Workshop: Getting Started in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Kathleen McKinney, Illinois State University
kmckinne@ilstu.edu
Goals

- Discuss definitions, examples, and functions of SoTL.
- Articulate strategies to integrate SoTL work into your professional life.
- Articulate a SoTL research question.
- Know where to look for literature and theory.
- Select possible research methods; consider ethical issues.
- Introduce ideas related to sharing SoTL.
- Introduce ideas related to having impact and documenting your SoTL work.
Definitions of SoTL

“problem posing about an issue of teaching or learning, study of the problem through methods appropriate to the disciplinary epistemologies, applications of results to practice, communication of results, self-reflection, and peer review” (Carnegie Foundation)

“systematic reflection/study on teaching and learning made public” (Illinois State University)
SoTL and Related Scholarship/Research/Concepts

- SoTL, assessment, and traditional educational research overlap but are not the same.

- Good teaching, scholarly teaching, and SoTL are related but not the same.
Characteristics of SoTL

- College level (but some K-12 as well)
- Discipline-based studies within an interdisciplinary movement (but growing cross-discipline studies)
- Focus on learning, sometimes teaching
- Conducted by faculty in the disciplines
Characteristics of SoTL, con’t.

- Local--your students (some multi-institutional)
- Methodological diversity
- Empirical; evidence-informed
- Must be made public/shared
- Usually requires IRB approval
Example SoTL Projects

- Examples from participants?
- Student perceptions about the laboratory session in chemistry
- Student learning and experiences in sociology senior research capstone
- Outcomes of civic engagement experiences
- Instructor and student immediacy behaviors, and achievement in a web-based writing class
Why Do SoTL? (Functions of SoTL)

Faculty...

- revitalizes faculty members
- brings in outside funding (though limited)
- adds publications and presentations to faculty accomplishments
- increases faculty credentials for internal and external teaching or scholarly awards
Why do SoTL?

Collaborative...

- creates new networks among faculty, staff, and students
- provides research opportunities for students
- provides opportunities for involvement in a national/international higher education initiative
- strengthens graduate student training (preparing future faculty)
Why do SoTL?

Learning and Institutional...

- demonstrates to job candidates that you value teaching
- helps with assessment; program review and accreditation
- strengthens budget requests
- helps change institutional culture
- improves reflection on teaching, teaching, and student learning
Integrating SoTL Work into Existing Practices, Work Load, Resources

- Attach SoTL work to campus priorities (e.g., general education reform; diversity initiatives; civic engagement...).
- Find internal pots of funds.
- Integrate SoTL with teaching, traditional research, & service.
- Use team work. Collaborate. Share expertise.
Integrating SoTL Work into Existing Practices, Work Load, Resources, con’t.

- Involve Students.
- Get Help; retrain.
- Look for resources in disciplinary associations.
- Apply results to improve learning.
- Use SoTL in annual review/P&T materials.
Where Do SoTL Questions Come From?

- Teaching-Learning ‘problems’ in your classroom or program.
- Reading extant SoTL or teaching-learning literature.
- From application or questioning of relevant theory.
- From reflections and conversations with others.
Types of Questions
(from Hutchings (2000))

- **What is** questions move us toward a picture of what the problem or issue or behavior looks like.

- **What works** questions engage us in finding evidence for the effectiveness of various strategies or interventions.

- **Visions of the possible** relate to questions about what could be.

- In developing **new conceptual frameworks**, we choose to answer questions that lead to new models and ways of understanding practice.
Getting Started on a SoTL Project-Worksheet- Part I

- List any activities in which you are currently engaged that constitute or could become SoTL work.

- Think about a teaching/learning issue or problem that you have. Briefly state that AS a question.

- What type of question is this (Hutchings scheme)?
Searching for Prior Literature for SoTL Projects

- Conducting a literature review requires using several different strategies. Participant suggestions?
- SoTL journals, education journals, & disciplinary journals are all relevant (traditional and online).
- Databases- no one database is best.
- Network at SoTL and TL conferences.
Getting Started on a SoTL Project-Worksheet- Part II

- Given your question, what types of information or artifacts do you already have that will help you to answer this question?

- What other types of information or artifacts or data will you need?
Theory Can Help Us Move Our Research Agenda Forward

- Read up on theories related to teaching and learning in higher education.

- Consider any models or theories in the extant SoTL literature on your topic specifically.

- Talk through your theoretical ideas out loud and with others.
Theory Can Help Us Move Our Research Agenda Forward

- Consider whether theoretical propositions and conceptual frameworks from your or a related discipline might help explain your teaching-learning problem.

- Draw out your model in diagram form such as a concept map to help you articulate implicit theories and refine them.

- Participant suggestions?
Strategies to Obtain Evidence/Data

- reflection and analysis then creating a product that presents this
- interviews and focus groups
- questionnaires
- content analysis of text or documents
- secondary analysis of existing data
- quasi-experiments
- observational research
- case studies
- other?
Ethical Issues and SoTL

- Human subjects + making public = IRB

- Informed consent, right to privacy, protection from harm
Getting Started on a SoTL Project-Worksheet- Part III

- Given your question and the information/data you need, what research strategies might you use to obtain this information and answer this question?

- What are some practical problems you might face in doing this study?

- What ethical issues should you consider in doing this study?
Making SoTL Public (Sharing)

Purposes of Sharing:

- To contribute to the body of SoTL knowledge
- To encourage additional applications of results by colleagues or students
- To strengthen annual review or tenure/promotion files
- To earn an award
Making SoTL Public (Sharing)

Audiences:
- Disciplinary peers; Other SoTL scholars; Colleagues in other departments or disciplines; Students; Accreditation Staff; Administrators; Community members or the Public

Mechanisms:
- Journal and newsletter articles; Presentations; Books; Chapters; Videos; Newsletters; Web pages; Blogs
Tips on Documenting SoTL Work

- Do high quality SoTL work and show how it meets standards of scholarship.
- Make SoTL public in respected outlets/ways.
- If appropriate, document SoTL as you would other scholarship in your field.
- “Educate” colleagues and administrators about SoTL work.
Tips on Documenting SoTL Work

- Show how SoTL work meets standards discussed for SoTL in the literature.

- Add a SoTL section to your teaching portfolio. List SoTL items on cv.

- Provide concrete evidence of making your work public.

- If form of documentation used is not peer reviewed, obtain peer review.
Getting Started on a SoTL Project-Worksheet- Part IV

- List the 1-3 main audiences for your SoTL project?

- Given those, how could you ‘represent’ your SoTL project to these audiences?

- List 1-2 conferences (disciplinary, teaching-learning, SoTL) where you could share your SoTL project.

- List 1-2 publication outlets (journals, newsletters, websites...) where you could make your SoTL project public.
The ultimate goal of SoTL is to improve learning.

Remember to think about, write about, and share implications of the results of your SoTL projects.

Apply what you learn to your own classes and other student learning opportunities.

Continue the loop and consider a follow-up SoTL study to any applications.

Keep in mind the limits re generalizability.
How Can We Impact Learning via SoTL?

- By making applications of own or others’ SoTL work in our classes or out-of-class learning situations.

- By making applications of own or others’ SoTL work at the program, department, college, or institutional levels.

- By making our SoTL work public to others

- By engaging in a SoTL research agenda and connecting with others doing similar work.

- By sharing our SoTL results with our students.

- By being a social change agent for the SoTL movement, locally and beyond.
Getting Started on a SoTL Project-Worksheet- Part V-Homework

- List several ideas related to the previous slide
  (e.g., How might you share results with students? How might SoTL results help with a program or department teaching-learning problem? How might you encourage/promote SoTL and its use on campus?)
Comments? Questions?

Thank you for your interest and contributions!