
**Categories:** SoTL, Institutional Reform

**Summary**

The goal of this article is to describe a variety of measures that will potentially increase the impact of SoTL on teaching and learning and “institutional and disciplinary cultures.” In this regard, the author focuses on how SoTL can promote positive change on teaching and learning in the classroom and in a set of broader contexts. To do so, she posits six strategies that will expand the influence of SoTL in the process of systemic change.

The first strategy that the article offers involves expanding public awareness of SoTL and its extent literature. While practitioners of SoTL attend conferences and publish articles in the relevant journals, their work is often unknown by the broader higher educational community. In order to broaden awareness amongst the broader public, those involved in the field need to do a better job of sharing their work with their colleagues, college administrators, and students. They also need to take advantage of alternative media: newsletters, interviews with the media, web representations, and structured conversations that involve all members of the academic community, especially students. As examples, she suggests holding meetings of faculty, staff and students to discuss recent SoTL scholarship, and a video documentary program run at her institution which combines study of student learning and the dissemination of that study.

The second strategy advocated by the author is for more faculty to engage in a SoTL research agenda and to connect with others doing similar work. This strategy is meant to overcome the isolation within which many practitioners of SoTL operate in. This isolation exists within both individual institutions and in the broader academic community. As such, faculty interested in or currently conducting research in SoTL need to reach out to others at their institutions who are similarly engaged or to those at other institutions. As an example of how to accomplish this goal, the author notes the network established under the auspices of the Indiana University Communities of Inquiry.

Third, the article calls for future SoTL research that fills the gap in the extent literature. The author notes several areas of interest that have gone under investigated. Among these are co- and extra-curricular activities, explicit use of theory, and research on big/common questions (questions that examine cross-discipline, national, or institutional issues).

Next, the author posits the need to more fully engage student voices in the study of teaching and learning. Traditionally, students have served SoTL primarily as subjects of research. While this is both necessary and proper, the author argues that students can be engaged in far more innovative and complex ways: as co-researchers, lead or sole researchers, and as commentators/participants in course design, curriculum reform, and institutional change.
Fifth, the article calls for the application of SoTL research at the program, department, college, and institutional levels. In this regard, individual faculty, departments, and administrators need to use the available literature and data to inform decisions about assessment, evaluations, curriculum design, accreditation processes, program review, and faculty development.

Finally, the author argues that proponents of SoTL need to work more effectively at promoting it within their institutions and disciplines. This, argues the author, can be done in a number of ways. Most importantly, on the institutional level, those working in SoTL need to support fellow faculty who are also engaged in the field, push for greater resources, enmesh SoTL into professional development programs, and advocate the potential of SoTL for effectuating positive institutional reform.

Applications

As is often the case with articles discussing the scholarship of teaching and learning, this essay is not exactly what it would, at first glance, seem to be. One facet of this is that one of its stated objectives is to promote the application of SoTL in the academy, and yet it offers relatively little practical guidance on how to do just that. To some extent, the article amounts to a call for more SoTL research and greater recognition/use of it on a disciplinary and institutional level. Despite these limitations, the article offers some cogent ideas about how to employ SoTL in the broader effort to improve the academy. In particular, the article’s discussion of engaging students in the process of doing SoTL research and using it to improve teaching and learning seems important. One potential example of the applying this strategy would be to use student organizations or leadership to conduct peer research aimed at assess both current teaching and learning design and potential reforms. Another area discussed by the author that would seem to be easily employable is utilizing SoTL research to shape professional development sessions. Indeed, there are a wide array of potential topics discussed in the available literature that could be readily turned into development workshops. Finally, the author’s argument that future work in SoTL needs to address current lacunae would seem obvious. There are two such areas of weakness within the field, however, that deserve attention by those who are interested in SoTL work at U.D.C.: HBCUs and community colleges.

Citations of Interest


