November 2021

Letter from the Editors

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Recommended Citation

Pellegrino, Joe; Liston, Delores D.; DiGregorio, Nikki; and Gatch, Delena Bell (2021) "Letter from the Editors," *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*: Vol. 15: No. 2, Article 1. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.20429/ijstl.2021.150201>

Letter from the Editors

Abstract

How we measure success

This issue, volume 15, number 2, is certainly one of our most substantial. Over the past couple of volumes we've averaged about 85 pages per issue, and this one is clocking in at over 150. We'd like to say that we're just cleaning up a backlog of accepted manuscripts, but the truth is that we're receiving more and more quality submissions. Since the date of the initial submission included in this issue, we've received almost 200 manuscripts for consideration. And this uptick in quality is not going unnoticed. We've had over 46,000 articles downloaded since the publication of our last issue. We've averaged almost 104,000 articles downloaded every year for the past five years, and we're on pace this year to exceed that number. Although this means more work for our tireless editorial board, this is a happy problem to have. If you're interested in contributing to the field by joining our Editorial Board, you can complete a self-nomination form at this address: <https://forms.gle/4VT2hbcW33uLJEEh9>.

Since moving to our current platform, we've had almost 700,000 articles downloaded, with another 71,000 complete articles read online. We now have 595 articles online (this issue will make it 610). And while the math here doesn't account for the relative popularity of each article, a simple back-of-the-envelope calculation says that articles are downloaded an average of about 1,000 times in a decade.

We would like to be able to offer authors a more concrete and reliable methodology for determining the penetration and effectiveness of their work. We could be very precise, and offer some cross-discipline comparisons with metrics like the impact factor of an article or an entire journal, a citation analysis for an article, or a particular author's h-index. But while the SoTL field has continued to gain more practitioners and garner more attention from scholars, it still has difficulty articulating its own legitimacy, and therefore its justification for inclusion in the analytic tools that sit behind the metrics above. The Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), used by the Web of Science in determining the impact factor of a journal or a single article, indexes 1,645 journals on teaching and learning, yet fewer than a dozen of these are not specific to a particular discipline. Scopus (run by Elsevier) provides three separate metrics: CiteScore, SJR (SCImago Journal Rank) and SNIP (Source Normalized Impact per Paper). Its database contains over 22,000 journals, and 1,468 of those cover education. But, once again, no more than a dozen of these move beyond a single field. You get the point; until we speak with a unified voice about our own efficacy, we'll have a difficult time articulating such a thing as individuals. The intersection of this issue with the emerging standard we speak of below is certainly ripe for our analysis.

Relearning the Familiar

As we inch our way back to whatever our "new normal" will be in higher education, we're struck by the unfamiliarity of what used to be so familiar to us: teaching in a face-to-face setting, engaging in discussions (even though we're still masked), and having interactions with students that are unmediated by electronic means. Of course, we have new administrative minefields to negotiate, but the solidity of day-to-day dealings with students still sometimes seems insubstantial, like we're learning how to teach all over again. In many ways, this means relearning habits of mind that had gone stale from disuse, and hopefully imbuing them with techniques, best practices, and evidence gained from our experiences of the past two years.

The Emerging Standard

And while we'd like to think that we're lowering disciplinary barriers and offering material that can inform and improve your teaching no matter your home field, we've also been thinking about the progress of

SoTL as a discipline. Over the past few years, the balance of manuscripts we've received has shifted from the theoretical, the anecdotal, or the "think piece," to reports on studies or experiments, replete with checks on both their efficacy and their validity as a study. So while it's not completely accurate, it is at least fair to say that the accepted standards for publishing in this field have coalesced around a social science model, perhaps because it offers the best blend of evidence-based decision-making and praxes based on such an analysis.

We editors are a varied lot; our "home disciplines" are Education, Physics, Psychology, and Literature. So we feel like we can address a number of disciplinary categories as a team, and speak with some sense of authority when we address the work in our disparate fields. And all of us are familiar with the conventions of the evidence-based report that is becoming, if not the majority, at least the plurality of articles published in SoTL. But it's not a natural form for us all, and may not be a natural form for all of you (says the humanist of the group). In carving out its own disciplinary space, is SoTL disenfranchising great swaths of potential practitioners and authors because of the very way it creates and validates knowledge?

This isn't a question that any one person can answer. It may take us another decade or so to finally come to clarity about this. But we're interested in engaging in such a dialogue about the future of this enterprise within higher education. This is especially appropriate given our upcoming venture. In celebration of 15 years of publication at Georgia Southern University, we will be publishing a special issue, coming out in January of 2022. In this issue practitioners, theoreticians, and some of the leading lights in the field, all associated with both the University and this journal, will look back on the past decade and a half to reflect on the current state of the discipline and how far we've come in those 15 years. From there, we hope to continue to help shape the future of the field for at least the next 15 years, and we'll get back to that with our regular issue in May of 2022.

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