Reviewer Essay: Exemplary Dissemination: Sowing Seed in IJ-SoTL

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Abstract
Excerpt: As a member of the International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning editorial board, I have the privilege of reviewing articles that make a significant contribution to the SoTL literature, and more importantly, to practice towards improving teaching and learning. I also occasionally see articles that could fall into that category, but fall short. For this 5th anniversary issue, members of the editorial board were asked to write 500 words on what characterizes...

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Exemplary Dissemination: Sowing Seed in IJ-SoTL

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As a member of the International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning editorial board, I have the privilege of reviewing articles that make a significant contribution to the SoTL literature, and more importantly, to practice towards improving teaching and learning. I also occasionally see articles that could fall into that category, but fall short. For this 5th anniversary issue, members of the editorial board were asked to write 500 words on what characterizes an exemplary IJ-SoTL article. I have purposefully used an agricultural metaphor: As SoTL scholars, we reap what we sow.

Don’t Write in a SoTL Silo

The papers I have read tended to examine implementing a particular practice in a single course. While they do explore the literature related to the topic, the literature review is often limited to the researcher’s disciplinary context. I agree with Weimer (2008) about the importance of connecting to literature outside your discipline as a way of expanding the potential audience for your work. It is also good form to refer to work published in previous editions of the same journal—it shows you are connected to the particular audience and can be a good way of starting collaborations. A tangential recommendation: If you already have published on work done in your disciplinary context, consider collaborating with other departments to show the wider applicability of your results.

Fewer articles explore the literature related to the particular methodology being used. Methodological connections, including a self-critique in the form of the limitations of the approach chosen, not only strengthen the article but also make it more useful to other researchers. This is an area of potential future growth for SoTL literature.

Leave Space Between the Rows

As a qualitative researcher I appreciate descriptive narrative. At the same time, I get bogged down reading excessive detail. Try this exercise: Take a paragraph and see if you can cut out half without losing the meaning. If you can, then do. The essence of your ideas will stand stronger as a result. You may also find that you have a second paper hidden in the first; as the American Society for Engineering Education’s (2004) paper advises, “If more than one theme continually emerges, write more than one paper” (p. 20).

Trimming is also about removing jargon that may not be understood by a diverse SoTL audience. While there may well be a disciplinary pedagogy (Shulman, 2005) in your writing, your audience will appreciate it if you remove context-specific jargon (Poole, 2009). Keep it simple.
Taking it to Market

Many of the articles that come in for review have well conceptualized results. While there is ongoing debate as to whether the work of SoTL is to develop educational theory (Prosser & Trigwell, 2007), conceptualized results, in the form of a graphic, model, or metaphor, make for stronger papers. Take the time to stand back for a meta-view towards enriching the presentation of results and recommendations.

Happy planting - and I look forward to reading your article!

References


