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Good practice in SoTL is methodologically sound. From its beginnings in the United States, SoTL practitioners have struggled with methodological questions. Huber and Internal (2001) made the case for “disciplinary styles” within the movement, recognizing how different disciplines incline faculty toward different questions and distinct ways of gathering and analyzing evidence of student learning. At the same time, social science research methods have been particularly influential in the field 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 number of methods that have been used extensively in the United States. However, proponents of discipline-specific methods continue to resonate (e.g., Boud, 2000). Regardless of the methods employed, good practice in SoTL requires the level of a specific inquiry to student learning.

“mistakes & pitfalls” of “unpublishable work”

- 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”

- source: “SoTL Reviewers: Getting 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"

project design
  evidence of learning
  + how evidence is analyzed

METHODOLOGY
“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?”

intervention
change, compare

pretest
participant
grp

post-
test


multiple choice vs.
mc + short-answer

→ more “cognitively active study behaviors” needed in learning science (Stanger-Hall, CRC, 2012)

annotate small text for contradictory patterns

→ articulate ambiguity as valuable & meaningful textual moments (Chick, Hassel, & Haynie, Pedagogy, 2009)

“A what is?”

“What does it look like?”
“What happens when...?”

meaningful themes, patterns, or conclusions drawn from the above evidence
“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”
(KCTE best essay of 2009)

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

-> Holly Hassel and Jeanne Saint Goranson
New Press

“what is?”
- meaning-making
- description
- understanding
- discovery
- hypothesis generating

“what works?”
- prediction
- confirmation
- control
- fixing
- testing hypothesis

goals
- evolving
- emergent

students
- small
- purposeful

results
- richly descriptive
- Z happened, and it looks like a, b, & c.
- E led to f.
caution!

Lewis, Catherine, Perry, Rebecca, & Murata, Aki. (April 2006). "How should research contribute to instructional improvement?" Educational Researcher, 35(3). 3-14.

controlled trial, fidelity to original design, causal proof ≠ broad application & improvement
difficult to control in study -> "legs," more applicable if 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
observations about themes

analytical tools
Conflicts and Configurations in a Liminal Space: SoftL Scholars' Identity Development

Teaching & Learning Inquiry 12 (2013)

Samuel Thompson, Indiana University
Thank you!