Documenting the Experiences of Faculty Participants in a University Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Seminar

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Abstract
The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) has a rich history of demonstrating the importance of faculty studying their own teaching. One institution sought to better understand the impacts a SoTL seminar had on its campus since 2015. This qualitative research describes the lasting impact a SoTL seminar had on its participants and their institution. Thirty-three faculty who participated in SoTL were surveyed regarding their experiences as members of a university-supported SoTL seminar. The findings revealed a three-point faculty learning cycle that included: SoTL support, faculty experimentation and risk-taking, and assessment and feedback. Moreover, SoTL support had dimensions that included a sense of faculty connection, accountability, career development, and support for university-wide assessment. This article concludes with ideas for future research and a discussion of the importance of documenting university programs to support faculty and student learning.

Keywords
Scholarship of Teaching and Learning; SoTL seminars; faculty learning cycles; faculty development; faculty support

Introduction

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) in higher education gained increasing attention in the early 1990s with the work of Ernst Boyer. Boyer's emphasis on the scholarship of teaching and learning reshaped the conversation in academia, encouraging faculty to view their teaching as a vital component of their scholarly identity (McKinney, 2007). Regardless of the starting point of SoTL research, the central theme of SoTL is viewing teaching and student learning as important and valued research while also recognizing the varied forms in which faculty contribute to

scholarship. Central to SoTL is viewing courses (in-person or online) as opportunities to investigate critical questions to advance learning, student understanding, and the practice of teaching.

SoTL research has the potential to demonstrate faculty as skilled in content knowledge of their discipline and pedagogical knowledge to present and facilitate learning. Moreover, by disseminating SoTL research, faculty are making their work public for others to review, critique, and build upon. Dissemination is critical to advancing the profession by integrating innovative learning approaches in the ever-changing landscape of higher education.

When undertaking an examination of SoTL research, one will find the majority of research centers on teaching and learning strategies (Fanghanel et al., 2015; How, 2020). For example, Kiener et al. (2015) investigated how using experiential learning increased students' value and comfort in learning research methodology. A mixed methods approach was used to study twelve students in a graduate research methods course. This study found students had a significantly higher value of research at the end of the semester, and that students progressed through four stages of understanding research including outsider, pre-novice, novice, and apprentice.

Rossow (2022) studied the use of Zoom-based oral exams as an alternative to traditional exams with twelve undergraduate exercise physiology students. Throughout the course, oral exams were used instead of written exams. The oral exams were graded by the researcher and an external expert. Students rated their experiences with the oral exams as positive and believed they had better retention. Furthermore, the outside expert assessed the student answers as accurate and well-developed. These studies demonstrate how faculty viewed their courses as research opportunities and implemented designs to test new strategies to improve student learning.

Another category of SoTL research emphasizes building institutional capacity. Marquis et al. (2014) investigated the use of international collaborative writing groups to build capacity for SoTL identity development. The authors found the writing groups provided mentoring and leadership, the creation of community, diversity of perspectives, and experiential learning and professional skill development, which helped foster SoTL scholar identity development. Marquis et al. (2014) also concluded future research should focus on the impact SoTL has on student learning.

In another study conducted by Marquis (2015), 2,330 faculty who participated in SoTL programing were surveyed on the perceived benefits and challenges of engaging in those programs. Perceived benefits included: positive impact on scholarly output, development of new teaching and learning research interests, and greater connections to faculty. Challenges included: limited resources and time to engage in research, and the lack of recognition of scholarship as part of their job duties or competing against disciplinary responsibilities.

Maurer et al. (2010) describe one institution's development of a campus-wide SoTL learning community. The case study described how the learning community evolved over four years and its impact on teaching, scholarly outcomes, and member reflections. Over the four-year span, its members produced thirty SoTL presentations and initiated collaborations between members who were not in the learning community. These studies emphasized the impact SoTL programing can have on individual faculty and in building stronger campus communities.

How (2020) conducted a systematic review of SoTL research in higher education and examined 181 articles from 2014–2019. Five themes emerged from the review including: conceptualizing

and framing SoTL; SoTL methodologies and approaches; teaching and learning strategies; applied SoTL research; and institutional support for SoTL. Moreover, How (2020) stated there was a need for more synthesis between conceptual and applied SoTL research. From this point of view, future SoTL research should go beyond a theoretical perspective and emphasize the impact SoTL research has on students, faculty, and higher education.

Although there is an increasing SoTL research base that indicates a positive impact on student learning, there is a need to examine how SoTL efforts have impacted colleges and universities. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine qualitatively the potential impacts of a SoTL faculty seminar. The specific research questions were: *What happens when faculty at a private midwestern university participate in a SoTL program? How, if at all, are participants integrating the principles of SoTL into their teaching?*

Methods

A qualitative methodology was chosen to address the research questions. Specifically, a qualitative case study was performed on a university Scholarship of Teaching and Learning community. Gaining a deeper understanding of a phenomenon from an individual or group perspective is an essential component of qualitative approach. A case study allowed for an in-depth exploration of this single group. It was believed that findings from this single case could provide useful information for those involved with or interested in the outcomes of participation in related groups (such as Scholarship of Teaching and Learning communities at other universities).

SoTL Seminar

Since 2005, the institution has offered the SoTL seminar to faculty in their second year (administration believed faculty would benefit more from the experience after being at the institution for one year), and two different individuals have led the seminar. Each spring faculty are invited to join the seminar, which starts in the fall semester. Historically, eight to fifteen people volunteer to participate each year. There is no compensation or release time offered to participants, and faculty are expected to remain in the seminar for two semesters. Faculty can remain in the seminar as long as they find it beneficial. Faculty meet ten times over the course of the academic year for hour-long sessions. Part-time faculty are welcome to participate, and meetings are conducted using video technology to better meet the needs of the participants. Each seminar is a mix of discussion of SoTL case studies, development of participant projects, and examination of key principles of teaching and learning (e.g., threshold concepts, student understanding, incorporating student voice). In order to accommodate the varied faculty teaching schedules, two to three separate SoTL seminar groups are offered each year. Once initial groups are formed, an attempt is made to keep the membership the same to increase cohesion and continuity.

Participants

Thirty-three educators at a small midwestern American university who had previously participated in (since 2015) or were currently participating in (fall 2021 and spring 2022) a SoTL seminar were invited to participate. Of these, seventeen completed an initial survey, nine completed a follow-up survey, and ten participated in a focus group. As this was a qualitative case study, no power analysis was needed to determine the recommended number of participants, and there was no target

number of participants. To obtain the most robust sample possible, all participants who agreed to participate in our study were included. All researchers were also SoTL participants: One researcher was the seminar leader, three of the four researchers completed the surveys, and two researchers led the focus group. None of the researchers participated as subjects in the focus groups. Including the researchers' responses in the survey data provided a more robust sample and diversity of responses. All survey and focus group responses were anonymous. The study was approved by the institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB #21-98), and all participants provided implied consent.

In the first survey, demographic questions were asked to help describe faculty who participated in the seminar. Not all participants completed all demographic questions. Participant characteristics can be seen in Tables 1–5.

Table 1

Subject Characteristics: Years in Academia

	$\geq$ 11 Years	6-10 Years	0-5 Years
n	6	4	1

Table 2

Subject Characteristics: Tenure Status

	Tenured	Tenure-Track	Non-Tenure Track	Other
n	2	7	1	1

Table 3

Subject Characteristics: Primary Teaching Responsibilities

	Lecture Courses	Laboratory	Clinical	Hybrid (lecture / lab or clinical)
n	11	1	4	2

Table 4

Subject Characteristics: Primary Mode of Teaching

	On-Campus	Online
n	7	4

Table 5

Subject Characteristics: Population Taught

	On-Campus	Online
n	5	6

Data Collection

Previous and current SoTL participants were identified through the personal records of the SoTL leader (MK). These faculty were emailed information about the study and asked if they would like to participate. They were told they would be asked to complete surveys and participate in a focus group. Upon enrollment, faculty were asked to complete an initial survey. In the initial survey, questions related to the purpose of the study were asked (see Table 6 in Data Analysis section). As previously stated, the purpose of this study was to qualitatively examine the impact of a SoTL faculty seminar. The specific research questions were: *What happens when faculty at a private midwestern university participate in a SoTL program? How, if at all, are participants integrating the principles of SoTL into their teaching?*

Researchers examined the data from this initial survey and created six open-ended questions for the follow-up survey (see Table 7 in Data Analysis section). The follow-up survey was emailed to all research participants. All surveys were administered via Qualtrics. Following survey administration, researchers gained further insight into participants' responses with a culminating focus group (Table 8 in Data Analysis section). The focus group was conducted on Zoom by two of the researchers. It was recorded with auto-transcription, which anonymously transcribed the participants' speech. Only time-stamps were assigned to speech. No names or identifying details of the participants were recorded. The focus group lasted approximately one hour.

Data Analysis

Responses to both surveys and the focus group transcript were hand-coded and analyzed for major themes. Thematic analysis was utilized with an inductive approach. Codes and themes can be found in Table 9. No *a priori* themes were assigned. Codes and themes were derived solely from the data as it presented itself. To optimize interpretation, data was first coded independently by two researchers. All researchers collaboratively determined themes that guided the progression to the next round of data collection. Final reflection on themes led to the development of a model incorporating the elements of SoTL participation and their impact on faculty learning cycles. The evolution of the themes and codes underlying them are further explained below.

Table 6

Initial Survey Questions

Initial Survey Questions
1. Briefly, please describe what drew you to participate in SoTL.   2. Was your SoTL experience as you expected? Why or why not?

> 3. How do you feel your teaching was influenced by participation in SoTL?
> 4. As an educator and scholar, what attribute(s) have you developed as a result of your participation in SoTL?
> 5. In what other areas of academic life has SoTL influenced you? How?
> 6. How did SoTL influence how you create assessments in your courses (if it did influence this)?
> 7. What do you believe is important to consider when creating a meaningful assignment to assess student learning? Why?
> 8. How would you categorize your SoTL project?
> 9. How would you categorize your SoTL project?: Other (describe)
> 10. Select your school or college.
> 11. Select your contract type.
> 12. How long have you been in academia?
> 13. What type of courses do you teach (select all that apply)?
> 14. What format do you primarily teach?
> 15. What level of students do you primarily teach?

Table 7

Follow-Up Survey Questions

Follow-Up Survey Questions
1. Describe an assessment that you have improved through the years and describe how it captures student understanding and voice.
2. Consider a course module you created or a single class session you taught. What specific indicators would tell you it was created and/or taught well?
3. Many of the responses to the first set of questions discussed how being part of a collaborative, interdisciplinary group was empowering to take risks and try new strategies in the classroom. Please describe how this was true or not true for you.
4. How has your SoTL work played a part in further applying Maryville's ALE* principles?
5. What would your ideal SoTL experience look like?
6. Describe what you think about as you plan a course you are teaching for the first time. Has your participation in SoTL affected your approach, and if so, how?

ALE stands for "Active Learning Ecosystem," an important initiative at the university studied.

Table 8

Focus Group Questions / Structure

Focus Group Questions / Structure
1. In your own words, define SoTL.
2. Many of the responses to the first set of questions discussed how being part of a collaborative, interdisciplinary group was empowering to take risks and try new strategies in the classroom. Please describe how this was true or not true for you.
3. Why do you think some individuals could and some could not pinpoint how SoTL had impacted their teaching and student learning? For example, some people mentioned

something like "I cannot think of any, but I am sure it has." Others mentioned it did not have an impact but did not explain why. Finally, others were able to give clear examples.
4. Consider a course module you created or a single class session you taught. What specific indicators would tell you it was created and/or taught well? (Think about probing participants to think about describing real versus perceived student learning.)
5. If there is time ask: Describe an assessment that you have improved through the years and describe how it captures student understanding and voice.

Themes	Codes
Faculty SoTL Support	• Connection and accountability • Support for teaching, career development, and programmatic/university-wide assessment
Faculty Experimentation and Risk-Taking	• Comfortable trying new ideas in the classroom • Unique risk-taking
Faculty Assessment and Feedback	• Cycle of reflective practice • Broadening teaching scope • Use of feedback • Learning from other faculty

For the initial survey, two researchers analyzed the participants' responses from questions 1–5 and independently arrived at a total of fourteen codes. Where noted in parentheses, researcher 2 provided further depth to researcher 1's codes:
- Personal and professional growth
- Student growth
- Support, guidance, structure
- Tenure (and scholarship) requirements
- Learning about and deeper appreciation for SoTL
- Deeper appreciation for research
- Learning about teaching
- Personal/group research project
- Peer interaction (collaboration and sense of belonging, interdisciplinary)
- Evaluate and improve teaching practice
- Student centered/student voice
- Risk-taking (creative and inquisitive)
- Mindful/thoughtful (reflective and purposeful)
- University cultural shift

The most commonly encountered codes were peer interaction (collaboration and sense of belonging) with 27 occurrences, evaluate and improve teaching practice with 22 occurrences, and learning about teaching/SoTL (18 occurrences). Additionally, participant responses to question 2 (Was your SoTL experience as you expected? Why or why not?) were coded as the following: 1) as expected, 2) not as expected, or 3) resulted in evolution of faculty thinking.

Based on the most commonly encountered codes from the initial survey, questions in the follow-up survey asked participants to further describe SoTL's collaborative atmosphere, SoTL's impact (if any) on the university's culture of active learning, and SoTL's impact (if any) on instructor approaches to teaching. All participant responses were coded based on positive impact, no impact, or indeterminate. In general, most responses coded as positive; one out of ten respondents noted a lack of understanding of their project on the part of their colleagues. Several other codes found in the initial survey were repeated here in greater detail: interdisciplinary interaction, supportive collaboration, risk-taking, learning about teaching, reflection, and student-centered pedagogy. From the follow-up survey, the researchers identified two major themes: a supportive community (nurturing, multi-disciplinary, structured, and safe) and reflective learning process (for both faculty and students).

Questions in the focus group asked participants to reflect further on the collaborative aspect of SoTL, to discuss whether SoTL is part of an ingrained culture at the university, and to describe the potential impact of SoTL on their teaching. Commonly found codes included connection and accountability; support for teaching, career development, and programmatic/university-wide assessment; comfort with trying out new ideas in the classroom; and a cycle of reflective practice that centered around broadening teaching scope and learning from other faculty. From these codes, the researchers identified three primary themes (described further below.)

Findings

A thematic analysis of the data collected was used to answer the following research questions: What happens when faculty at a private midwestern university participate in a SoTL program? How, if at all, are participants integrating the principles of SoTL into their teaching?

Data analysis revealed three overarching themes: Assessment and Feedback, Experimentation and Risk-Taking, and SoTL Support. SoTL Support included four subthemes: Connections, Accountability, University Assessment, and Career Development. Each of the themes are interrelated. Through a synthesis of the major themes, the data analysis led to the development of a faculty learning cycle. The following narrative describes the impact of SoTL as related to each of the major themes.

Faculty SoTL Support

A major theme identified by this study was the support experienced by faculty members who participated in SoTL. This support was multifaceted and included a sense of connection and accountability, as well as support for teaching, career development, and programmatic/university-wide assessment.

Connections

Faculty who participated in SoTL reported experiencing an increased feeling of connection with their colleagues and the university. A sense of connection in the workplace is a key predictor of faculty engagement, which in turn is a predictor of faculty and student success (Maslach, 2011). Repeatedly throughout this study, participants described a sense of belonging: "It felt like you were a part of something" (focus group participant). This sense of connection was interdisciplinary, extending beyond departments, and even to the university as a whole, underscoring the importance of focusing on connection in smaller workgroups to promote success across an institution.

In addition to a strengthened sense of community, multiple faculty stated they felt comfortable participating in SoTL, describing it as a "safe place to think aloud about ideas" (focus group participant). One faculty member contrasted their SoTL experience to other university working environments:

> Working with the right group of people is key I think: I have been fortunate to be part of a group that truly enjoys talking and learning about teaching, without egos getting in the way. Everyone is very kind and encouraging, and I never feel like an outsider or an imposter (unlike in some other university settings). My responses are always met with thoughtful dialogue; no one is ever dismissive (survey respondent).

Importantly, this sense of increased community and connection extended beyond full-time faculty to include adjunct faculty. "As adjunct faculty, I wanted to interact with both full-time faculty and other adjunct faculty, exchanging thoughts and ideas of how to make my own teaching more meaningful for the students." It is well-established that a significant number of adjunct faculty feel a sense of disconnection from the institutions at which they teach (Dailey-Hebert et al., 2014) and that this lack of connection can adversely affect student outcomes (Pyram, 2018). For institutions seeking to improve contingent faculty engagement, participation in a SoTL seminar could be a worthwhile starting point.

Accountability

One natural outcome of strengthened connections was a heightened sense of accountability. Accountability via deadlines and scheduled meetings is a simple, effective way to promote faculty success. Without the structure of SoTL, "I don't think that conversation would have happened because we wouldn't have found a moment to have it" (focus group participant). One faculty member mentioned how SoTL helped them scaffold their work:

> I'm a person that likes to complete things, so [SoTL] gave me a deadline for getting the next step done. I think if I hadn't come in every month I might have taken longer to complete it. That accountability factor is huge (survey respondent).

Faculty also noted the benefit of regular, sustained participation in a working group. While SoTL can add to already overloaded schedules, one participant noted, "I think a major benefit [of SoTL] is that it makes me reflect on my classes and teaching and learning every 3 weeks and not just at the end or beginning of the semester." While isolated professional development events can undoubtedly have lasting impact (Ha, 2015), the longer-term commitment of SoTL provides a consistent "platform to be intentional about the work" (survey respondent).

There were exceptions to this finding: Some faculty believed they would have benefitted from even more structure and deadlines. For example, one survey respondent explained, "I expected a more structured experience because of exposure to SoTL at a different institution where presentation of research was required as part of SoTL participation." Considering this finding, it may be useful to discuss goals and expectations early on in faculty SoTL seminars. Doing so may help tailor the SoTL experience to the needs of individual participants.

Career Development Support

This study revealed that participation in SoTL supports faculty career development in numerous ways, from providing networking opportunities to creating avenues toward scholarly presentations and publications. While multiple faculty reported their initial reason for participating in SoTL was to fulfill promotion and tenure requirements, several respondents shared that their SoTL experience evolved into something more meaningful: "I don't quite remember what I expected, but, honestly I think I didn't expect to like it quite as much as I do. I definitely didn't expect to make the great connections that I feel like I've made" (survey respondent).

Not surprisingly, participants also reported both an increased familiarity and interest in learning about qualitative research literature and methods: "I now regularly read the education literature, something I only did sporadically before. I am now much more well-versed in methodology, data analysis, and frameworks for studying student learning" (survey respondent). Some instructors have also incorporated their new knowledge and skills into their teaching and mentoring: "I've learned about qualitative research and I've been able to share this knowledge with my [graduate] students when they are doing research" (survey respondent).

Interestingly, one faculty member described how presenting their work to an interdisciplinary group of colleagues helped them explain their research in a more meaningful way:

> I had to explain the work that I was going to do to people who are outside of my own specialty area, which was really valuable in putting something together a lay person can read and understand. It takes you away from the jargon and the acronyms, and you gain confidence in the fact that the work really has good, true meaning for you and for the work that you can want to continue to do (focus group response).

Finally, SoTL supported faculty throughout the entire scholarly publication process, from guidance for applying for IRB approval to informal presentations of intermediate findings. Notably, it was commonplace for SoTL leadership to encourage participants to disseminate their findings to a larger audience and many either presented or published their results in peer-reviewed venues.

Support for Programmatic and University-Wide Assessment

When probed about how SoTL influenced other areas of academic life, participants revealed that SoTL support extends beyond the classroom to encompass both programmatic and university-wide assessment efforts. One survey respondent reported an increase in the amount of time they spend considering "program outcomes and Maryville University of St. Louis outcomes." Another respondent noted that SoTL expanded and informed how they thought about assessment: "It enabled me to take a broader view and tie assessments to the university and program expectations." While this shift in mindset appears to be in early stages, according to one faculty member, "SoTL

has the potential to be a bigger part of our assessment strategy. I would like to use it to demonstrate our reflective, effective teaching in addition to student work and outcomes" (survey respondent).

Faculty Experimentation and Risk-Taking

Changing how one teaches is extremely difficult (Henderson et al., 2011). There are multiple barriers to pedagogical evolution, including lack of support, time, and training (Brownell & Tanner, 2012). Several faculty members shared how the support they experienced through SoTL directly contributed to their feeling of comfortability with experimentation and risk-taking in the classroom (see the Faculty Learning Cycle, Figure 1). As one respondent succinctly stated, SoTL helped them feel "okay about being imperfect." Another participant described their experience:

> My participation in SoTL has provided me a supportive space for me to try several new things in my classroom in the last semester. I have learned about teaching techniques, tried out the techniques, and then have a group of supportive colleagues who help me talk through the outcomes of my innovation.

In the focus group conversations, one SoTL participant shared the following perspective of how collaborating with colleagues helped them generate ideas and then take risks with their own teaching:

> Someone else was studying, changing up their tests and doing it more collaboratively, and I thought, well, heck, let me try that. So just hearing someone do a study on that made me think, well I'm going to try it once and see how the students do, and then afterwards they had an opportunity to collaborate and decide if they wanted to change their answers. And there was a lot of learning that happened in that process. And actually, no student was convinced to change a correct answer to an incorrect answer which was interesting. I thought that would probably happen, and it didn't (focus group participant).

Sometimes, faculty experimentation took an unexpected turn. In one instance, a SoTL participant decided to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles into activities in their data analytics course, a subject not necessarily associated with DEI considerations. This faculty member shifted the focus from traditional data analysis to asking students to consider how their decisions could potentially impact underrepresented populations:

> How are you thinking about [DEI principles] from [the perspective of] data bias? And how is that impacting people? Because if you're not really looking at the data, you're making decisions that could impact people of color, certain segments, certain groups. And so think about it more from that perspective, not just whether you're getting the wrong answer (focus group response).

This kind of risk-taking was a novel experience for the faculty member:

> There are things that I would not have felt comfortable before discussing in class [at my other school], those harder discussions about the impact on different groups and populations…. So it's definitely out of my comfort zone, but it is so nice…. But we didn't really have those discussions [at my previous institution], even in our humanities and social sciences and other areas. Here we're encouraged to go out of our way to do that (focus group response).

Faculty Assessment and Feedback

For highly effective practitioners, a cycle of reflective practice is embedded in their daily routine. A veteran instructor described the impact of such a process on their work since joining the university.

> Okay, so it's interesting I've been in SoTL for over 20 years. However, I've only been here for two years. I'm an engineer and, as others have mentioned I'm not trained in education. My experience here, I think it's very different than the work that I did the 20 years prior. The emphasis, I think really more or less has been a huge transition for me. As I've mentioned looking at my rubrics and how I've changed my courses, my rubrics also kind of have taken into account how I'm going to measure those. At this institution, I think for me it was one of the biggest takeaways again, hearing from other people because it's not just about the content…. Yes, and I mean I did that back at my old university as well, too. But, it was more than the very traditional learning perspective. Right. You have an intervention. Did it work or not? But not from what is it doing to become like a digital citizen? And a community member, and giving back to the community at large. That is probably been my biggest transition of really thinking about it from that perspective (focus group participant).

As seen from their comments, they took an approach they were comfortable using and broadened the scope to consider learning beyond the content standards.

A greater understanding of the usefulness and practicalities of designing meaningful assessments and collecting feedback from students following experimentation was another reported benefit of SoTL participation. For example, in the initial survey, a participant reported that an attribute developed as a result of participation in SoTL was "the ability to recognize the need for continuous assessment and possible change." In the same survey, another participant shared, "SoTL has better prepared me for my work in assessment in a university task force," suggesting SoTL contributed to an increased appreciation of the benefits of assessment.

In the focus group, a participant described how feedback from students inspired her to offer an individual project option when assigning group projects. She specifically connected this idea to her SoTL participation, stating, "I think it's a reflection on…. SoTL's impact and being able to be assertive enough to change your class." SoTL inspired her to collect feedback while also giving her the confidence to act on this feedback.

In another example from the focus group, a participant described how her main project while in SoTL was to come up with a program evaluation to collect feedback from the students at the end of her program. The participant described how SoTL helped her "see what other programs were doing" and that "people in my cohort shared with me different surveys that they gave" and this was "tremendous because I got to see those different perspectives." She summed up this experience by saying "in the end it really made for a much richer survey and feedback evaluation for me." SoTL participation helped her to learn how to best collect feedback from students by examining the examples of others.

SoTL provided a natural feedback process for faculty who were researching their own practice through formal or informal action research. One participant expressed how they were able to learn

from other faculty as well as their students to help them engage in a process of continual improvement:

> We actually were looking at our teaching styles online as far as our different active learning environments. This was with the interactive and animated case scenarios. And so this SoTL project really helped us to kind of reevaluate some of our online projects. And we found out that the different case studies were actually real life and made them actually talk about their specific case. They were highly rated among our students, and some of the case studies we thought would be pretty good weren't as good. So, we were able to reevaluate and kind of adjust (focus group participant).

Faculty Learning Cycle

A synthesis of the major themes from this study revealed that participation in the SoTL seminar supported a three-point faculty learning cycle. The three points of the faculty learning cycle were SoTL support, faculty experimentation and risk-taking, and assessment and feedback.

Figure 1

Faculty Learning Cycle
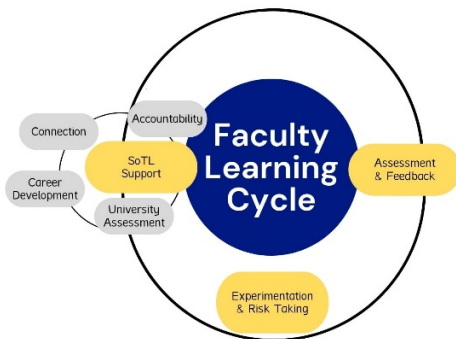
From the outset, SoTL participation prompted faculty to think critically about their pedagogical choices. SoTL then provided a platform for faculty to discuss, explore, and get feedback on ideas for new learning experiences. While this type of experimentation can feel risky, faculty felt supported by their SoTL colleagues to innovate in their classrooms, knowing they had a team to reflect with as they analyzed the effects of their interventions. Through reviewing student learning, student engagement, and often student feedback, faculty then responded by adjusting instructional practices.

It is important to note that the SoTL Support had multiple dimensions that included a sense of faculty connection, accountability, career development, and support for university-wide assessment.

Figure 2

Multifaceted Support Experienced by SoTL Participants
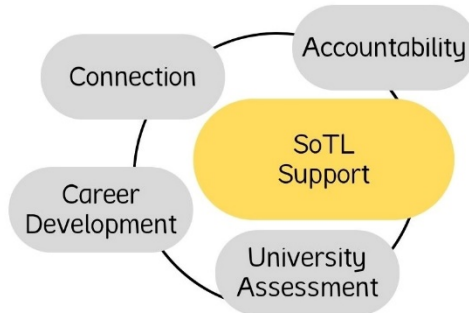
Through listening to SoTL participants, it is evident that the learning cycle resulted in changes to instructional practices and students participated more frequently in authentic learning experiences, which simulated real-world problems faced by professionals.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to better understand how, if at all, a SoTL seminar benefited faculty teaching. More specifically, was there a lasting positive impact on the institution's active learning culture since 2015? The findings provide evidence of a learning cycle for faculty who participated in SoTL. Specifically, faculty benefited from a shared community of individuals taking educational risks to improve on-campus and online learning.

How this Research Supports the Larger Research Base

At a foundational level, this investigation aligns with past SoTL research as a means to demonstrate effective teaching (McKinney, 2007). When faculty participate in SoTL and disseminate their scholarship, they are advancing their disciplines through inquiry by informing the next generation of educators of evidence-based learning strategies (Franks & Payakachat, 2020). Moreover, it can be argued that it is an ethical obligation for faculty to study their teaching and to innovate in higher education. The central theme of a faculty learning cycle emphasizing faculty support and community is consistent with past research documenting the benefits of SoTL as a means to support faculty professional development (Marquis, 2015; Marquis et al., 2014).

The findings of this study align with Franks and Payakachat (2020), who advocated that participation in SoTL impacts engagement in larger institutional goals. Specifically, participants commented that the benefits of SoTL included creating an active teaching/learning environment, taking educational risks to teaching, and documenting changes in their teaching to support assessment priorities. The current investigation also supports SoTL research as a means to create community among SoTL participants and to provide a support system for faculty as they progress in their careers (Beatty et al., 2020; Case, 2013). Wilson-Mah et al. (2022) cite the benefits in creating SoTL communities of practice to develop knowledge, support, learning, risk- taking, and

campus impact. Although not specifically called a community of practice, this research also supports providing formal opportunities for diverse faculty to gather and develop their teaching.

Applications for Use

Perhaps the greatest benefit of this research is the recommendation for other institutions to invest in and support SoTL and other faculty development programs that have a direct impact on developing effective teaching. Alternatively, for institutions who already have established faculty development programs, it is a call for them to study the impact those programs have on their campus and culture of learning. Based on the findings of this study, there were multiple positive outcomes as a result of creating and supporting SoTL. Disseminating research on teaching and learning and highlighting institutions that value a continued investment in professional development programs has great value to the field of SoTL by demonstrating the growing number of institutions that view SoTL as equivalent to other forms of scholarship. This research supports the claim by Marquis (2015) that higher education institutions need to incorporate SoTL programs into institutional culture as a means to increase effective teaching.

Additional benefits beyond teaching and learning include an increased sense of community and support network for participants. Beatty et al. (2020) advocated for peer learning groups to be used with early career professionals to build campus community and teaching and learning knowledge. In a time of unpredictable employment, programs such as SoTL can provide lasting relationships and an increased sense of institutional community (Marquis, 2015). As a result, institutions may experience fewer faculty pursuing other opportunities and have increased application pools as a result of these intentional professional development opportunities.

Future Research

Future research could focus on completing similar outcome research on a regular cycle using a grounded theory methodology. This process could inductively reveal new insights and theory of the impact SoTL has on higher education. Establishing program evaluation processes could help institutions demonstrate they have a culture of assessment and more easily document how they are meeting student learning outcomes.

Additional research could focus on faculty and how their participation strengthens their connection to an institution. Moreover, encouraging faculty to participate in SoTL program evaluations will provide another opportunity for faculty to think about and document how they are continually using the skills they learned in the seminar and to reconnect with peers and share innovative strategies benefiting student learning. Another avenue of future research could more specifically examine the impact SoTL has on students.

Dewar and Perkins (2021) stated a need for more research to support mentors and seminar leaders of SoTL programs. Future research could specifically examine how to support faculty engaged in leading SoTL programs and examine ways to help sustain and integrate programs into campus culture.

Limitations

Although a qualitative methodology provided an understanding of faculty participation in a SoTL seminar, more research is needed to make judgements on the applicability and usefulness of this research. Perhaps interviewing participants individually would have allowed for more nuanced responses. All the participants were currently employed at the institution; it would be interesting to note if faculty who left the intuition had similar experiences or were still engaging in SoTL work. Finally, conducting this research at a variety of higher education institutions or at institutions that did not have as a long as a tradition of SoTL would have also provided additional perspectives.

Conclusion

The research questions sought to gain a deeper understanding of the lasting impact a SoTL seminar had on a university's culture. The core category revealed the seminar and its members provided a safe and supportive environment to take educational risks to support student understanding. The findings of this study provide intriguing evidence for other institutions of higher education to systematically and continually invest in programs that overtly support SoTL and faculty teaching.

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