60-Second SoTL

Episode 68 – Navigating SoTL Alongside Discipline-Based Research

Transcript

(Music)

0:10

Jessie L. Moore:
How do academics decide whether—and how—to engage in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, especially when time is limited and institutional reward structures still privilege disciplinary research? That's the focus of this week's 60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning. I'm Jessie Moore.

(Music)

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In "Navigating SoTL: Identity, Time and Transformation in Academic Decision-Making," Christo Bisschoff, Dane Coetzee, Jacobus Johannes Oosthuizen, Cornelia Schreck, Alretha Du Plessis, and Samantha Kahts-Kramer present a qualitative, context-sensitive study from South Africa that explores how lecturers in Human Movement Sciences navigate SoTL alongside discipline-based research. Their article appears in *SoTL in the South*, an open-access journal.

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The authors are Human Movement Sciences scholars in South Africa. Noting that the scholarship of teaching and learning can be perceived as time-intensive and outside recognized field-specific priorities, their collaboration was guided by the question: In what ways might SoTL be integrated into their teaching and research practices?

Methodologically, the authors used Participatory Action Learning and Action Research—PALAR—within a community of practice made up of six lecturers from different Human Movement Sciences disciplines. Guided by Wood's Figure Eight Model, the group worked as an Action Learning Set, prioritizing relationship-building before research activity. The authors participated in collective inquiry, co-analysis, and planning during three day-long PALAR workshops, spaced across the academic year to align with workload cycles, and a 60- to 90-minute focus group used for reflective consolidation and member checking.

Using democratic dialogue, participants explored questions about academic identity, time, and the feasibility of SoTL. The authors collaboratively analyzed four transcripts from their interactions and followed an iterative thematic analysis process, beginning with inductive coding and followed by deductive analysis aligned with the PALAR guiding question about how the authors might integrate SoTL alongside discipline-specific research. Throughout, the authors treated outcome, process, catalytic, and democratic validity as embedded principles rather than a final evaluative step.

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From this process, three interconnected themes emerged, which the authors visualize through a compass metaphor.

First, professional identity. Participants described SoTL engagement along a spectrum—ranging from keeping SoTL at the margins to deliberately blending SoTL with disciplinary inquiry to embracing SoTL as a central research focus. These choices were shaped by promotion criteria, performance agreements, and research rating systems, highlighting that identity work around SoTL is deeply institutional as well as personal.

Second, time to SoTL. Time isn't just about scarcity of time, but also about timing within career paths and the time demands of some methods. Many participants recognized they were already engaging in SoTL-informed practice but lacked time to write it up. Through collective reflection, they began to reframe time as negotiable—exploring alternative methodologies and aligning SoTL activity with academic workload rhythms.

Third, SoTL transformation through collaboration. Working within the community of practice shifted SoTL from an individual burden to a shared, sustainable endeavor. Collaboration reduced isolation, distributed effort, and created space for reflection, helping participants reconceptualize SoTL as both scholarly and developmental work.

4:02

The takeaway? SoTL engagement is an ongoing act of navigation. When approached through collaborative, flexible, and context-aware structures, SoTL can become a meaningful and sustainable form of scholarship—especially within the Global South higher education contexts.

To learn more about this study, visit our show notes for a link to the open access article.

(Music)

4:28

Jessie Moore:
Join us for our next episode of 60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning for another snapshot of recent scholarship of teaching and learning. Learn more about the Center at www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org.

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