SoTL Commons Conference

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SoTL Matters

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Find good practice in SoTL is methodologically sound. From its beginnings in the
United States, SoTL practitioners have struggled with methodological questions. Huber
and Interns (2002) made the case for “disciplinary styles” within the movement, recog-
nizing how different disciplines incline faculty toward different questions and distinct
ways of collecting and analyzing evidence of student learning. At the same time, social
science research methods become particularly influential, in no small part because these
approaches have been developed by experts to study learning and development. Authors
of helpful guides to SoTL practice, such as McKinney (2007), have identified a smorgas-
bord of methods that have been used extensively in the United States. However, they
have observed that the effectiveness of discipline-specific methods continue to resonate (e.g.,
Bass et al., 2006). Regardless of the methods employed, good practice in SoTL requires
the inclusion of a particular inquiry into student learning.

“mistakes & pitfalls” of “unpublishable work”
(2 SoTL journal editors)
- methods aren’t “good science”
- designs lack “empirical rigor”
- no “baseline or pre- and post-test”
- results aren’t “easy to replicate”

“Control groups & experimental
design are preferable”
- Maurer, “SoTL Reviewer: Looking for Articles Published” 2011
"Is It Significant? Basic Statistics"
- "...the main statistical analyses needed to conduct SoTL..."
- "...the tools and the know-how to assess teaching and learning..."

• Gurung & Schwartz 2009

➢ Only 10% of all ISSOTL sessions* 2004-2009 were about humanities-based SoTL projects
  • Chick 2009
  * panels, papers, posters, workshops, or plenaries

“Difference, Power, & Privilege: The Value of Humanities SoTL”
Chick, Nancy L.

“Square One: What Is Research?”
Poole, Gary
- SoTL In & Across the Disciplines, ed. Kathleen McKinney
  IUP, 2013.

“Controversies, Debates, & Tensions in SoTL”
my.vanderbilt.edu/sotl
SoTL Guide
  ➞ “Doing SoTL”
  ➞ “Planning the Project Design”

METHODOLOGY

- project design
- evidence of learning
  + how evidence is analyzed
“Every scholarly & professional field is defined by the questions it asks.”
—Pat Hutchings, Opening Lines (2000)

question asked  →  project design

SoTL Taxonomies


| “what works?” | seek “evidence about the relative effectiveness of different [teaching] approaches” |
| “what is?”   | seek to describe “what it looks like” |
| “what’s possible?” | related to goals for teaching & learning that have yet to be met or are new to the faculty member asking the questions |
| theory-building? | designed to build theoretical frameworks (“shaping thought about practice”) for SoTL, similar to those in disciplines |

"what works?" seek "evidence about the relative effectiveness of different [teaching] approaches"
“What works?”

intervention
cchange, compare

class(es)

pretest participant
group

pretest

pretest comparison
group

intervention

post-test

post-test


multiple choice vs.
mc + short-answer

→ more “cognitively active study behaviors” needed in learning science

(Stanger-Hall, CBE, 2012)

annotate small text for contradictory patterns

→ articulate ambiguity as valuable & meaningful textual moments

(Chick, Hassel, & Haynie, Pedagogy, 2009)

“What is?”

“A

visible evidence of student thinking & learning in response to learning activity

B

C

D

meaningful themes, patterns, or conclusions drawn from the above evidence

“What does it look like?”

“What happens when...?”

students

learning activity
As we analyzed how students processed their literary tasks, several patterns emerged:

1. specific approaches to & attitudes toward the discipline itself
2. beliefs & strategies centered on the site of interpretive authority & where the power to identify meaning is located (the author, the teacher, the reader, or the text)
3. misunderstandings of the processes of literary interpretation.

Chick, Hassel, & Rybak

writing behaviors & performances of students in open-admission U in transition from comp to later courses
• 3 case studies in different kinds of “rhetorical adaptability”
(NEC best essay of 2009)

Transfer Institutions, Transfer of Knowledge: The Development of Rhetorical Adaptability and Underprepared Writers

“what is?”
goals: meaning-making
- description
- understanding
- discovery
- hypothesis generating
design: evolving
- emergent
students: small
- purposeful
results: richly descriptive
  Z happened, and it looks like a, b, & c.

“what works?”
goals: prediction
- confirmation
- control
- fixing
- testing hypothesis
design: structured
- predetermined
students: large
- random
results: precise
  E led to f.

difficult to control in study -> “legs,” more applicable & usable by others


“dilemma of rigor or relevance”

“remain on the high ground ... solve relatively unimportant problems according to his standards of rigor, or ... descend to the swamp of important problems where he cannot be rigorous in any way he knows how to describe”

“...shift from an imperative of proof to an imperative of understanding

...from an imperative of generalizable simplicity to one of representing complexity well”


EVIDENCE

type of evidence collected
• samples of students’ work (papers, journals, projects, presentations, performances, recorded or online discussion)
• classroom assessment techniques (minute paper, muddiest pt, clicker data)
• evidence of how students think (think-alouds, process logs, reflective journals, concept maps)
• scores (exam, or single exam question)
• counts (online postings, office visits, # pages read/written, hours studied)
• institutional research data (grades, GPAs, admissions scores, retention rates)
• students’ reports of their learning (surveys, interviews, focus groups)

Caution!

“It is viable research if its methods fit the purpose.”

Poole, 2013, p. 149

question asked → evidence gathered
(type, #)

Analysis

type of analysis applied to evidence
Conflicts and Configurations in a Liminal Space: SoftL Scholars' Identity Development

Teaching & Learning Inquiry 12 (2013)

Samuel Thompson, Indiana University
Thank you!