

Summary of Workshop: SoTL in the Disciplines (SoTL-D)

(Facilitators: Wu Siew Mei and Adrian Michael Lee)

Questions guiding the workshop discussion and the points raised in response to them are summarised below:

1) *What is SoTL?*

These three definitions/descriptions of SoTL were used to clarify and guide the participants' conceptualisation of what SoTL might be.

“SoTL is integrating the experience of teaching with the scholarship of research. It is the ongoing and cumulative intellectual inquiry, through systematic observations and ongoing investigations, by faculty into the nature of learning and the impact of teaching upon it.”

Hutchings, P., and L. Shulman (1999) The scholarship of teaching and learning: New elaborations, new developments, *Change*, **31(5)**, 10-15.

“Though employed in different ways and to different degrees, the scholarship of teaching and learning entails basic but important principles...It means viewing the work of the classroom as a site for inquiry, asking and answering questions about students' learning in ways that can improve one's own classroom and also advance the larger profession of teaching.”

Huber, M., and P. Hutchings (2005) *The Advancement of Learning: Building the Teaching Commons*. p 1. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

“The scholarship of teaching and learning goes beyond scholarly teaching and involves systematic study of teaching and/or learning and the public sharing and review of such work through presentations, publications or performances.”

McKinney, K. (2007) *Enhancing Learning through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. p 10. San Francisco: Anker.

2) *How is SoTL conceptualised in your discipline?*

One participant raised the point that in her department (biology), SoTL work is being pushed towards educational research and that educational research approaches were recommended (for methodological reasons). Others suggested that SoTL questions can be framed by external issues (e.g. accreditation) or by how you do research in your discipline (methodologically). However, this is not necessarily negative as these disciplinary practices provide a kind of familiar entry point towards SoTL-D. A challenge raised is the lack of community of SoTL practitioners in individual departments.

3) *What characterises good SoTL in your discipline?*

Felten's characterisation of good SoTL work was presented:

- Inquiry focused on student learning
- Grounded in context
- Methodologically sound
- Conducted in partnership with students
- Appropriately public

Felten, P. (2013) Principles of good practice in SoTL. *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, **1(1)**: 121-125.

Participants raised these other points about good SoTL work:

- Needs to be hyperdisciplinary
 - Horizontal integration, needs to resonate with colleagues in the discipline
- Ethics can preclude certain mythologies within a given context
- Questions about Academic Development being a discipline

A query on why SoTL would improve learning was discussed. Two main reasons were suggested:

- Literature has given examples
- You believe it would work in your context

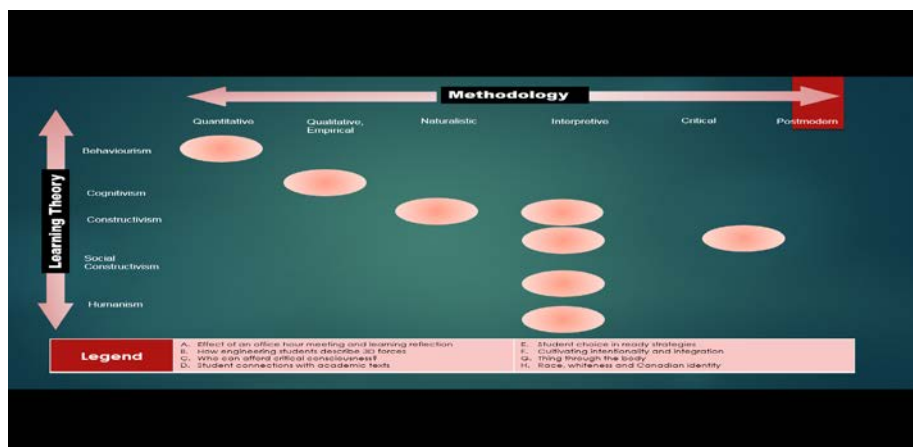
There was agreement that most SoTL addresses “What works?” and “What is?” questions rather than ‘visions of the possible’ and ‘theory building’ research.

Fallacies regarding SoTL such as these were thrown up for discussion:

- SoTL research should employ control groups
- SoTL studies conducted at a particular institution should be generalized to other (often very diverse) settings

On the discussion about replication vs control group, it was agreed that SoTL is contextual and that the onus would be on the “reader” to take a study and bring it into their own context. However, there is an obligation to make the work public so that others can benefit. The SoTL community is open to presentation of failures. Rather than being criticised about a failure (as happens in disciplinary research), one is asked what you are going to do next.

4) *For beginners, how do we frame SoTL work in terms of learning theories and methodologies in the conceptualisation stage?*



Miller-Young and Yeo (2015) provides a framework to guide the framing of SoTL inquiry in the context of learning theories and possible methodologies to adopt.

Miller-Young, J., and Yeo, M. (2015). Conceptualizing and communicating SoTL: A framework for the field, *Teaching and Learning Inquiry: The ISSOTL Journal*, **3(2)**: 37–53