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A SoTL Memoir

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Abstract

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Keywords

SoTL Memoir

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A SoTL Memoir: From a Florida Strip Mall to Bamboo to Einstein

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The Founding Editor of *IJ-SoTL* reflects on his journey to SoTL, his promulgation of it at Georgia Southern University, his founding of this journal, and his hopes for the future of the field.

I will take care that they suffer no hurt or damage.
(original Hippocratic Oath)

In 1985, in a classroom in a former movie theater in a strip mall in Naples, Florida, that served as the campus for a local branch of a community college, I experienced “pedagogical thrown-ness.”

There I was, working on my doctoral dissertation from the University of Pittsburgh, but with absolutely no guidance in how to teach students, or more precisely, how to help students learn. Looking back, it must have been assumed that by earning BA and MA degrees, and now nearing a PhD, being a good teacher was automatic or innate or too obvious to even mention. In all my academic years and at different universities, not one of my professors or advisors ever talked with me about pedagogy, andragogy, or whatever it was I was supposed to do in my work. Given that my degrees would be in theology and religious studies, teaching in a higher education setting was my most likely means of survival (if publishing poetry and mystical novels did not flourish).

What did I do? Probably what many of you who are readers of, or contributors to, *IJ-SoTL* did in your own version of thrown-ness into teaching, I started talking and seldom stopped. I was supposed to be the know-er and the students were the un-knowing. My job was to unload on them, to tell them what they ought to know using the same methods that my teachers and professors had used when I was in one of those student seats myself.

The process continued that way for years. Oh, I would encourage class discussion, have students work in small groups, and other things, but I was flying solo and without a guidance system. I really did want the students to learn the subjects we studied because I felt there were academic and personal benefits in such learning. But I really had little idea, beyond anecdotal stuff, that my teaching and their learning were connected. Something was missing, something big, but what was it? Something my exams and papers did not measure fully.

Continued years of pedagogical isolation in an academic wilderness pushed me into doing some random experimentations with my teaching and working with students. Some may have even been “successful” and some the students seemed to enjoy. I liked that since I sensed that if students enjoyed being students and learning about what I was teaching, they would learn more effectively and with more lasting results. But it was all assumption and hope and solitary reflection on the work the students did in the courses. I didn’t want to just keep talking through the coming decades and then retire, a pooped professor, aching to become a monk under a vow of silence.

What eventually happened was not an epic, numinous experience about teaching and learning, but a form of sustained love.

If you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you’ve always gotten.

(Schlechty)

I loved being in the classroom, even though when young, I was perhaps the shyest person I ever met. Still had a lot of that about me. But being with students was different. I loved it and wanted to do it well. Those experimentations continued over the years until I came to a semi-awakening: I was not applying to my teaching the same investigative methods and passion that I did to my scholarly work. And though the details are lost to my memory, I came across the whole attitude and methodology of what was called the “Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.”

As far as being a university professor goes, the years were good. Teaching and scholarship awards, grants, some publications, promotions, tenure. Outwardly, all was well. And then an opportunity opened up before me that changed the whole momentum of my work. I left one university where I was a tenured, full professor for work at another university where I would not have tenure and would be the director of the professional faculty development center, with limited teaching responsibilities.

It was a shift, not only in locations and job descriptions, but in attitude, procedures, and process. I was the person in charge of helping faculty learn how to teach well. Did that make me somewhat of an imposter? Here I was, experiencing once again being thrown into an academic situation where it seemed I had to learn to breathe underwater. What would I do this time?

SoTL! That was it. Learn about learning and not so much about teaching.

We think too much about effective methods of teaching and not enough about effective methods of learning.

(Carolus)

The years of rugged individualism in the classroom, of grasping for ways to help students learn, of never talking with colleagues about how I was teaching and with what results, were over. It was the dawning of the age of SoTL for me.

In time I did initiate SoTL stuff and liked what I was seeing and experiencing among the faculty. After several years another opportunity arose at Georgia Southern University, to become the director of its professional faculty development center. With me I brought the calm urgency of a person on a mission. I hoped to have the faculty at Georgia Southern eventually become a living model of the benefits of serious engagement in all aspects of SoTL.

Soon after I arrived in Statesboro amid the cotton fields, we (the administration, faculty, and I) began Faculty Learning Communities, including strictly for SoTL work, the *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (IJ-SoTL)*, an annual academic conference entitled the “SoTL Commons Conference,” and would add SoTL grants and awards, SoTL poster sessions, and, if I remember correctly, SoTL book groups. The stage was set for a large scale experiment about the value of SoTL for student learning outcomes across the disciplines and colleges, across all kinds of pedagogical practices and experiences. The initiative was called “SoTL at Georgia Southern.”

Who dares to teach must never cease to learn.

(Dana)

With the approval of academic affairs (my boss), *IJ-SoTL*, a peer-reviewed, international, online academic journal was developed. I wanted it to become a premier SoTL journal that would not only be a place for college teachers around the world to publish their research on student learning, but would also provide Georgia Southern faculty opportunities to submit articles, serve on the international editorial review board, and benefit from the articles that were selected for publication. I appreciate the administrative cooperation and support I received for founding *IJ-SoTL* and for supporting the whole spectrum covered by the various SoTL initiatives at Georgia Southern. Would the faculty want to become involved? There were the immediately passionate ones who joined with colleagues and who seemed to flourish in the collaborative, community-based work of SoTL. But what about all the others?

IJ-SoTL was important to me as a major step to introduce SoTL as a legitimate scholarly approach to what faculty were dedicating so much of their time to doing, teaching, and working with students. My impression over the different institutions and years was that faculty tend to think that they are doing good work in their teaching (scholarship confirms it), largely because they are so knowledgeable in their particular disciplines. Where have I come across that thinking before? How about me!

But there is a problem. It is not true. The most learned of professors can fall short of being good advocates and mentors for authentic student learning outcomes. Because we have traditionally not shared our teaching practices with colleagues, the assumption that all is well has largely gone unchallenged, even unknown. SoTL opens the classroom or online doors, literally and figuratively, so that we can benefit from each other’s failures and accomplishments without quite so much fear of derailed careers or criticism from others. SoTL is a radical approach to being a professor, a simple way to focus on what really matters: students in our care and their learning.

Although the original 5th century BC Hippocratic Oath does not actually contain the words, “Do no harm,” it does say that physicians should take care to not cause hurt or damage to their patients. That became a pivot point for me working with SoTL. My students were not patients, but they were people under my guidance and academic care. If I did my work poorly, was it not possible that I could cause them harm, could damage their desire to learn as well as their ability to do so? After all, I was a Doctor of Philosophy, of the “love of wisdom.” If I did not teach, and help

colleagues in their teaching, in ways that encouraged students to learn and provided them the contexts for that learning, I could be damaging the great goal of education: to learn how to learn.

The students would not physically die from my pedagogical malpractice, but it could stifle their imaginations and abilities to think critically and creatively. It had become clear that being a professor was a very big deal, a very big responsibility to present and future students, to perhaps generations of students, and how they might affect society as a whole. Wow. And no one back in my graduate schools thought to mention it, let alone teach me about teaching and learning in my disciplines? Pretty amazing.

Back to *IJ-SoTL*. It was fun and exciting to establish the best review board I could. We ended up with many scores of reviewers from over 30 countries and 6 continents (I never did find a reviewer down in Antarctica). I thank those reviewers for being willing to do all the work they did for the sake of SoTL and students’ learning. Impressive. There was help with establishing an online submission and review process that was important to have. A journal name was selected that reflected the global nature of SoTL. And I decided to have a logo or symbol for *IJ-SoTL*: bamboo (for the SoTL Commons Conference that began about the same time as *IJ-SoTL*, the symbol chosen was the nautilus shell).

Bamboo has a heritage of symbolism and mythology. It was selected as the original symbol for *IJ-SoTL* with the inaugural issue in 2007 based upon some of its characteristics that parallel the hopes I had for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning at Georgia Southern, and for *IJ-SoTL* in particular. Bamboo is fast growing, can be found in many and varied climates, including on marginal land, can persevere for long times under harsh conditions, is strong, aesthetically appealing, and can be used for construction. So too, SoTL: its growth potential is great among higher education faculty who use all sorts of differing pedagogical (andragogical) methods, including among those who have not reflected much on the direct consequences of those methods, and SoTL is itself an act of perseverance (especially when administrative or collegial support is low). But SoTL is based upon the power of authentic research and investigation that makes for a pedagogical aesthetic where student learning is the focus of the art and science of pedagogy, not an isolated view of teaching. Finally, SoTL provides foundational construction for the continuous process and growth in student learning outcomes.

With Review Board in place, an online system created for submissions, marketing conducted, and virtual bamboo on the journal’s website, we were ready to launch not only the journal, but the whole SoTL at Georgia Southern initiative. Those first years were, for me, a dynamic time, a wonderful time of working with enthusiastic faculty who seemed very hungry to both adopt an evidence-based approach to teaching and learning, but also to talk about student learning with their colleagues. One would think such discussions would be normative in departments and colleges, but that was not the case. It was a time of pedagogical and personal adventure, of growth, for many of us. Those early years were learning about learning in ways that were new for many, even transformative for some.

While I was immersed in the work of creating and implementing SoTL at Georgia Southern, and there was a vanguard of faculty willing and wanting to experiment in finding better ways to teach so as to foster student learning, I knew the majority of the faculty had yet to respond to the initiative. That was not surprising as research has indicated that most college faculty think of

themselves as good teachers. So if I thought I was already doing good work with my students, I may not be so responsive to a “movement” that talks about improving student learning. After all, wasn’t I busy enough already?

Would there be a tipping point for SoTL that would be possible to reach if we persevered in advocating for a campus immersion into the SoTL spirit and its practices? Clearly, there was some resistance from some faculty who disregarded the initiative, but our gradual growth, with the great virtue of enthusiasm that went with it, kept the whole process and the “SoTL faculty” involved. If I had to mention just one thing that motivated those faculty to continue to participate, it would be the the authentically collegial atmosphere that was generated. There had been an unrealized thirst for simply talking with colleagues, in and out of one’s discipline, about teaching and learning. I suspect that for many of the participating faculty they did not even know just how thirsty they had been until SoTL came along with its emphasis on opening discussions about their teaching.

As the years passed and the work of SoTL continued, a yearly rhythm developed, a kind of SoTL marathon through the seasons and activities. By the time I left Georgia Southern, we had not reached the tipping point I sought, at least I don’t think we did. By the five-year mark, we had the established SoTL cohort of those first years, plus those who were becoming touched by SoTL later along the way. For all of them, I am appreciative of their intense professionalism and personal, stimulating engagement. And now, here I am, writing an essay for the 15th anniversary issue of *IJ-SoTL*. It is so good to know that faculty are continuing the adventure year after year. .

INFORMATION, KNOWLEDGE, VIRTUES, AND WISDOM: IJ-SOTL’S CULTURAL CONTEXT

**Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?**

(T.S. Eliot)

Is teaching for student learning a science? A craft? An art? Philosophical alchemy? A gene you either have or don’t have? I understand the desire and approach to interpret teaching and learning as akin to a science that can be examined strictly through investigative, logical, and observable means. *IJ-SoTL* would not exist if such investigations could not be conducted.

However, *IJ-SoTL* was intended to reflect both the empirical measurements for how to best facilitate significant student learning, and the art, even beauty, of the pedagogical process and relationship between teacher and students. Back to antiquity and probably beyond, the art of teaching and learning, the liminal aspect of education itself, was well respected and valued in civilizations.

Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another.

(G.K. Chesterton)

The science and the art of teaching and learning are not mutually exclusive. A professor in the classroom whether teaching accounting, or astrophysics, or poetry can be both a scholar of pedagogy and an embodiment of the ancient, human heritage of being educational elders to generations of the tribe or people. In that sense pedagogy is like a sacred ritual. *IJ-SoTL* recognizes that not ALL of the wonder of human learning can be totally captured in experiments about learning. There is an aspect of it that remains elusive, fortunately, for it allows room for the “spirit” of the learning process to exist, and for the pedagogical “soul” of the professor to give a needed dimension to the more measurable aspects of SoTL. To say it another way, SoTL does not mean that teaching can be robotically effective by the neutral application of certain methodologies. It is people who are the teachers and learners, people who bring with them all the complexities of any human adventure, including learning. As T.S. Eliot says in the quote above, SoTL must not fall into the trap of mistaking information or facts for authentic knowledge. Even if I could memorize a great encyclopedia, I could still be a profoundly ignorant and foolish person. It is not the accumulation of facts that makes for knowledge, but being able to critically and creatively think about the patterns, implications, and meanings of that information. And even knowledge is not the end of the road. As with our forebearers, there is a desperate need for growth in wisdom so that our students are not just vehicles for facts and knowledge, but can be good, generational leaders. It is a need of every generation even if sometimes it goes unfulfilled.

I would also maintain that *IJ-SoTL* exists to enhance respect for the very virtues of human teaching and learning. Things like courage, or heart, being willing to learn that my teaching methods may not be as effective as I have assumed, and to change them according to the research of SoTL and the collegial attitude towards teaching that it engenders. Virtues like perseverance in experimentation and imagination about what I am doing to mentor students, a foundational love of knowledge about how best to teach, as well as what discipline to teach. My responsibility to not only “do no harm” or pedagogical injury to my students, but to do what actually is effective, even enjoyable, for the hard work of the learning process. The virtue of coming out of my closed door teaching, and opening it up to colleagues for both my learning from their comments, and their learning from what I do in the classroom. The virtue of a robust hope, a hope that is reflected in the very act of teaching and learning. Such hope is the marker for doing what we do. Thus, *IJ-SoTL* is a publication of academic and deeply human hope.

A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.

(Adams)

Aristotle said “All men by nature desire to know.” I hope so. What has been missing in higher education is the desire to know the ins and outs of the pedagogical process, and not simply conveying (“dumping”) loads of information into students and leaving it at that. Mission accomplished. On the contrary, those people involved with *IJ-SoTL* are not information-dumpers, but practitioners of raising questions among their students, and for themselves, about learning outcomes. Such questions are signs of growth, life.

A well-educated mind will always have more questions than answers.

(Keller)

Over its years, *IJ-SoTL* has continuously supported the creation of creative, pedagogical questions about so many varied aspects of being a professional (and wise) teacher of students. There are so many areas of teaching and learning that *IJ-SoTL* articles have addressed. A key is to keep things simple regarding a very complex subject, using any aspects of learning and the teacher-student relationship to impact the outcomes. The legendary founder of Daoism put it this way:

(The sage) is ready to use all situations and doesn't waste anything. This is called embodying the light.

(Lao-Tzu)

And perhaps the greatest human faculty to stimulate questions in students and ourselves is imagination. If I had a primal or foundational vision for beginning *IJ-SoTL*, it was to have an open, online journal that was itself an opening for faculty everywhere to apply their imaginations to their work with students, and to envision if the deep learning they wanted for their students was actually occurring.

My belief was that most college faculty want to do well in teaching students and I still believe that. But, as in my own story, many of us were seriously underprepared to begin our teaching careers (even if we did not realize it at the time). *IJ-SoTL* exists to "change our minds," to be a vehicle for helping us become more contemplative teachers, focused less upon what we do and more upon what the students are doing. In that sense, the journal was to bring faculty to experience pedagogical rites of passage into far-reaching examinations of what they were doing, and not doing. An individual and collegial revolution at colleges and universities around the world. No meager imagination, no small dreams.

When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bonds.

(Patanjali)

In addition, *IJ-SoTL* was to elevate both teaching itself as monumentally valuable, and research into the whole teaching and learning continuum as a valid form of scholarship and publication that should not be considered less than disciplinary research. We wanted SoTL to cease being a neglected orphan in higher education, and begin being as important as disciplinary research in the promotion and tenure process. There are some faculty, fully capable of doing disciplinary research, or who have done it, but whose intellectual passion lay with engaging in active and public scholarship about the full spectrum of students' learning. *IJ-SoTL* was to be a voice on their behalf through its integrity, quality of research and analysis, and the pedagogical impact it was to have.

Thus, *IJ-SoTL* was to be a virtual medium for real, experiential, repeatable results. A go-to journal for the best and latest research for faculty awakened, awakening, or wanting to begin awakening to a pedagogical revolution long overdue.

BARRIERS, SUCCESSES, SEEDS, AND HARVESTS

Success is not final; failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts.

(Churchill)

Hopes were sky high when *IJ-SoTL* entered the digital world of academic journals, including other journals for SoTL. But there was not total innocence and naivete in the office of the editor. There were some obvious barriers, some of which had already been overcome. I was very pleased that the Office of Academic Affairs was supportive of *IJ-SoTL* from the beginning and of my goal for Georgia Southern University becoming a regional, national, and international haven for SoTL, a kind of living laboratory for the scholarly exploration of teaching and learning, and the application by the faculty of the results of that research to their own classroom and online work. It could raise the status, reputations, and effectiveness of both the University and of SoTL itself.

Would enough faculty want to become involved with SoTL in some way? The answer was yes and no. What became clear was that my focus upon SoTL in my work in professional faculty development was both controversial and appreciated. I found that the early joiners were almost bursting at the seams to have conversations with colleagues about teaching and learning outcomes. It appeared that such discussions were not so common within the departments and colleges, which itself is fairly astounding (and I think can be generalized to most faculties anywhere). There was often a GREAT SILENCE about what most faculty did in the classroom and upon which they gave so much of their time.

Some faculty just seemed to want to keep things the way they had always been. Teaching was to be a private, personal preserve where research was not needed. Successful learning was easy to determine via exams, papers, projects, etc. What's the problem, Altany? And for some, maybe many, to seek to have SoTL rewarded as much as disciplinary research in decisions about faculty promotions and tenure, was a step too far. We were not swarmed by legions of the faculty desperate that SoTL had arrived at last!

But there was a surge of curiosity among a minority throng of faculty as word about SoTL started to spread. As already mentioned, there was a hidden and obvious hunger among some faculty to take their teaching so seriously that they wanted to learn about the research of others about it, and, for some, to do such research themselves. These faculty were the soul of SoTL at Georgia Southern. I have been away from the campus for some years now, but I suspect that there is a SoTL cohort (still growing, I hope) that helps invigorate and professionalize teaching at Georgia Southern.

Contemporaneously with the founding of *IJ-SoTL* was the starting of its sister SoTL anchor, the SoTL Commons Conference, that was held on campus in its first years before we moved it to Savannah, Georgia, where it continues each year. Other pieces of the SoTL complex included the establishment of Faculty Learn-

ing Communities on all sorts of pedagogical topics (and beyond), including an FLC on SoTL. Earlier I mentioned other components like SoTL Awards, SoTL poster sessions, speakers, involvement of Georgia Southern faculty as reviewers for SoTL, and as presenters at the SoTL conference, faculty grants for doing SoTL, etc. I may have forgotten all the ways we tried to create a pedagogical climate teeming with SoTL.

Perseverance is a great virtue and it held true with bringing SoTL to a large campus with almost 20,000 students in 2007, and many hundreds of faculty. SoTL would deeply touch some faculty, while leaving others untouched. That was not a surprise; unfortunate, but not unexpected.

It does not matter how slowly you go, as long as you do not stop.

(Confucius)

It might take a change in generations of faculty to more fully plant seeds in fertile soil. The harvest would not be immediately huge. Many of those faculty who were unmoved by SoTL were probably very good teachers, having learned the hard way (my story) by personal experimentations done in isolation. SoTL could change that and we needed to keep working, stay with the vision, and be patient. As Teresa of Avila said, "Patience obtains everything."

Something else I consider a success of the SoTL initiative was the intellectual enthusiasm that SoTL engendered in some faculty. They were finding doing SoTL work refreshing, not a path to burn-out.

Learning never exhausts the mind.

(Da Vinci)

For this learning was unique in some ways, or at least new to many. It was putting a laser light upon teaching with the purpose of shifting the focus from that teaching to student learning.

Learning is not the product of teaching. Learning is the product of the activity of learners.

(Holt)

Our SoTL-infused faculty were becoming learners about learning. I learned that teaching was so much more than talking (remember back at that community college classroom in an old movie theater in a strip mall?). There had been a good book entitled *Teaching With Your Mouth Shut*. Very nice. When students are allowed to talk out loud in various ways, their learning tends to become more enduring, enjoyable, and passionate. I was hopeful for growth in SoTL as the years passed and as *IJ-SoTL's* reputation grew. SoTL was alive at Georgia Southern; not universally triumphant, but surely alive. It had not taken the whole faculty by storm, but it had taken enough faculty to heart that we were gradually bringing teaching out into the open... where it should have been all along. John Newman said that "the only real sign of life is growth." At least for the moment, that was good enough.

I wanted to give a larger context for the founding and development of *IJ-SoTL* at Georgia Southern. Seed-sowing was the goal

with long-term harvests to come in due time. It might not have worked out nearly so well, or still be alive and flourishing after 15 years, if the journal were created in isolation instead of there being a formidable and possibly unique SoTL matrix of which it was a part. I need to say that I do not know the full status of that matrix in recent years after I left Georgia Southern. That *IJ-SoTL* and the SoTL Commons Conference are still the flagships for SoTL at Georgia Southern is a very good sign that the fire that is SoTL still burns at Georgia Southern. Whether it is a big or a more modest flame, I cannot say, but any flame is welcome and appreciated.

Before continuing, at this point I want to express gratitude not only for the thoughtful invitation to me to write an essay about *IJ-SoTL* and SoTL at Georgia Southern for this anniversary issue, but to those faculty over the last 8 years who have been the editors and doers in keeping *IJ-SoTL* on a positive trajectory in the world of SoTL-enlivened college teaching. And a thank you to all the many authors published in *IJ-SoTL* since 2007, and equally to all those authors whose work was not accepted for publication. Many manuscripts were received and the acceptance rate was relatively low. Thank you to the scores of reviewers from colleges and universities around the world for their professional diligence in reviewing all those manuscripts received and providing constructive feedback to all the authors, whether their works were accepted for publication or not. And thanks to the thousands of readers, near and far, including many for whom English is not their first language. Also, I thank you as you read this essay and this 15th Anniversary Issue of *IJ-SoTL*. The people, the journal, and the years mark an enormous amount of work and dedication. And I want to express appreciation to the Georgia Southern administrators and academic leaders who were supportive of the SoTL at Georgia Southern configuration that I presented to them. Without their approval and support, there would be no *IJ-SoTL* issue today and there would not have been the whole SoTL at Georgia Southern initiative.

Finally, and heartfully, I am grateful to all the Georgia Southern faculty, from 2006 to the present, who participated in that initiative in one or varied ways. You (and your students) have been the touchstone for the whole thing. Without your curiosity, collegiality, passion for information, knowledge and truths about teaching and learning, and commitment to academic professionalism, nothing would have come of SoTL at Georgia Southern. It would have died before it was born. Your love of teaching, learning, your discipline, and for your students, has been a continuous process of birth. You have been busy inculcating your students and Georgia Southern with lively learning. The words of Bob Dylan apply as you have been very busy being SoTL-born and bearing it to others: "He who isn't busy being born is busy dying." You are among the living for sure.

"THE PEDAGOGICAL IMPERATIVE"

Lee Shulman talks about the "pedagogical imperative" as an obligation "to inquire into the consequences of one's work with students..." Teaching is not it. Teaching is not enough. Some kinds of teaching can even harm students, drain their imaginations and desire to learn. SoTL work tells us that neither a teacher-centric, nor a student-centric approach brings the breakthrough. It is having a learning-centric strategy that breaks open and through

the walls that obstruct, rather than construct, actual and active learning. The teacher is most a teacher when not-teaching, but

I cannot teach anyone anything, I can only make them think.

(Socrates)

when creating pedagogical worlds where students have the responsibility to begin to learn how to learn.

Old Socrates reminds me of a student evaluation I received for a course long ago. The student said, "He made me think!" Sounds good. But in the context of the evaluation it was meant as a criticism, a complaint. I wonder how that student did in the rest of her or his education. Without learning to think, the student is rendered incapable of learning how to learn which is the real goal of the educational process. Formal education is a short period of time, while the rest of life can be long. For our students not to learn how to think for themselves is a great educational tragedy

The only person who is educated is the one who has learned how to learn . . . and to change.

(Rogers)

with consequences for the generations. It is breaking the educational version of the Hippocratic Oath.

A great paradox of SoTL at Georgia Southern and of *IJ-SoTL* itself is that a teacher is best when not teaching, but learning how to learn. SoTL raises a mirror before us where we can see that we must be learners in the pedagogical process as much as our students. For many of us that is radical stuff that goes to the root of being professors professing for authentic, enduring learning. The "pedagogical imperative" has arrived in significant measure because of SoTL. Just as a student is responsible for her or his own learning, faculty are responsible for their own learning about how best to help students succeed in their responsibilities to think and learn.

The SoTL at Georgia Southern initiative does not mean that the national axis for SoTL runs through Georgia Southern, or that *IJ-SoTL* is the only SoTL journal worth reading. Definitely not, and it is good thing that it is not. We want SoTL to be a de-centralized "pedagogical imperative" where faculty at all the colleges and universities have opportunities right at home to engage in both scholarly teaching, and SoTL. However, Georgia Southern's history of experience with SoTL can be a reference point, inspiration, and resource for those who are new or relatively new to SoTL. The real goal is SoTL at campuses all over the world. And discussion of it to our graduate students who will go on to academic careers.

I have been asked to speak about what bringing SoTL to the Georgia Southern campus meant to me. I have probably responded to that throughout this essay, but let me be more direct. Do a thought experiment with me for a moment. Imagine yourself back as a college student. What professor(s) inspired in you a passion for truth and learning, that helped you become intellectually, emotionally, and perhaps even spiritually, engaged in a deeply difficult, deeply enjoyable work, learning? Learning not only about something, but learning about learning. Who helped you become *homo viator*, a person on a quest beyond where you had ever been before.

What about that professor helped guide you to where you are today as you read this journal? Was it just how knowledgeable he or she was, or did the professor have a passionate wisdom about the work and art of learning that was too great to be contained by the act of teaching alone? Chances are that professor may have not even heard of SoTL, but was a hidden practitioner nonetheless, willingly accepting responsibility for the "pedagogical imperative."

Promoting SoTL gave me the hope that many more faculty would become pedagogical masters mentoring their students based upon concentrated research, application and experimentation, analysis of results, and going public (in a variety of ways) with what was learned.

In addition, it meant that each faculty member could be a highly professional professor, not only in disciplinary scholarship, but in SoTL as well to whatever extent that was desired. At the very least, the campus could be so semi-saturated with SoTL that its influence would transcend the boundaries of only those actually doing SoTL research. Longer term, I hoped that promotion and tenure decisions would fully recognize good SoTL work.

SoTL at Georgia Southern began at a moment in time, as did *IJ-SoTL*. Those moments have settled into memory, but they can still encourage faculty today at any college or university to go on the adventure that is SoTL. If I were looking back over my life, I don't think I would wish I had read more academic tomes in my discipline. I suspect I would think more of the students in my classes over the decades, the thousands of them, with whom I was academically, intellectually trusted to serve them well. Did I? Did I know what I was doing when I stood in front of them in classrooms, or communicated with them in online environments? Did I harm any of them because I, myself, was not exposed to the "pedagogical imperative" in my own days, especially in graduate schools? Then amid any regrets, I might remember SoTL and how it affected me. It would be something for which to be grateful.

I hope you are grateful for SoTL and being introduced to it. I also hope you will tell some of your colleagues about it. *IJ-SoTL* or the SoTL Commons Conference could be places to start.

Above all, SoTL has the potential to transform your approach to working with your students, even being motivation to be sure they are learning as deeply as you heartfully want them to learn. SoTL emerged from a love for teaching and learning, for working with students, and for being one of those professors who a generation from now will be remembered by your students as being knowledgeable, compassionate, and unusually wise about being a professor and about your students.

I now conclude this SoTL memoir with perhaps (I don't know for sure) the only poem ever written about SoTL. In the mists of memory, I was the publisher and editor of a small magazine of poetry in Minnesota. The mag was entitled *The Beggar's Bowl*. If I had then received the following poem, I probably would have sent back a rejection note to the author. Nevertheless, I dare to conclude this essay with it. Thank you for being part of a SoTL pilgrimage to the heart of learning.

A Professor & SoTL

**The professor wandered
among the working students
wondering if they were learning
what he was trying to teach,
if he was igniting imaginations
or dampening their curiosity.
He loved teaching.
He did love learning.
But was he doing right
by his students no matter
his intense desire to do so?
Doing no harm was not enough
for the courageous professor,
only critical, creative learning
would do with these minds.
He began asking new questions
of himself and his teaching,
questioning students' learning
and experimenting with measuring
outcomes and growth in knowledge.
The teacher became a student
of the students as he began a
pedagogical pilgrimage to a
familiar place where he had
never been before, a place
where learning defined teaching
and letting go of old habits
began a way to wisdom.**