gathering the data.

   Questions? Check with David Delmonico, IRB Chair at Duquesne. For Recent changes to IRB: http://www.tinyurl/newruleppt

   b. It is valuable to teachers, learners and readers to engage some students in the research and presentation process.

6. Analyze and interpret the findings – in the light of other research and theories, your past experience, the larger context (Duquesne, disciplinary association initiatives, educational trends, societal needs).

7. Make your work public. Submit your findings to peer-reviewed venues. Check with editors ahead of time about the fit and format so that you don’t waste time. (Consider blogging first – as a way to begin making your ideas public for comment, e.g., CTE blog: https://flourishingacademic.wordpress.com/)

Who else would be interested in your research questions? Who are your potential readers and conference session participants?
Resources

Websites:

- SOTL guide Duquesne University https://guides.library.duq.edu/sotl
- Center for Engaged Learning, Elon University. http://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/. Provides documents and videos on SOTL.
- Georgetown Visible Knowledge Project. https://blogs.commons.georgetown.edu/vkp/
- International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning www.issotl.com
- The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Illinois State University http://sotl.illinoisstate.edu/
- Nancy Chick’s SoTL Guide https://nancychick.wordpress.com/sotl-guide/Includes A SoTL primer that lists top ten citations, and top ten short pieces.


McKinney, Kathleen. (2007). *Enhancing learning through the scholarship of teaching and learning: The challenges and joys of juggling*. Bolton, MA: Anker. This is a handbook on SOTL.

Nelson, C. (2003). Doing it: Examples of several of the different genres of the scholarship of teaching and learning. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching* 14 (2&3), 85-94. Groups SOTL into genres: e.g., reports on particular classes, reflection on teaching informed by SOTL, comparisons of courses or of student change over time, learning science, analyses of sets of prior studies.


Publication outlets
- Illinois State University provides links to journals by discipline that publish SOTL articles, as well as helpful organizations and programs by discipline.
- Illinois State has also shared a core list of SOTL journals.
- Vanderbilt University links core and disciplinary SOTL journals from their library resource guide.