SoTL in Translation

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因材施教
குறுகு குறுகு அரவி, குறுகுக்கு வலகலாய
Melentur buluh biarlah daripada rebungnya
• Making SoTL more robust on a global level by expanding the types of explanatory evidence we use

• Building into SoTL that is to be shared with others (published?) the means of translation across contexts
• Critique of some aspects of SoTL and “provincializing” SoTL history
• Rejecting the notion of generalizability in favour of translation
• Seeking different cultural ways of knowing for constructing different approaches to SoTL
A critical incident: Clustering Post-it Note responses to a conceptual question about learning
Faculty workshops: “Evidence is from the USA, or the UK, and it does not apply here. Our students are different.” They felt the evidence did not generalise
How can these two different situations, in Neil Haigh’s terms, “prove relevant and beneficial for practitioners in other contexts”?

Neil Haigh (2012) “Sustaining and spreading the positive outcomes of SoTL projects; issues, insights and strategies” International Journal for Academic Development 17(1) 19-31
“To do your own scholarship of teaching and learning, you’ll typically do these four things:

• Ask questions about your own students’ learning
• Gather and analyze evidence to answer those questions
• Try out new insights about learning in your teaching
• Go public with what you find so your peers can review it, critique it, and build on it

Though it’s most commonly pursued in the classroom, you can also use SoTL in collaborative inquiry leading to the design, assessment, and improvement of academic programs.”

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“...some things work in some situations and not in others; so the trick is not to evaluate this and that intervention but to ask questions about what mechanisms are at work”

"...evidence-based critical reflection on practice aimed at improving practice"


“Work which begins in the individual’s classroom and arises from a desire to know more about one’s own practice, realizes a significant impact beyond the physical and virtual spaces where it starts.” Pat Hutchings, Mary Taylor Huber, Anthony Ciccone (2011) Scholarship of Teaching and Learning revisited: Institutional Integration and Impact Jossey-Bass
SoTL tends to treat the classroom as a self-enclosed instrumentalist system- teacher-curriculum (techniques) - students

THE REVERSE BLACK BOX
SoTL findings should not be assumed generalizable or transferable across settings, and teaching methods should not be viewed as isolated behaviours. They are social acts informed by cultural traditions that become most meaningful when described in terms of specific histories and larger social contexts.

Liz Grauerholz (2013) Fallacies of SoTL: Rethinking How We Conduct Our research” in Kathleen McKinney (Ed.) The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning In and Across the Disciplines. Indiana University Press
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Liz Grauerholz (2013) Fallacies of SoTL: Rethinking How We Conduct Our research” in Kathleen McKinney (Ed.) The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning In and Across the Disciplines. Indiana University Press
From a social constructionist perspective it is difficult to generalize because these “insights are founded in social interactions which are influenced by associated power relationships and have situational, historical, and cultural specificity.” Neil Haigh (2012) p22 ‘Sustaining and Spreading the Positive Outcomes of SoTL Projects: issues insights and strategies” International Journal for Academic Development. 17 (1) 19-31
Thick description

“…a thick description of a human behavior is one that explains not just the behavior, but its context as well, such that the behavior becomes meaningful to an outsider.”

Gilbert Ryle (1971) and Clifford Geertz (1973)
Moderate essentialism

Trowler’s idea of moderate essentialism

- A form of essentialism is necessary ‘for reasons of clarity’ and ‘for reasons of explanatory power’
- Strong essentialism suggests fixed and unchanging characteristics that have generative power
- Moderate essentialism is like Wittgenstein’s (1953) idea of family resemblances, where family members will share some, but not all, of the same features and characteristics, making them recognisable as a group.

Artist Yang Liu moved from China to Germany when she was 14 years old. “The fact is that each single illustration is my very personal experience in the past 13-17 years, and this work was made as a documentation of my own life,” she said.

https://creativemornings.com/talks/yang-liu/1
“…concepts such as the mind, reasoning, enquiry and objective knowledge are rarely, if at all, part of Chinese learning parlance (despite the recent importation of these concepts into Chinese societies from the West).

Similarly, the learning virtues of personal effort, endurance of hardship, perseverance, concentration, and humility are hardly discernible in iconic texts of the Western learning tradition despite their increased recognition in today’s education.”

"The Chinese believe in constant change, but with things always moving back to some prior state. They pay attention to a wide range of events; they search for relationships between things; and they think you can't understand the part without understanding the whole. Westerners live in a simpler, more deterministic world; they focus on salient objects or people instead of the larger picture; and they think they can control events because they know the rules that govern the behaviour of objects."

Peng Kaipeng, PhD Student
“Westerners have a strong interest in categorization, which helps them to know what rules to apply to the objects in question, and formal logic plays a role in problem solving. East Asians, in contrast, attend to objects in their broad context.”

“Americans are robustly lower in COL [Collectivism] than people of Chinese origin. In addition, both regional and country analyses show small differences between Americans and Western or Central Europeans, bolstering the assumption that there is a “Western” cultural frame. (28) “...need for multiple psychologies rather than a single general psychology”

“Eurocentric thought has always claimed to be universal and general”

“Western instructors often assume that their notion of the value of knowledge and how it can be conveyed and learnt has little to do with culture. [My findings and those in other research] suggest that culture influences all dimensions of learning”

Irene C.N. Ng (2007) “Teaching Business Studies to Far East Students in the UK” in David Palfreyman and dawn Lorraine McBride (eds.) *Learning and Teaching Across Cultures in Higher Education*. Palgrave Macmillan
American mothers labelled objects more frequently and consistently than did Japanese mothers, while Japanese mothers used objects to engage infants in social routines more often than did American mothers.

“Key to understanding knowledge management in the Arab world and China is recognizing the networked nature of these societies” p.97

SoTL as an Anglophone epistemology

Differing definitions of SoTL as influenced by geography, culture, and prevalence within the Anglophone research and practice communities; and limited access to publication

Maheux-Palletier, Genevieve; Rukholm, Vanessa; Groen, Jovan; and Vézina, Nancy (2017) “Nested within or Swallowed Up: Le dilemme des chercheurs francophone en pédagogie postsecondaire au Canada” The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning 8(2) Article 7
“The hegemony of western academic journals is so complete that the superiority ascribed to them has been somewhat internalized by periphery scholars themselves”

“First in the West, and then elsewhere”
Provincializing “SoTL”
“SoTL” history from its genesis in Boyer is frequently rehearsed
Has SoTL taken shape within a Western epistemology that isolates the object of research from its broader contexts, from its cultural determinants?
What is the signified for the signifier “SoTL”? 
Is this an example of Chakrabarty’s notion of western historicity where ideas are first generated in the West and are then spread to the rest of the world?
SoTL and the problem of generalizability

In education “...bare empiricism does not generalize”

If “theory does not guide your observations [you] might as well go into a gravel pit and count the pebbles and describe the colours. How odd it is that anyone should not see that observation must be for or against some view if it is to be of any service.” Charles Darwin
Contexts to consider
“How does poverty affect the way we see learners and SoTL?”

“How do conditions of rurality influence teaching and learning in higher education in Southern Africa?”

Maitseo Bolaane, University of Botswana
“How do conditions of material privilege influence teaching and learning in higher education?”
What does SoTL look like if we use Chinese metaphors and theories of education as part of the analysis?

Evidence that tells us not just what happens in the classroom, but how what happens in the classroom is constructed and situated – addressing Sue Clegg’s question about what mechanisms are at work.
Think aloud


“A caveat before I begin: I write from the perspective of philosophy within the United States of America and speak about philosophy and its research in this space...I expect the description will more easily fit some other contexts (e.g., other English-speaking Western contexts, like Canada), and will fit less for philosophy and its pedagogical research done differently and in different contexts.”

The article is also a critique of SoTL in relationship to philosophy and philosophy in relationship to SoTL
Broader range of scholarly explanatory evidence

Theory/principles

Translation rather than generalising

Discipline A

X

Discipline B
THICK DESCRIPTION

Translation rather than generalising

SoTL Project

Legible to others