

# Routes to Change: Strategic Leadership in SoTL



# Routes to Change: Strategic Leadership in SoTL

Edited by Irma Meijerman and Andrea S. Webb

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## Hyperlinks and Supplementary Materials

All hyperlinks and supplementary materials referred to in the print volume are available in the online version, accessible at: <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/routestochange/>

## Editorial note on the use of AI tools

During the preparation of this book, generative AI tools were used selectively to support editorial processes, including language editing, drafting summaries of chapter themes, and helping identify overarching connections across chapters. All intellectual decisions, interpretation, synthesis, and final wording were reviewed, revised, and approved by the editors. Responsibility for the content remains entirely with the editors and contributing authors.

The cover design also involved the use of AI-assisted image editing. The final cover image was developed from an original photograph provided by Irma Meijerman and subsequently transformed using AI-based visual filters and editing tools as part of the creative design process.



## Introduction

### Getting On the Path

Irma Meijerman and Andrea S. Webb

You are involved in teaching and learning in Higher Education, and you might recognise this.

You have struggled with challenges in your students' learning or wanted to try something new in your teaching, and decided to take a more grounded, evidence-informed approach.

You have developed a teaching activity and made an inquiry into the effect of your teaching on the learning of your students.

Perhaps without naming it as such, you have already begun to engage in what is commonly understood as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL).

Perhaps you are already a bit further along: you have presented your SoTL work at conferences, collaborated with colleagues across courses or programmes, or become part of a local SoTL community. But very often, without intention, your SoTL work begins to reach beyond your own classroom.

A colleague asks you to comment on an idea.

You are invited to explain what "counts" as SoTL.

You support colleagues in developing or sustaining their SoTL work.

You help create or sustain a SoTL community or space for shared inquiry.

You help shape priorities or directions for SoTL within a programme, department, or institution.

You join a working group, a project, or a committee because of how you think about teaching.

You notice connections across individual inquiries that others may not yet see.

None of this comes with a title.

And yet your work now involves others.

Is this leadership?

It may not be recognised as such—by institutions, by colleagues, or even by

yourself. There is no formal role, no appointment, no explicit mandate. And yet influence is exercised, directions are shaped, and responsibilities are assumed.

When does engagement become leadership?

Who decides what counts as leadership in SoTL—and on what grounds?

And how can SoTL leadership create meaningful change across teaching, learning, and institutions?

In this book, we explore these questions to show how strategic leadership in SoTL shapes routes to change, even when leadership is informal or unrecognised.

## **SoTL Leadership in literature**

The Oxford Dictionary defines leadership as “*the action of leading a group of people or an organisation.*” This is a useful starting point. However, it leaves important questions unanswered for SoTL, where leadership often occurs without formal groups, roles, or mandates. If this sounds familiar to you, you are not alone. Several scholars have explored what leadership means specifically in the context of SoTL.

SoTL thrives when passionate grassroots engagement is met with supportive and strategic institutional leadership. However, a common challenge is bridging the gap between these two crucial forces. Grassroots SoTL initiatives, born from faculty curiosity and commitment to student learning, can sometimes struggle for visibility, resources, and wider institutional impact. Conversely, institutional leaders may wish to foster a culture of SoTL, but lack clear pathways to connect with and empower on-the-ground practitioners.

This tension raises an important question: if leadership in SoTL occurs in the space between initiative and institution, what kind of leadership is required? Rather than a positional role, the literature increasingly describes SoTL Leadership as work that connects, translates, and mobilises across contexts. In this sense, a SoTL leader is not simply someone who directs others, but a scholar who enables movement—between people, practices, and levels of the organisation.

A SoTL leader is therefore a scholar whose activities involve innovation and development in curricular and pedagogical initiatives at a local, institutional, or national level. SoTL leaders influence change and implement initiatives to strengthen teaching and learning practices, communities, and cultures. Drawing on the work of Hannah and Lester (2009), Pyrko, Dorfler, and Eden (2019), and Ackermann, Pyrko, and Hill (2024), first, these individuals are catalysts within and between networks. They connect people and broker relationships across a department, institution, or discipline. Second, leaders promote the sharing of

knowledge between these connectors within and across social networks by influencing both the structure and functioning of knowledge networks. The following perspectives do not offer competing definitions but illuminate different dimensions of this connecting work.

We see SoTL Leadership as the lever of change in higher education (McKinney, 2012; Webb & Tierney, 2019; Webb, et al., 2024). SoTL is an interdisciplinary field that contributes to solving the wicked problem of teaching in higher education which is, in and of itself, a social problem. SoTL Leadership requires leaders that feel connected (Sinek, 2013), authentic leadership (Lux, Grover, & Teo, 2019), and brokering across communities (Wenger-Trayner, et al., 2015). As systems convenors, these educational leaders work to create and hold spaces for conversations between people who would otherwise be separated by a boundary, for example, a disciplinary, organisational, or geographic boundary (Webb et al., 2024; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Effective leaders are purposeful. Using their why (Sinek, 2009), as an anchor when choosing their activities and advocating on behalf of their team when there are challenges (Sinek, 2013). Authentic leadership demands leaders to be open and honest, know themselves, follow a moral compass, and appreciate their biases (Lux, Grover, & Teo, 2019). The candid, relationship-oriented approach of authentic leadership facilitates and encourages personal connections amongst the team. SoTL leaders build and nurture positive supportive relationships, and bring together effective teams creating collaborative opportunities to enhance teaching and learning. SoTL Leadership necessitates working as a broker; working at the boundaries to build connections between different practices.

Roxå and Mårtensson describe SoTL leaders as advocates who work in the space between disciplinary teaching practices and broader organisational change. Often, this work is carried out without formal authority. Their perspective helps explain why SoTL Leadership is frequently experienced as influential, yet not always visible or formally recognised (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009).

Building on this view, Hubball and colleagues argue that SoTL Leadership extends beyond individual inquiry. They include strategic educational activities such as curriculum renewal, the evaluation of teaching, supervision, and faculty development. From this perspective, SoTL Leadership connects scholarly inquiry to institutional learning and improvement (Hubball, Clarke, Chng, & Grimmett, 2015).

More recent SoTL Leadership literature emphasises that leadership in this field is typically distributed and practice based. It emerges through sustained engagement, credibility developed through inquiry, and relationships grounded in shared commitments to teaching and learning (Webb & Welsh, 2021). Simmons and Taylor (2019), for example, conceptualise SoTL Leadership as operating through four

interconnected practices: engagement, connection, collaboration, and advocacy. Together, these practices support leadership that bridges gaps between individual SoTL work and institutional culture.

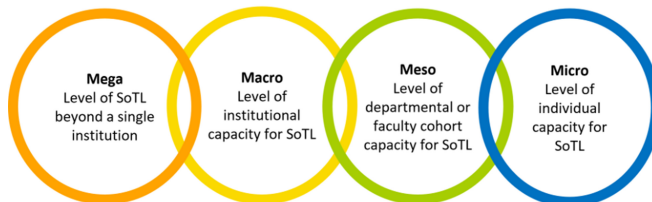
The 4M framework—micro, meso, macro, and mega (see figure 1) offers a complementary way of understanding this work. It makes visible how SoTL Leadership can be enacted at different levels: within individual teaching practice, across departments and faculties, at the institutional level, and within wider scholarly communities (Poole & Simmons, 2013; Simmons, 2016; Williams et al., 2013).

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that SoTL Leadership is not a single role that one either has or does not have. Rather, it is a constellation of practices through which individuals and groups create coherence, build connections, and enable change across contexts.

But do we see this in practice? To address this question, we begin with our own cases. These cases reflect everyday SoTL work as it is lived, negotiated, and enacted, and they form the starting point for the reflections that led us to write this book.

### Figure 1.

*The 4-M framework (Adapted from Simmons, 2016; Williams et al., 2013)*



### Our own cases

Irma

Trained as a toxicologist, I began working at the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences at Utrecht University (UU), a research-intensive university in the Netherlands, in 2001 as an assistant professor. In addition to leading my own disciplinary research group, I was required to teach for half of my time. I was one of those people who thought, “Oh, I can give an excellent scientific presentation, so I will also be able to teach very easily,” only to discover that teaching presents its own unique challenges. This was the first moment I recognised education as a distinct disciplinary field, one that can be built upon theories and evidence.

During my participation in UU's Educational Leadership Programme (2006-2007), we visited Gloucester University. It was there that I met Mick Healey and his colleagues, who were deeply involved in Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) and had created an open, student-activating learning environment. Their evidence-informed approach inspired me to view teaching and learning in a more scholarly manner. This led me to a project where I embarked on my first experiences with qualitative research; I wrote my first educational paper, essentially my first SoTL project, about a course I had developed (Meijerman, Storm, Moret, & Koser, 2013). This was not always easy, as the institutional environment at the time was not open to a scholarly approach to teaching, let alone to sharing results through writing papers. However, I was fortunate to have a few colleagues experienced in educational research whom I could approach for help and support.

In 2010, I became the programme coordinator of the College of Pharmaceutical Sciences (CPS), a new bachelor programme in pharmaceutical sciences that needed to be developed and coordinated once it was running. This role allowed me to demonstrate scholarly leadership, as the programme was developed evidence-informed using, among other things, the principles of IBL that I had encountered a few years earlier (Meijerman, Nab, & Koster, 2016).

In the years that followed; while searching for literature about the development and support of teachers in relation to the CPS and other teacher development initiatives, I discovered literature about SoTL. It immediately resonated with me. I realized that I had been unconsciously engaged in SoTL for several years and recognised its importance not only for me but also for the quality of our teaching.

This realization inspired me to take my first step as an informal SoTL leader. On my own initiative, I started a SoTL course for teachers at our university, together with a colleague. Additionally, within the Faculty of Science, we integrated SoTL into a project that was aimed to create a network of teachers. The result of the initiatives was published and presented at the ISSOTL18 conference (Meijerman, Kirschner, & Prins, 2023). Attending this conference was a pivotal moment for me. Coming from an environment where scholarly teaching was barely known, let alone acknowledged, I found the conference to be incredibly inspiring. Meeting all these like-minded individuals, including Andrea, the co-editor of this book, motivated me to invest even more energy into promoting SoTL at our university.

In 2017, the Centre for Academic Teaching and Learning (CAT) of UU was established. I immediately approached the Academic Director of the Centre to discuss a role for SoTL. In 2018, I became one of the Senior Fellows (SF) of CAT, with SoTL as my project. This role significantly accelerated my development as a SoTL leader. As a Senior Fellow, I organized a SoTL course, initiated SoTL grants and a yearly SoTL conference at UU, and wrote the Utrecht University Roadmap

for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning—a practical tool for anyone interested in engaging in SoTL (Meijerman, Wijsman, & Kirschner, 2025). I also obtained a grant from UU to set up a SoTL Advocates programme. Together with a team, we organized supporting meetings for the SoTL Advocates, two from each faculty of our university. The aim of the SoTL advocates project was to make SoTL more familiar within their faculty and to ensure it is recognised and supported.

Over time, my involvement in SoTL gradually extended beyond my own institution. I served as Vice President Europe of ISSOTL for two years and chaired the ISSOTL 2023 conference in Utrecht. More recently, I have taken on the role of Chair of the EuroSoTL network, with the aim of engaging more colleagues across Europe in SoTL and creating spaces where people from different contexts can connect, share, and learn from one another.

Looking back, I now see this journey as a gradual shift—from SoTL as something I pursued largely for myself, to work that became shared with and shaped by others. It was not the result of a single decision or a formal leadership role, but of many small steps taken over time, often in response to opportunities that emerged along the way. Throughout this process, much of my SoTL Leadership remained informal and was not always fully recognised or rewarded within existing institutional structures.

What mattered most to me was staying curious, being open to new ways of researching and teaching, and having the courage to start conversations and initiatives, even when the outcomes were uncertain. Sustaining this work required perseverance, but it also prompted reflection on how and where this kind of leadership could best flourish. This reflection ultimately led me to establish my own consultancy and training practice, creating space to support others in SoTL and educational change in ways that felt both aligned with my values and responsive to the needs I was encountering.

Above all, this path has reinforced for me that SoTL Leadership is deeply relational and possibility-oriented—about noticing where energy exists, bringing people together, and creating conditions in which shared inquiry and change can grow.

Andrea

I have been an educator for more than twenty-five years in public school and higher education classrooms. Beginning in 1999, I spent nine years as a secondary school teacher. I taught courses in social studies and English, volunteered on the Professional Development Committee, and, for four years, served as the Social Studies department head; taking on an administrative position in addition to my teaching responsibilities.

In 2008, I was seconded to the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia (UBC). For three years, I taught, as an independent instructor in the Teacher Education Program, teaching several courses in Social Studies Education. For each of these courses, I designed the curriculum, delivered the instruction, and completed all of the assessment and evaluation. I also supervised teacher candidates on their practica, which meant that I worked one-on-one with the teacher candidate to develop their pedagogical and curricular practice in classroom settings. Working as a mentor teacher and teacher educator honed my skills in programme planning and education for adults. These two positions laid the foundation for my scholarly interest in teaching and learning in higher education. Then through a professional development programme, I was introduced, by my mentor, Professor Harry Hubball, to the SoTL. This experience was transformative for me and strongly influenced not only my practice, but also my future research into faculty development.

In 2011, enrolling in a Ph.D. programme in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy (EDCP) at UBC was four years of intensive professional development as a scholar and educator. Attending the 2011 ISSOTL conference in Milwaukee, WIS was a transformative experience. I felt like I had ‘found my people’. There were other scholars who were interested in transforming higher education through scholarship! Blending education and SoTL gave me a vantage point of working *from* a Faculty of Education towards other areas of the institution. Through the International Program for the Scholarship of Educational Leadership: UBC Certificate on Curriculum and Pedagogy in Higher Education (UBC SoEL Program), my teaching and research support programme participants as they contribute to the intellectual life of their discipline as well as the institution. The cohort participants come from across the UBC campus and around the world. I facilitate interdisciplinary conversations about teaching, learning, and educational research; spending a significant amount of time introducing the field of SoTL and acclimatizing participants to the literature and conventions that they will need to use throughout the programme.

After completing the Ph.D. in 2015, for three years I worked in a variety of positions in the Faculty of Education. I supported a departmental review, developed a proposal for a programme to support postdoctoral fellows, and designed, implemented, and administered cost recovery professional development programmes for students and visiting educators. These positions developed my personal leadership capabilities as an effective communicator and project manager, and my ability to develop and maintain collaborative relationships with faculty and staff across the faculty. I believe that the work of higher education is facilitated by the development and sustaining of a community of scholars. I believe that scholarship and service to the department, faculty, university, and profession create a working environment where each community member can fully contribute.

Making my research focused on SoTL and SoEL, has given me the platform to be an advocate for scholarship and leadership in teaching and learning in higher education. Taking over as the academic chair of the University of British Columbia Scholarship of Educational Leadership (SoEL) Program and sharing my research with others at UBC and around the world is the fulfilment of the spark that was lit in 2008. When I think back on the route that I have taken to this point in my career, it could be viewed as a haphazard meandering, however I see each move or temporary position as a specific choice to gather a broader perspective on education. Once I embraced my vocation as an educator, I embraced the opportunity to make my professional work an extension of my beliefs in encouraging, connecting, and serving others as a teacher.

My SoTL Leadership is intertwined in a professional identity that I liken to a Chimaera (Bennett et al., 2016; Kensington-Miller, Renc-Roe, & Morón-García, 2015). The three species of the Chimaera speak to a tripartite identity, and manifest in the need to be a generalist teacher of academic literacies, a disciplinary teacher, and a SoTL researcher. As a scholar in Education and SoTL, I have been able to engage in sustained scholarly activity, often in between traditional disciplinary cultures. As a result, my work reflects an eclectic range of partnerships and projects. These projects and presentations, at their heart, are emblematic of the diversity of work that is part of SoTL and SoTL Leadership.

### **Reflecting on our cases: why this book matters**

Looking across our two cases—different in context, career stage, and geography—a shared pattern becomes visible. Neither of our routes into SoTL Leadership began with a formal leadership role or a clear intention to *become* a leader. Instead, leadership emerged through engagement: noticing questions about teaching and learning, acting on curiosity, and choosing to work with others around those questions. In both cases, SoTL Leadership began with small initiatives—starting a conversation, developing a course, supporting colleagues, or creating spaces where inquiry could be shared.

This is why we strongly believe that **SoTL Leadership is for everyone**. You do not need to be senior, formally appointed, or institutionally recognised to begin. Leadership can start with something as simple—and as courageous—as taking an initiative to work with others around teaching and learning. Often, leadership appears before we have the language to name it as such.

At the same time, our cases show that SoTL Leadership is **not one thing**. It takes many forms and unfolds in different ways, depending on context, opportunity, and personal inclination. At times, leadership was closely connected to our own teaching

practice; at other times, it involved supporting others, building communities, shaping programmes, influencing institutional cultures, or connecting people across institutions and countries. These experiences resonate strongly with the different aspects of SoTL Leadership explored in this book and with the 4M framework, which highlights leadership at the micro, meso, macro, and mega levels.

Importantly, neither of our trajectories followed a single, linear path. Leadership shifted over time, moved between levels, and was sometimes visible and sometimes not. Informal leadership often carried responsibility without clear recognition or reward. Navigating these realities raised practical questions about how SoTL work can be sustained over time, how care for people and communities can be maintained, and how meaningful change can be achieved — questions that many engaged in SoTL will recognise.

This brings us to why we find this book important. **This is not a book that tells you how to become a SoTL leader, nor does it offer a single model to follow.** Instead, it shows a diversity of SoTL leaders and the many routes they have taken. Through cases, theory, and practical reflections, the book opens possible paths ahead, helping you to recognise where you are now and to imagine where you might want to go next.

Ultimately, this book is an invitation. It invites you to see yourself in the stories of others, to recognise leadership in practices you may already be engaged in, and to explore how your own SoTL work—at whatever level and in whatever form—can contribute to meaningful change in teaching and learning.

### **How this book is structured**

This book is organised around the idea that SoTL Leadership develops in relation to context, people, and purpose—and that there are many possible routes into this work. Each section combines **cases, theory, and practical reflections**, allowing you to move between lived experience and conceptual insight as you read.

Together, these sections reflect an expanding scope of SoTL Leadership — from individual identity, to relationships, to institutional contexts, and finally to international engagement.

We begin by focusing on **academic and SoTL Leadership identities**. This section explores how individuals come to see themselves as SoTL leaders, often gradually and without a clear starting point. Practical chapters in this section attend to early steps in SoTL Leadership, including initiating projects, working with others, and building confidence and credibility over time. This section speaks particularly to readers who are just beginning—or who may not yet see themselves as leaders.

The next section turns to **networks and communities**, highlighting the central role of relationships in sustaining SoTL Leadership. Here, the case and chapters explore how communities of practice, local networks, and national or international collaborations are formed and maintained. This section emphasises that SoTL Leadership is rarely an individual endeavour and that change often happens through connection and collective effort.

We then focus on **institutional cultures and SoTL Leadership**. This section examines how institutional contexts shape what is possible for SoTL and how leaders navigate, influence, or sometimes work around existing structures. Contributors address both supportive and challenging environments, offering insights into how SoTL Leadership can be enacted even when recognition or support is limited.

The final substantive section explores **SoTL Leadership in an international context**. Drawing on conceptual discussion and reflective examples, it examines how language, culture, geography, and academic traditions shape the development and leadership of SoTL across different contexts. The chapter highlights the tensions between the local, practice-based nature of SoTL and its global scholarly exchange and considers how leaders can navigate these dynamics. In doing so, it invites readers to look beyond their own institutional or national contexts and to reflect on the possibilities and responsibilities of participating in a global SoTL community.

We conclude the book by returning to the central questions raised at the outset.

*When does engagement become leadership?*

*Who decides what counts as leadership in SoTL—and on what grounds?*

*And how can SoTL Leadership create meaningful change across teaching, learning, and institutions?*

Rather than offering a single model or prescription, the conclusion reflects on the diversity of SoTL Leadership practices presented across the chapters and invites you to consider your own position, possibilities, and next steps.

Taken together, the structure of this book reflects its central message: **SoTL Leadership is not a fixed role or destination, and it is not reserved for a select few**. Rather, it consists of evolving practices that you can take up in different ways, at different moments, and across different contexts. Whether you are just beginning in SoTL or have been engaged for some time, the chapters offer examples and reflections that can help you recognise your own practices and imagine new routes to change.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have shown that SoTL Leadership is rarely a formal appointment and almost never a single, decisive moment. Instead, it emerges through practice—through curiosity about student learning, a willingness to inquire into teaching, and the courage to invite others into that inquiry. Whether through small acts such as supporting a colleague, or through wider initiatives that shape programmes, networks, or institutional cultures, SoTL Leadership grows from engagement. It is deeply relational and grounded in shared commitments to improving teaching and learning. The cases offered here illustrate how leadership can begin long before one names it as such, and how it is sustained not by title or authority, but by connection, purpose, and practice.

As we move forward in this book, we invite you to see SoTL Leadership as a dynamic and accessible endeavour—one that you may already be participating in. The cases, chapters, and reflections that follow will offer multiple ways to understand, explore, and enact SoTL Leadership across contexts, from the micro level of individual teaching to the mega level of international collaboration. Rather than prescribing a single pathway, this book opens space for recognising your own experiences and imagining new possibilities. In doing so, our hope is that you will not only identify leadership in your current work, but also feel empowered to cultivate it intentionally as part of a collective effort to strengthen teaching, learning, and educational cultures in higher education.

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She is a former Principal Fellow at the Centre for Academic Teaching and Learning (CAT) at Utrecht University, where she focused on the development and institutional embedding of SoTL. As associate professor in Pharmaceutical Sciences, she contributed to curriculum innovation, honours education, and the professional development of university teachers. With a background in toxicology and biomedical research, she brings an insider perspective on academic practice, combined with extensive experience in designing and improving higher education.

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# Academic and SoTL Leadership identities

In our Introduction, we explored how engagement in SoTL often begins with questions about one's own teaching and gradually extends beyond the individual classroom—sometimes without being recognised as leadership. This raises a further question: when and how does this engagement become part of who we are as academics?

This section focuses on identity as a central dimension of SoTL leadership. If leadership in SoTL is not a formal role, it is also not a fixed identity that one simply adopts. Rather, it develops over time through practice, relationships, and context—often emerging gradually and only becoming visible in retrospect.

The chapters in this section explore this process from complementary perspectives. Reflective case narratives illustrate how initial engagement in SoTL can evolve into broader influence through everyday practice, highlighting the uncertainties, motivations, and opportunities that shape early trajectories. Alongside these accounts, more conceptual contributions examine how academic and leadership identities develop, drawing attention to the ways in which individuals negotiate their roles across disciplinary, institutional, and scholarly contexts.

Together, these chapters move from lived experience to conceptual understanding, showing how identity is not only shaped by what individuals do, but also by how they interpret and position their work in relation to others. They highlight that developing a SoTL leadership identity involves ongoing processes of recognition, negotiation, and alignment—both internally and within wider academic environments.

In this way, the section lays an important foundation for the chapters that follow. It shows that SoTL leadership begins not with a title or formal mandate, but with a developing sense of purpose and positioning that is shaped through engagement with others.

This section invites you to reflect on your own trajectory: how your engagement in SoTL has developed over time, how you understand your role in relation to others, and how your sense of identity may continue to evolve as your work expands beyond your immediate teaching context.



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## Case Study: Reflecting on Our Teaching Journey

Rahul Pandit and Bo van Leeuwen

The Euro SoTL conference in 2022 in Manchester brought many SoTL enthusiasts from Utrecht University together. Among the UU delegation were Bo van Leeuwen and Rahul Pandit, who share reflections on their individual SoTL journeys in the narratives that follow.

### *Rahul Pandit*

Teaching has always been an intrinsic part of me. My journey started at the age of 15 in Kolkata, India, when I began teaching younger school-going children, mostly from disadvantaged backgrounds. Thinking back, it's perhaps then that I started understanding the value of knowledge.

Currently, I work as an Assistant Professor within the Faculty of Medicine at Utrecht University. I coordinate and teach pharmacology-related courses. Next to this, I am involved in curriculum development and teach-the-teacher programs. After completing my PhD, I started as a lecturer within the medical faculty. During these early teaching years, I enrolled in a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) training programme. My initial experience with SoTL was discouraging as I was still getting acquainted with the educational and cultural system of The Netherlands. Not only did I struggle to come up with a research topic, given my background in biomedical sciences, but I was also skeptical about the research approaches used in SoTL. The situation however changed in a year or two. Growing into my role as a teacher, I had questions on the effectiveness of teaching methodologies and on understanding how students approach certain problems. It was then when I had applied for a SoTL grant at Utrecht University. My SoTL journey had officially begun. Receiving this grant helped me to understand educational research igniting my passion to delve into this new world.

In the past years, I have worked on several projects and have supervised students in the field of educational research. Multiple factors – receiving educational grants, publishing educational articles, attending educational congresses – have all enthused me to continue this journey. The nature of my SoTL projects have also diversified. While initially I worked strictly within my own discipline, successfully completing a few SoTL projects enabled me to experiment with diverse research methodologies and diversify my field of research interest.

When I ask myself the question, what do I enjoy about SoTL? I think for me it's the applicability of SoTL, as research questions here are often closely connected to one's daily teaching practices. I also value the multidisciplinary community we are slowly building within the university through the SoTL advocate project. As a group we come together, share ideas, exchange views, collaborate on projects, making the community of practice varied and dynamic. In recent years, I've become more involved in faculty-level educational projects, and my SoTL background has been invaluable in understanding the intricacies of curriculum development. That being said, challenges do exist. Juggling teaching and SoTL with limited assistance remains a pressing issue. Currently, I'm enrolled in the Utrecht Teaching Scholars Program to deepen my expertise in educational research and looking ahead, I aim to focus on shared learning and collaboration, both locally and internationally, believing that together we can foster an equitable society through education.

### *Bo van Leeuwen*

In 2019, I started my teaching career as a junior teacher in anatomy and physiology at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at Utrecht University (UU). Like many early-career academics, I navigated the uncertainty of temporary contracts while striving to balance my passion for teaching with my interest in research. The challenge was finding a way to integrate these two interests.

My journey into the SoTL began when I joined the Utrecht University's Special Interest Group for SoTL. This group connected me with like-minded individuals who encouraged me to explore how SoTL could enhance both my teaching practice and academic career. At the same time, I was developing a teaching innovation: a smartphone app using flashcards to help students acquire foundational veterinary anatomy knowledge in preparation for dissection classes. My supervisors suggested linking a research project to this innovation, and SoTL seemed a perfect fit. It allowed me to expand my understanding of educational research while producing valuable output for my department. I applied for a €5,000 SoTL grant from Utrecht University, which provided expert feedback on my proposal and boosted its credibility with my supervisors. The grant also funded my participation in the EuroSoTL 2022 Conference in Manchester, where I shared my findings and connected with the international SoTL community.

Shortly after, the UU established the SoTL Advocate Program. When I was invited to apply to become an advocate for my Faculty, I seized the opportunity. It was a chance to inspire early career colleagues to engage with SoTL and enhance their academic teaching CVs. Within this formal role, it was also easier for me to spend time on SoTL activities that were not directly connected to research. With the support from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, I founded a Community of Practice (CoP) aimed at early career (clinical) teachers. However, the initial

meetings had low participation. It became evident that a focus on sharing teaching experiences was more relevant for most participants than launching their own SoTL projects. At first, I struggled to accept this – why were my peers not as enthusiastic as I was? After reflecting, I realized that starting a SoTL project was challenging. It required adapting to new research methods and relying on intrinsic motivation, as my efforts often went unrecognized by my supervisors. Therefore, I teamed up with fellow junior teachers to reshape the CoP. We centered the meetings on three key themes: innovation, professional development, and educational research. This new approach almost immediately increased participation, with an average of 15 attendees per meeting covering topics such as “the hidden curriculum”.

I recognize that I’ve benefited greatly from opportunities, support, and mentoring, particularly from role models. My involvement in SoTL not only developed my interest and skills in classroom-based education research but also ignited my enthusiasm to pursue a PhD. Since 2023, I have been working as a PhD candidate, with my research partly based on my first SoTL project.

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Rahul Pandit

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Rahul Pandit is Assistant Professor at University Medical Center Utrecht and Medical Fellow at University College Utrecht in the Netherlands. With a disciplinary background in pharmacology, his work focuses on integrating biomedical sciences with patient perspectives, community engagement, and societal dimensions of health in medical and biomedical education. He contributes to curriculum development and educational leadership across multiple undergraduate programs. His scholarship in teaching and learning focuses on authentic learning, community-engaged education, inclusive pedagogies, and innovative approaches to pharmacology teaching. Rahul has received multiple educational grants and teaching awards in recognition of his contributions to medical education.

Bo van Leeuwen

UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

Bo van Leeuwen has worked as a junior teacher in anatomy and physiology at Utrecht University’s Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in the Netherlands since 2019. Alongside this role, he has been a PhD student since 2023. His research focuses on teaching and learning in anatomy education, with a particular interest in spatial

knowledge acquisition and the use of technologies, such as augmented reality, to enhance instructional methods and improve students' anatomical comprehension.

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## Working the Boundaries: Integration and Learning as Key Aspects of SoTL Leadership Practice

Janice Miller-Young

### Abstract

This chapter explores integration as a leadership practice for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), foregrounding the importance of boundary-crossing and learning across diverse communities. Framed by the Landscape of Practice model and complexity theory, I conceptualize SoTL not as a singular community but as a dynamic, adaptive landscape comprised of multiple disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and intercultural contexts. Within this landscape, leadership emerges less as a position and more as a process of integration. This process brings together people, ideas, and practices to foster understanding, generate new knowledge, and enable change. Drawing on literature and my own experiences, I outline prerequisites, practices, and signs of integration, emphasizing conditions such as shared vision, openness, purposefulness, humility, and long-term engagement across boundaries. I also examine how integrative leadership shapes identity, highlighting the opportunities in developing hyphenated, boundary-spanning roles. Ultimately, I argue that integrative leadership advances SoTL by cultivating collaboration and co-creation rather than hierarchy or authority, and by making visible the learning that occurs through navigating boundaries. I conclude by inviting continued dialogue on how scholars might extend, critique, and enact integrative leadership in order to strengthen SoTL as an inclusive and transformative field.

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*“It is difficult for communities of practice to be deeply reflective unless they engage with the perspective of other practices.”* (Wenger Trayner & Wenger Trayner 2014a; p. 19)

Being invited to write a chapter on leadership was flattering and mildly alarming, not unlike being asked to teach a class on how to teach well. It immediately led me to reflect on the different ways I might be considered to be a leader... or not. Yes, I've held formal leadership positions, but I've always felt those titles don't capture what leadership means to me, at least not when it comes to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). For me, SoTL has always been about *learning* – learning about new-to-me approaches to research, about my students, and from my

colleagues. This has required me to cross many boundaries, such as those between different disciplines, institutions, cultures, and research paradigms.

This perspective also shapes how I see myself. I recently admitted in writing that I find it hard to identify with the term “SoTL scholar” (Chick & Miller-Young, 2024). Coming from a more high consensus field of engineering, I struggle to identify with a label that is so broad and carries so many contested meanings. I am also less comfortable with the label “leader” than with terms such as boundary crosser, convenor, collaborator, or enabler. Finally, I think of myself as an educator, mentor, learner, problem-solver, and scholar striving to make meaningful contributions in contexts that matter. The important question for me is not about leader identity, but how leadership can be practiced in ways that advance SoTL.

This perspective is rooted in my own experiences. When I became Director of the Institute for SoTL at Mount Royal University in 2013, SoTL was not well understood across the institution. That role gave me the opportunity to legitimize a form of scholarship I valued, to build community across disciplines, and to support people asking thoughtful questions about teaching and learning. Looking back, I realize that this was the kind of SoTL leadership that resonates most with me: advancing what one believes in, building bridges, and creating conditions for others to learn and contribute. That is the form of leadership I continue to practice no matter what role I’m in, and the one I explore in this chapter.

This chapter unfolds in several layers. First, as an engineer by training, I feel it’s important to spend some time defining the terms I use in this chapter. In particular, I take care to articulate what I mean by SoTL, a term with many definitions. I frame it as a topic of inquiry and as a complex and dynamic *landscape of practice*, which guides the arguments that follow. From there, I explore what leadership might look like in this landscape, especially the kind of leadership that advances the field by fostering interdisciplinary and intercultural understanding. I argue that both types of understanding require integration, not just of knowledge, but of people, perspectives, and ways of knowing.

That brings us to the individuals who help make that integration happen. I explore what it means to take on a leadership role by facilitating those integrative processes, and I outline the conditions and practices that support them. I then consider how these practices might shape one’s identity as a SoTL leader. Finally, I discuss the case studies presented in this section of the book through the lens of integrative SoTL leadership, showing how this type of leadership is rooted in collaboration and co-creation, rather than hierarchy or authority.

## SoTL as a Complex, Adaptive, Landscape of Practice

In my experience, before one can talk meaningfully about leadership in SoTL, one must first establish what they mean by ‘SoTL’. There are many different activities and genres of dissemination which fall under this broad umbrella of scholarly activities (Poole & Chick, 2022; Miller-Young & Chick, 2024). In this section, I offer a conceptual framing of SoTL as both a topic of inquiry (Felten, 2013) and as a *complex, adaptive landscape of practice*.

Metaphors related to journeys, maps, boundaries, ecologies, and rhizomes are pervasive in SoTL and higher education. I find the landscape metaphor useful because it can integrate all these ideas, allowing for a more holistic view of a field that, to me, isn’t a single community but rather a patchwork of disciplinary and multidisciplinary communities spread out across different contexts and terrains. Some of these communities are interconnected by bridges, while others remain separated by unexplored waters (Miller-Young, 2024). Some communities do SoTL work even if they don’t use the label. What unites these diverse communities is not methodology or disciplinary background, but “a duty and commitment to serve the important interests of students” (Kreber, 2013). In my experience, the metaphor of a landscape also addresses a foundational need for SoTL practitioners: the need to locate oneself within, and make sense of, such a large, diverse, and complex field of practice as SoTL.

Important to this framing is the role of boundaries between communities as sites of learning, challenge, and transformation. The Landscape of Practice framework (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2014a) shifts the understanding of professional learning from a fairly linear journey (from peripheral participation to full involvement in a community of practice) toward a more complex model. The landscape metaphor highlights the possibility for cross-pollination that occurs through movement between communities and also gives everyone, whether located peripherally or centrally within a community of practice, the agency to create change. This is where *systems convenors* come in (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2014b); they are people who intentionally bring others together across those boundaries, create space for shared sense-making, and build bridges between communities that don’t naturally interact. In SoTL, I see this kind of convening as an important form of leadership.

My use of the term ‘complex’ is also intentional here. Complex social systems such as higher education are a web of interacting factors and variables, each influencing the others in unpredictable ways. Influencing change in complex systems requires strategies targeted at all levels of the system by those who work at each level (Hannah & Lester, 2009; Roxå, Mårtensson & Alveteg, 2011; Miller-Young & Poth,

2022). I want to focus on what I haven't seen talked about elsewhere – how a scholar can exert influence to advance the field itself.

## Leadership in SoTL

*Leadership is not a position but a process or practice that promotes change* (Mighty, 2013; Youngs, 2017).

In reviewing leadership literature in preparation for this chapter, I found that most leadership models didn't resonate with me. Many are grounded in managerial and hierarchical frameworks that don't reflect academic systems. My own philosophy aligns with more recent models of distributed, collective, relational, and ecological leadership which emphasize purpose, values, process, and relationships, and the importance of context, reflexivity, collaboration, adaptability, complexity, and social responsibility (e.g. Allen, 1999; Kezar, 2009; Raelin, 2016; Todnem By & Kuipers, 2023). As such, the term "leader" doesn't resonate with me as much as terms such as boundary crosser, convenor, and enabler (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2014a, 2021; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Partnership models also resonate with me, which position all collaborators involved in an inquiry as co-teachers, co-learners, and co-generators of knowledge and practice (Miller-Young et al., 2017a).

In our 2017 article in CJSOTL, a SoTL Canada collaborative writing group took the distributed leadership perspective that SoTL-active faculty can exert influence at multiple levels by "leading up" (Miller-Young et al., 2017b). Using a systems perspective by paying attention to their teaching micro-cultures and their institutional contexts, we identified many strategies that individuals could use to influence their peers (micro level), chairs and deans (meso level), those in formal, institutional leadership positions (macro level), and their disciplinary and SoTL communities beyond their institution (mega level). In short, we recommended ways a faculty member (academic staff member) could be mentors, enablers, advocates, and ambassadors in order to have an influence on their teaching micro-cultures and on institutional and disciplinary SoTL cultures. What seems to be missing in the literature is a focus on how a SoTL scholar can engage in leadership that actively advances SoTL itself as a *field of inquiry*—a form of leadership I have seen referred to in various other discourses as intellectual, lateral, or horizontal leadership. As a SoTL leader, you may recognise yourself in these forms of influence, even if you do not hold a formal leadership title.

There are a number of indicators that the field, or at least the multidisciplinary and international community that explicitly uses the term SoTL, could benefit from new perspectives. Humanities scholars have been warning us that SoTL has not been welcoming to them (Chick, 2013; Potter & Wuetherick, 2015; Potter & Raffoul,

2023). One recent review of the SoTL literature identified that most SoTL studies remain in the didactic domain, which “pays attention to student learning and the processes and practices of teaching as they impact on student learning” (Booth & Woollacott, 2018, p. 540) with less attention to moral/ethical and societal domains related to issues such as social justice and equity. Another review found that SoTL literature tends to rely on student self-reports of learning rather than assessments of learning (Manarin et al., 2021). Others have called for SoTL to be more inclusive of global perspectives and respond to calls for social justice and decolonization (Kreber, 2013; Chng & Looker, 2013; Chng, Mårtensson & Leibowitz, 2020; Patel & Lynch, 2013; Chaka et al., 2022). On the other hand, some have questioned the ability of SoTL to be inclusive as well as rigorous (McSweeney & Schnurr, 2023).

I share the view that SoTL as a field must remain inclusive-welcoming all disciplines, research paradigms, and cultural perspectives in higher education – while also developing markers of quality, progress, and contributions to knowledge (McSweeney & Schnurr, 2023). One way to do so may be for SoTL researchers to venture outward, horizontally, engaging in boundary-crossing collaborations that foster both individual and collective interdisciplinary and intercultural understandings.

### **Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Integration**

Both the Landscapes of Practice (LoP) model and complexity theory offer guidance for fostering understanding and promoting change across SoTL’s diverse landscape. The LoP and Communities of Practice (CoP) literature emphasizes that learning at boundaries is essential for the evolution of communities (Wenger, 1998). Similarly, literature on complex adaptive systems underscores the potential for change when we disrupt entrenched feedback loops and foster collaboration across distinct parts of the system to establish new, cross-boundary feedback (Meadows, 2008). By drawing on these frameworks, collaborations in SoTL can not only bridge disciplinary and cultural divides but also create opportunities for innovative, integrated approaches that exceed what any single field might achieve alone. Integration refers to the process of constructively combining a wide range of perspectives with the aim of developing a more comprehensive understanding of complex problems and generating more promising solutions. It is recognized as a form of knowledge creation and scholarship (Boyer, 1990).

However, integration does not occur automatically. For example, simply having multiple disciplines represented in a SoTL collaborative research project or in a SoTL community does not necessarily make it interdisciplinary. It requires intentional, proactive efforts to integrate the diverse perspectives and methods from multiple fields to create something new. In my own recent experience, I realized that

a truly interdisciplinary collaboration required my long-time colleagues and me to engage with each others' disciplinary paradigms more deeply than we had in the past (Miller-Young et al., 2024; Miller-Young et al., 2025). Similarly, intercultural collaborations have the potential to help SoTL researchers engage with and integrate the diverse perspectives, values, and practices that shape teaching and learning across cultural contexts (Mato, 2011). In my Canadian context, intercultural learning holds particular significance as a pathway toward reconciliation and decolonization (e.g. Garson et al., 2021). One SoTL example I find particularly compelling is the Disrupting Interview (Lindstrom et al., 2022), developed by one Indigenous and three settler scholars. It is a collaborative, decolonization tool intended to help interview participants "illuminate hidden assumptions and colonial practices and consider alternative ways of knowing/doing/being in their discipline" (p. 3). However, as these scholars and many others remind us, learning across boundaries—particularly paradigmatic and cultural ones—is a challenging and often uncomfortable process. It involves more than simply crossing boundaries; it requires sustained 'boundary experiences' or journeys that actively challenge our assumptions, unsettling us, and ultimately leading to a deeper understanding of our own perspectives as well as those of others.

This raises an important question: how can one practice leadership that intentionally fosters these productive, integrative, and difficult boundary-crossing experiences to rework the boundaries of SoTL? Wenger identifies several strategies to enhance the flow of knowledge across community boundaries. One approach is the creation of boundary objects-artifacts, often texts in academic contexts, that crystallize shared knowledge from across communities. The creation of boundary objects is itself an act of integration. Another strategy involves leveraging the role of brokers: individuals who actively engage in multiple communities and serve as conduits for ideas and practices, transferring them across boundaries. Finally, systems convenors play a pivotal role in forging new, diverse partnerships which facilitate others' boundary crossing.

All these strategies hinge on what Wenger calls knowledgeability, a practitioner's deep competence in multiple areas of practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2014a, p. 23). Knowledgeability ensures credibility within multiple communities and enables those doing boundary crossing to navigate and bridge these different spaces effectively. These boundary crossers don't simply position themselves at the intersections of diverse practices in order to navigate and bridge different communities; they value others' differences as enriching. Thus they are uniquely equipped to do 'boundary work' i.e. challenging and extending the boundaries of one or more communities, and fostering spaces where innovative thinking and collaborative learning can flourish.

Developing knowledgeability requires time, experience, and intentional effort, as

well as the self-awareness and skill to negotiate multiple communities. However, these strategies can be enacted at different scales—within teams, within communities, and across multiple communities—allowing practitioners to gradually expand their sphere(s) of influence as they grow in experience and expertise. Whatever scale they are working at, integrative leaders seek to engage with and ultimately cultivate teams, partnerships, and networks with others who share their goals of integrating ideas to create change. This is what I refer to as the leadership practice of integration.

Instead, it may be about doing high quality work, opening up new lines of inquiry, making connections across areas of knowledge, and creating conditions where others can explore, question, and contribute (Macfarlane, 2011; Ruan, 2024). In this chapter, I explore how such leadership takes shape through processes of integration: of people, of ideas, and of practices.

### **Prerequisites and Practices of Integration**

The prerequisites and practices of integration I outline here are synthesized from reflections on my own interdisciplinary and intercultural collaborative experiences and an extensive, though unsystematic, review of integration literature from fields such as education, leadership, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary studies, intercultural learning, team science, and mixed methods (e.g. Bird & Osland, 2005; Akkerman, 2011; Klein, 2017; Mato, 2011; Holden et al., 2019; Pohl et al., 2019; MacGillivray, 2018; Salazar et al. 2019; Morss et al. 2021; Poth et al., 2024). Recognizing the difficulties inherent in collaborative, integrative work, I propose several foundational elements that are crucial for fostering success (see Table 1). For example, a shared vision serves as a guiding compass for the team, providing direction while also motivating collaborators to persevere through inevitable challenges. Experience in multidisciplinary and/or multicultural settings is equally important, as it develops individuals' self-efficacy to navigate the diverse languages, epistemic practices, paradigmatic and cultural norms that shape different communities (Miller-Young, 2016; Lang, 2020). Finally, research across various contexts consistently highlights the importance of a learning orientation for effective integrative collaboration—one that embraces openness, resourcefulness, transformation, and humility.

While systems convening is undoubtedly a form of leadership (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021), I argue that integration itself is also a form of leadership. In integrative collaborations, learning is both process and product as collaborators co-create their new understandings (Lattuca, 2002). Thus, integrative leadership is about the *leading of learning* by cultivating the conditions for meaningful engagement and sustainable change. This means that leadership must involve

listening and being attentive to one's context and social capital; it is less like charting a course and steamrolling towards it, but more like feeling one's way forward, taking opportunities to advance toward one's objective as they arise.

To support and enhance this challenging process, there are several key practices that integrative leaders should consciously engage with (see Table 1). Note that this work is neither easy nor ever fully complete; the emphasis on time, effort, mediators, and reflexivity highlights the ongoing, iterative nature of this work and the resilience it demands of those engaging in it. Table 1 also provides some useful markers to help scholars reflect as to whether integration has been achieved. Scholars can use these signs as tools to reflect on the degree of integration within their own collaborations or communities of practice.

**Table 1.**

*Prerequisites, practices, and signs of integration* (Link to downloadable PDF of Table 1)

<b>Enabling conditions</b>	<b>Integrative leadership practices</b>	<b>Signs of integration within a team, CoP, or a field</b>
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<p>INDIVIDUALS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multidisciplinary/cultural experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Long term engagement and knowledgeability in more than one CoP</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Willingness to learn <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ A habit of challenging assumptions and inferences</li> <li>◦ A willingness to take risks and embrace uncertainty</li> <li>◦ Curiosity, openness and flexibility</li> <li>◦ Distributed and collective perspectives on leadership.</li> <li>◦ A view of conflicts and challenges as a learning opportunity</li> <li>◦ Humility and a recognition of the limits of one's own knowledge</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging purposefully with different areas of expertise through people with relevant knowledge, long term collaborative projects, and relevant literature</li> <li>• Actively engaging in new-to-you research approaches rather than taking a “divide and conquer” approach</li> <li>• Investing time and effort in listening and learning about different perspectives and paradigms, and building and nurturing trust within collaborations</li> <li>• Explicitly identifying and dialoguing about boundaries when they arise</li> <li>• Paying attention to conversations that appear to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporates full intellectual participation by each contributing area of expertise, forming a multiway partnership</li> <li>• Generates novel research questions, approaches, and interpretations</li> <li>• Leads people to think about a topic differently</li> <li>• Leads people to better understand their own practice in relation to the landscape</li> <li>• Innovates at the intersection of areas of expertise and within contributing communities</li> <li>• Provides useful new insights about a complex problem</li> <li>• Creates boundary objects that aid others in</li> </ul>
<p>TEAM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared vision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ A belief in the value of SoTL and of integration</li> <li>◦ A desire to make</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		

<p>a difference within and beyond one's context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Trust and positive group atmosphere</li> </ul> <p>STRUCTURES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time and resources</li> <li>• Recognition and valuing of integrative research</li> </ul>	<p>be leading to new understandings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paying attention to power and who might be disadvantaged in a collaborative process</li> <li>• Translating emerging integrative ideas into metaphors, shared language, conceptual frameworks, and visuals to provide mediators for integrative discussion and iteration.</li> <li>• Reflexively and collaboratively making sense of integrative processes and events</li> <li>• Sharing lessons learned with others</li> </ul>	<p>facilitating knowledge transformation</p>
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### Embracing the hyphens: Developing an Integrative SoTL Leadership Identity

Identity is a complex and multifaceted construct, reflecting how individuals see themselves in relation to their communities. It is a result of dynamic construction which reflects our trajectory across the landscape (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2014a) and is shaped by ongoing interactions, collaborations, and situated

practices across diverse communities. There is no one way to develop an identity as a leader nor as an integrator; some interdisciplinary scholars describe their interdisciplinary identity as a specialization which is nested within a broader field, or as a confluence of ideas between two fields (Blackmore & Kandiko, 2010). Others describe their identities as a dynamic moving back and forth between two areas of specialization (Mojarad et al., 2024).

Wenger-Trayner et al. (2014a, p. 20) outline three modes of identification that are particularly relevant for understanding integrative SoTL leadership identities. Engagement involves actively participating in SoTL practices—doing, reflecting, and collaborating with others, especially across boundaries. This mode fosters the development and maintenance of knowledgeability within and across communities, though its scope of influence can sometimes remain localized. Imagination entails envisioning the broader landscape, positioning oneself within it, and exploring new possibilities. This mode offers the potential to generate new perspectives and ideas, often inspired by contexts and communities one may not have the time or resources to engage with directly. Alignment focuses on coordinating efforts with others to achieve shared goals, a mode essential for realizing collaborative outcomes on a larger scale. These three modes are most effective when they work in concert, each complementing the others.

So what might a SoTL integrative leadership identity look like? Here I must speculate, drawing on the literature I have cited and my own experience. I suggest that integrative SoTL leaders thrive on exploring new connections and learning opportunities (Chick & Miller-Young, 2024) and thus they are not interested in an existing, stable identity. Instead, they continuously refine their multiple identities through experience, collaboration, and reflection. Based on their views of leadership which emphasize process and collaboration, integrative leaders develop identities through their contributions to collective meaning-making processes, whether or not they are comfortable with the term “leadership” (Blackmore & Kandiko, 2010). While tensions in their identities may persist, integrative SoTL leaders find coherence by deeply valuing teaching, SoTL, and integrative learning, weaving these commitments into their practices. They embrace wayfinding and the ongoing interplay between learning and leading as necessary to their work.

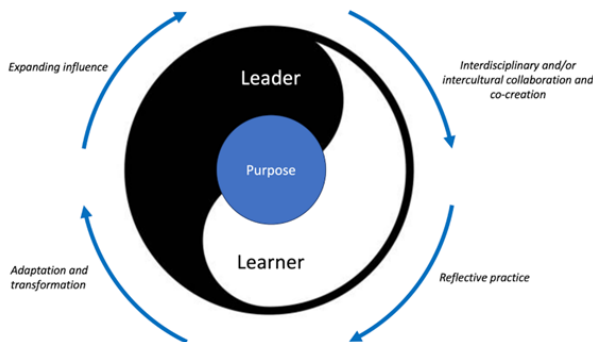
Integrative SoTL leaders also embrace hyphenated identities as a result of their multifaceted roles and commitments across different communities. They move between identities such as teacher-researcher-practitioner, disciplinarian-SoTL scholar, vertical-horizontal leader, convenor-collaborator-learner, insider-outsider, multi-epistemic, quantitative-qualitative researcher, and novice-expert, adapting their leadership and learning practices to fit the context and collaboration at hand. By letting go of their discomfort with being a novice (Simmons et al. 2013; Fenton-O’Creevy et al. 2014), they challenge the status quo and build resilience through

trust in themselves as an *experienced learner*. They focus on capacity building—within themselves and others—and remain anchored to their values and sense of purpose.

Returning to my own reflection at the start of this chapter, I admit to continued discomfort with the notion of a leadership identity. In addition to my unease with the managerial notion of “followers”, I believe this uncertainty stems from the fact that I am much more aware of what I have learned from SoTL than what others might have learned from me. Further, my critical realist, complexity worldview, which acknowledges the complicated, nonlinear nature of cause and effect, makes it difficult for me to see myself as a traditional “leader”. To me, leadership is about navigating emergent, interdependent systems where agency is dispersed and outcomes and influences can rarely be attributed to a single individual or action. Ultimately, through writing this chapter, I have come to view my SoTL leadership identity, if I must have one, as inextricably intertwined with my identity as a learner—what I now think of as a leader-learner, where each informs the other and both are strengthened through a dynamic, iterative process over time (Figure 1).

### Figure 1.

*SoTL Integrative Leadership identity, which is continuously refined through experience, collaboration, and reflection*



### Conclusion

Reflecting on the case studies provided in this section of the book and my own journey, I’m struck by the fact that, despite being prompted to explore leadership and identity in SoTL, we all centered not on asserting an identity as leaders but on our collective purpose—to make a meaningful difference in teaching and learning—and on deepening our expertise in research as a necessary path to fulfill that purpose. This orientation reinforces my perspective that integrative SoTL leadership is not about status or position but about ongoing learning and the influence it can enable.

Like Rahul Pandit and Bo van Leeuwen (in Case Study: Reflecting on Our Teaching Journey, in this book), I will conclude with a focus on the next steps in my own learning journey. It begins with recognizing that my integrative practices and learning thus far have been shaped primarily by interdisciplinary SoTL collaborations, with less emphasis on intercultural collaborations. I also acknowledge that the scholarship I have drawn upon in this chapter is predominantly rooted in Western worldviews. Yet working in a Canadian context, I am acutely aware of the need for our society to focus on building relationships with Indigenous communities and to address equity, diversity, inclusion within higher education. My own profession remains slow to embrace inclusivity for women let alone other underrepresented groups, and only recently have we begun to incorporate these essential topics into our educational programs.

As such, I recognize that I have much more to learn. I will continue venturing into new contexts and convening new partnerships to gain perspectives that hold the potential to transform teaching and learning in my own and others' practice, discipline, or the field of SoTL. I will continue to create boundary objects intended to help others cross (or modify) the boundaries I have already crossed. Finally, understanding the limitations of my own knowledge and experiences, I invite scholars from diverse academic disciplines, contexts, and cultures to extend and critique my ideas on integrative SoTL leadership, enriching the dialogue, broadening our collective understanding, and enabling others to enact SoTL leadership.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the editors of this book for inviting me to contribute, an invitation that prompted me to read, reflect on, and further develop my own SoTL leadership identity. Special thanks are also owed to my long-time friend and colleague Karen Manarin for providing feedback on an earlier version of the manuscript.

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# Novice to SoTL Leader: Building Confidence and Capacity in the Education Focus Workforce

Tanya Lawlis

## Abstract

Education-Focused faculty members are integral to building a positive culture and advancing scholarship and SoTL. However, many enter academia with limited skills in teaching and scholarship. In this chapter, through the lens of an Education-Focused faculty member and the development of an Education-Focused faculty members Community of Practice, I describe the activities and experiences that have informed the progression of scholarship and SoTL in an Australian university. While the activities and suggestions are informed from the Education focus and a Health faculty perspective, they can be applied to many disciplines, faculties and academic employment tracks.

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## Embracing the Education Focus faculty member journey – from PhD to Academic leadership

I am honoured to be invited to write a chapter for the Academic/SoTL Leadership Identities section in this book, *Routes to Change: Strategic Leadership in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. Honoured and surprised as I did not see myself as an academic leader in SoTL. However, while writing this chapter and seeking feedback from colleagues, I recognised being a SoTL leader does not necessarily mean having a lot of papers or being in formal education leadership roles. A SoTL leader models and inspires; provides opportunities through mentoring, education and activities that embrace and promote SoTL work locally, nationally and internationally; and supports faculty members to build confidence and capabilities, so they become champions in scholarship and SoTL and advance SoTL as a field of inquiry. In this chapter I will share my journey in being an academic and leader in SoTL and how I have encouraged and empowered others through evidence-informed practical and actionable tools and strategies to become SoTL champions and leaders.

At the time of writing this chapter, I was the Associate Dean Education (ADE) in the Faculty of Health, University of Canberra. I have been an Education-Focused

(EF) faculty member in a Health faculty for the last 14 years and have created my own academic journey and pathway into SoTL. My move into education was not deliberate, it was opportunistic and framed by a diverse background both prior to and during my studies with a bachelor's degree in nutrition, honours in immunology and PhD in health education. I have a Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Education and a Certificate in Curriculum and Pedagogy. My early academic career focused primarily on teaching within the discipline of nutrition. I then developed and delivered Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) programs for non-clinical undergraduate programs in health science, nutrition and psychology and quickly developed expertise in WIL. In formal leadership roles, I have focussed on ensuring course, faculty, and university quality assurance and governance processes, and through these roles promoted the importance of scholarship and SoTL.

My SoTL journey, although I was not aware at the time, commenced with my PhD, *Interprofessional Education: Higher Education Health Professional Attitudes, Barriers and Enablers* (Lawlis, 2012). Back then, there was little discussion around scholarship or SoTL within the faculty, as I was told on many occasions during my PhD 'this is not real research'. While I engaged in 'real' research when appointed from Level A (Associate Lecturer) to Assistant Professor to meet university expectations, I realised my passion was in SoTL when I led my first major project, the *Development of the national nutrition science competencies for undergraduate degrees in Australia* (Lawlis et. al., 2019). Due to the limited support from those around me and the challenges I encountered, I made it my mission to be a leader in education and scholarship and advocate for a positive culture in relation to scholarship and SoTL in my faculty, university and those I work with nationally.

As an EF faculty member I thought it important to provide context on the EF faculty landscape and challenges as this has framed my experiences as a SoTL leader and the examples I have provided. Similarly, my perspectives are from a Health faculty, thus the examples provided come from this context. While these contexts frame the chapter, the concepts covered, advice and strategies provided can translate to any academic faculty member that has a teaching workload allocation or any discipline area from science and information technology to the arts.

### **Education focus roles: expectations and challenges**

The staffing profile of higher education institutions has evolved over the last 15-20 years with many institutions moving to increase faculty members in EF roles (Probert, 2013; Rogers & Swain, 2022) to address reductions in government funding, poor performances in local, national and international quality of teaching and learning metrics, and enhance the institutional expertise in learning and teaching (Probert, 2013; QS Quacquarelli Symonds Limited, 2023; Times Higher Education,

2023). In Australia, for example, some higher education institutions have developed specific programs to attract and increase their EF workforce (Fleischner, 2025). As a result, the academic staffing profiles of many institutions have shifted from 5% to between 25-50% teaching/EF faculty (Fleischner, 2025; Probert, 2013; Rogers & Swain, 2022).

Education-Focused faculty members are expected to be experts in education and scholarly approaches to learning and teaching (Probert, 2013; Rogers & Swain, 2022), including: designing and leading educational approaches; applying curriculum and pedagogical theories and methodologies; lead and advocate curriculum and pedagogical change; and be SoTL leaders (Godbold, Matthews, & Gannaway, 2023; Simmons et. al., 2021). In my experience this has not always been the case due to a poor understanding of EF roles, and negative attitudes towards these roles, scholarship and SoTL (McEwan, 2022; Simmons et. al., 2021; Webb et. al., 2020; Webb & Tierney, 2020). While this is slowly changing, many higher education institutions, particularly those with a research focus, have very few or no senior academics in EF leadership positions, rather EF faculty are more likely to be employed as Associate Lecturers (Level A) or Lecturers (Level B) (Webb et. al., 2020) with very little or no teaching, research or SoTL experience. This results in fewer EF role models and mentoring of those in lower academic levels. Higher proportions of EF faculty are also found in both the health and education faculties (Probert, 2013). The workload allocation for EF roles varies across institutions with the teaching loads between 40-90%, and scholarship, including SoTL, between 0 and 40% (McEwan, 2022; Probert, 2013; Rogers, & Swain, 2022; Webb, Hubball, Clarke, & Ellis, 2020).

The literature reports many challenges to being employed as an EF faculty member and academic leader in a higher education institution, these include, poor teaching and learning cultures across higher education institutions (Probert, 2013), high teaching workloads, and limited career pathways, institutional support and resourcing for EF faculty development (Fleischner, 2025; Webb, 2012; Webb et. al., 2020). While the challenges seem insurmountable to some, in my experience being an EF faculty member is powerful and rewarding and these challenges can be overcome. As EF academic and SoTL leaders we have the voice to shift the culture for EF faculty members, overall institutional quality teaching and learning and educational scholarship and SoTL.

### **Academic leadership to engage and inspire faculty in scholarship and SoTL**

Many academic faculty members, particularly those in a health faculty, are employed for an academic teaching role due to their subject/discipline and clinical/healthcare expertise and not their experience in learning and teaching (Bennett,

et al., 2018; McLeod & Steinert, 2015; Webb & Tierney, 2020). While faculty members have completed a qualifying degree related to their discipline, many have not completed a PhD. For the most part, higher education institutions do not provide the support, culture or resources to develop these faculty members in teaching and learning, and scholarly activities including SoTL (Bennett, et al., 2018; Godbold, Matthews, & Gannaway, 2023; Simmons, et al., 2021). Faculty members who are new to teaching are, therefore, left to navigate this landscape themselves. There are some exceptions where institutions have developed successful structured programs to support faculty members through their pathway to SoTL leadership, for example, the widely recognised International Program for the Scholarship of Educational Leadership: University of British Columbia Certificate on Curriculum and Pedagogy in Higher Education (Hubball, et al., 2015; Webb, et al., 2020; Webb, et al., 2021), reported a positive impact on participant understanding and engagement in research-based, methodological sound strategic inquiry (Webb, et al., 2021). Similarly the Post Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice and the SoTL I and SoTL II courses offered in the United Kingdom reported benefits relating to the promotion of SoTL engagement and support provided within and beyond the program (McEwan, 2022); and the implementation of social networks at Lund University, Sweden provided a sense of community (Mårtensson, Roxå, & Stensaker, 2014). Other reported strategies to support EF and faculty members new to teaching include: providing mentors, workshops and short programs, funding for SoTL projects, communities of practice and workload offsets (Simmons, et al., 2021; Webb & Tierney, 2020).

Despite the success of these programs, there remains numerous sector wide challenges contributing to the poor perception towards SoTL and educational research (Bennett, et al., 2018; Simmons, et al., 2021). In particular, teaching and SoTL being undervalued, lacking a scholarly basis and rigour (Felten, 2013), academic faculty members' limited understanding of scholarly activities and SoTL (McEwan, 2022), lack of appropriate methodological expertise and faculty members finding it difficult to construct SoTL research (Webb, et al., 2020). Faculty members themselves, particularly EF faculty members, agree with these findings as they report confusion in understanding their role and conduct in scholarship and SoTL (Bennett, et al., 2018; Simmons, et al., 2021; Webb & Tierney, 2020). Faculty members also expressed concern that their SoTL work is not as rigorous as their discipline research (Webb & Tierney, 2020) as they are not familiar with educational theoretical frameworks and methodological rigor (Kanuka, 2011). As a result of being novices in SoTL, faculty members either do not consider theories and appropriate methods in their work, are unsure of how to engage in SoTL or avoid engaging with scholarship and SoTL (Webb & Tierney, 2020).

As ADE and a Program Director in the Faculty of Health, I observed that very few faculty members were engaging in scholarly activities, SoTL, or educational

research in their home discipline. There was a culture and perception from senior faculty members that engaging in scholarship and SoTL took time from engaging in 'real' research, and faculty members stated they were not engaging due to time constraints and limited availability of training and resourcing opportunities. Using my platform as ADE, and as an educational leader, I set out to change the perceptions and culture of teaching, scholarship and SoTL across the faculty. Before deriving a strategy, I needed to understand what training and resources faculty members needed, their time capacities and level of understanding particularly in relation to scholarship and SoTL. I knew I needed buy-in from faculty members as telling people what they had to do was not going to work. In 2021, I surveyed faculty members on their teaching and learning professional development needs, understanding and capacity, reviewed the professional development opportunities provided to faculty members at other higher education institutions and took into account relevant regulatory requirements set by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), including the TEQSA scholarship guidelines (TEQSA, 2022). I then developed a scaffolded strategy to build faculty member's confidence, capacity and empower them to actively engage in quality assurance through scholarship and SoTL. The strategy first provided training for all faculty members in teaching and scholarship to build their knowledge and skills, then enhanced and extended current initiatives and opportunities to engage faculty members in rigorous scholarship and SoTL projects. The third component of the strategy was focused on building scholarly capacity in EF faculty members. To engage faculty members and ensure their buy-in, I promoted the strategy and highlighted the benefits to faculty members at various meetings and forums, including senior faculty meetings.

### Strategies for All Faculty Members

1. Build Faculty member capacity and experience in learning and teaching through:
  - Faculty of Health Learning and Teaching Professional Development Calendar; and
  - Extension of existing Faculty member learning and teaching professional development initiatives
2. EF specific strategies
  - Build EF faculty member confidence, capacity and leadership in learning and teaching and scholarship, including SoTL, through the development of an Education Focus Community of Practice (EF CoP)

## Faculty of Health Learning and Teaching Professional Development Calendar

The professional development calendar sets the foundations of the strategy and provides academic members with regular opportunities to build their knowledge and skills in learning and teaching, and scholarship. The calendar includes scheduled monthly lunch hour sessions on different aspects, such as, SoTL, scholarly activities, academic integrity, generative AI, student support and inclusion services; bi-monthly course convener networking; and casual/sessional faculty member induction training. The topics covered are based on faculty member needs/gaps via a survey and emerging educational topics. The annual Faculty of Health Learning and Teaching Symposium focuses on key learning and teaching topics and applications. Speakers external and internal to university share their expert views and scholarly work through presentations or workshop sessions. Faculty members present their work in a safe and engaging environment, as well as inspire others to improve their assessment, content delivery, teaching and scholarly practices, thereby becoming SoTL leaders. The professional development is mostly conducted online, with the exception of the symposium, and recorded to ensure all faculty members including those from our partner institutions have access to the sessions. Originally designed for Faculty of Health members, the sessions are open to members from other faculties across the university.

### Scholarship and SoTL initiatives

The second component of the strategy builds upon the professional development calendar by enhancing current development opportunities, particularly in relation to rigour, methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks. In doing so, developing faculty academic leaders to enhance and advocate for education and scholarship. When I was appointed ADE a number of opportunities were supported by the faculty and available to all faculty members, these included:

- Teaching Innovation Generating Education Research (TIGER) Faculty grants program funded SoTL projects led by faculty members.
- The Faculty of Health Excellence in Teaching Awards recognised quality faculty teaching practices and outstanding contributions to the student experience, learning and outcomes.
- Higher Education Academy (HEA) fellowship awarded by AdvanceHE (Advance HE, 2025).
- Enrolment of faculty members in the University of British Columbia (UBC) Certificate in Curriculum and Pedagogy in Higher Education (University of British Columbia, 2025).

The Faculty of Health Education Conference Funding Scheme was the latest

opportunity to be added to the above opportunities when I was ADE to support the dissemination of SoTL undertaken by faculty members. This also ensured the faculty was able to support faculty members in all aspects of SoTL.

When developing the scholarship and SoTL strategy in the faculty I noticed that the application instructions for the above-mentioned opportunities, such as the TIGER Grants, Teaching awards, and the University of British Columbia program did not explicitly require applicants to include information regarding theoretical frameworks or methodological approaches. This was mirrored by the applications themselves. Using my expertise from completing the UBC in Curriculum and Pedagogy in Higher Education (University of British Columbia, 2025), I revised the application process to include information on rationales, methodological approaches and educational theoretical frameworks in the application instructions and relevant rubrics. To build faculty member knowledge and skills in these areas, SoTL sessions were included in the professional development calendar. Since implementing the changes, I have observed an improvement in the quality of applications with faculty members using relevant theories and appropriate methodologies to inform their teaching and scholarly activities across the TIGER Grant, Teaching Awards and certificate applications. I have also noticed greater depth on these areas in faculty member HEA fellowship applications. However, there have been challenges and resistance to these additional requirements. These challenges were mostly linked to the perception that SoTL is 'not real research' and therefore does not need to have rigour or sound methodological approaches. In these instances, I met with the faculty members, encouraged them to attend the professional development sessions, and in some instances aligned the faculty member with a mentor.

Overall, the professional development activities and initiatives have been well received by faculty members. The number of faculty members attending the sessions and achieving buy-in has improved over the last 5 years. There has been a culture shift across the faculty with improved engagement and high levels of enthusiasm towards education and an increase in faculty members engaging in scholarly activities and SoTL. The sessions are now seen as business as usual by most and not an imposition on time. SoTL as 'real research' is also changing but more slowly. As an educational and SoTL leader, my educational leadership philosophy has evolved to align with my growth as a leader. What I learned in this process, is that despite regulatory processes, policy requiring faculty members to engage in scholarship and SoTL, or my view that everyone should be engaging in scholarship, changing culture, particularly deep-seated culture, takes time, patience and champions. Leadership is about listening to and respecting differences, allowing each person to be heard, managing the differences and working to find a common ground to address an issue while acknowledging the compromises (Bolman & Gallos, 2011) and seeking their buy-in. This together with clear and effective communication,

both verbal and non-verbal, are key to obtaining faculty member buy-in and can positively influence engagement.

#### Education Focus Community of Practice

When I commenced as an EF faculty member in the Faculty of Health, I found that EF faculty members were generally not well supported, there were limited career pathways and while there were professional development programs most were for those on the education/research track and EF faculty members were either not eligible or the programs not suitable. As an educational leader in the faculty, I made it my mission in 2020 to change the narrative and set up an EF Community of Practice (CoP). At the time I did not formally align the CoP to a theoretical perspective or framework, the sessions were about sharing knowledge and ideas, but this changed as the CoP evolved and I reflected on the value of the CoP. Over time, I did refer to different theoretical perspectives, most notably Wenger-Trayer and Wenger-Trayner (2015). The theoretical perspectives and how CoP can be used in SoTL are covered in more detail in *How to Build a SoTL Network* by Janet Lord.

The Faculty of Health EF CoP involves a group of like-minded faculty members employed on the EF track that regularly come together to support and learn from each other, share experiences and build confidence and capacity in the EF workforce. EF faculty members from all 14 faculty disciplines are invited to attend the EF CoP sessions. The EF CoP meets bi-monthly for an hour, either online or in-person with approximately 20-30 EF faculty members attending each session. As being an EF faculty member is central to the EF CoP the concept of boundary crossing as discussed by Janet Lord, brings in another layer. The bringing of faculty members from diverse health professional backgrounds creates an environment in which the faculty members can share their knowledge, skills and practices to identify areas of academic commonality, proficiencies and efficiencies, and collaborate to initiate change in the wider academic setting.

Over the last two years I extended the original intent of the EF CoP in response to EF faculty members seeking support to engage in scholarship and university requirements for EF faculty members to engage in scholarship and SoTL. Although this extension went beyond the definition of a CoP as stated by Wenger-Trayner, & Wenger-Trayner (2015), the use of the CoP as a mechanism to develop the teaching and scholarship capabilities of the EF faculty members has been successful. Using the expertise I gained from completion of the UBC Certificate in Curriculum and Pedagogy in Higher Education, I designed a scholarship and educational research program specifically for EF faculty members in the Faculty of Health. In the Faculty, there are ~60 EF faculty members, of which only a quarter have a PhD and limited or no experience in undertaking research or scholarly activities and were not sure where to start. The inclusion of this program increased the attendance and

engagement of the EF CoP. The program was underpinned by the TEQSA guidelines on scholarship (TEQSA, 2022), the 2022 UC scholarship strategy (University of Canberra, 2023) and loosely based on the university research program available for education/research faculty members. Embedded in the bi-monthly EF CoP sessions, the program introduced faculty members to the basics of scholarly activities, SoTL, pedagogical and curriculum theories and research design. The following sections outline two topics that formed part of the program and are integral to faculty members as they become SoTL leaders – professional identity and the continuum of scholarship.

Since implementation of the EF CoP, EF faculty members are now more strongly positioned to demonstrate the University of Canberra Performance Expectations for Academic Staff (PEAS) and improve promotion and teaching excellence award prospects. The CoP has created a sense of belonging which was previously non-existent, for example: *“The EF Faculty Member CoP sessions have been extremely valuable to me as a new academic faculty member. The sessions provided relevant and practical content that deepened my understanding of scholarly practice. The sessions helped me connect with other EF faculty members in the Faculty and offer a supportive space to share ideas, exchange experiences, and build a sense of community.”* (EF Faculty Member 2025). I have observed that the improved faculty member knowledge and confidence in SoTL and educational research has increased, EF faculty members are leading FoH teaching grant applications, submitting conference abstracts and presenting SoTL/educational research at Faculty of Health Learning and teaching sessions and various conferences.

## **The pathway to SoTL leadership: Building capabilities and confidence**

### Tensions between professional identities

Professional Identity Formation is loosely defined as a complex, multidimensional, continual and transformative process that individuals move through as they align their current attributes, beliefs, values, behaviours, motives and experiences with those they perceive in their new career (Holden et. al., 2015). While there are a number of definitions for professional identity formation, the medical education definition is broad enough to apply to both health and other faculties, whereby professional identity formation is the *‘adaptive, developmental process that happens simultaneously at two levels:*

1. *at the level of the individual, which involves the psychological development of the person, and;*
2. *at the collective level, which involves socialization of the person into*

*appropriate roles and forms of participation in the community's work'*  
(Jarvis-Selinger, Pratt & Regher, 2012).

Informed by the social-cognitive and social categorisation theories, professional identity formation considers both the person and the social environment that influences and challenges one's professional identity (Holden et. al., 2015, Jarvis-Selinger, Pratt, & Regher, 2012). The formation of one's professional identity is therefore not static, it evolves as the individual learns new knowledge, skills and practices, and develops new or renewed behaviours and attitudes (Jarvis-Selinger, Pratt, & Regher, 2012). As mentioned earlier EF faculty members in the Faculty of Health, similar to other faculties, are often employed due to their subject/discipline and/or clinical/healthcare expertise (Bennett et. al., 2018; McLeod & Steinert, 2014; Webb & Tierney, 2020). Moving to academia the professional identity of the new faculty member is challenged as they move from being an expert as a health professional (nurse, physiotherapist, occupational therapist), artist, lawyer, engineer or researcher to a novice teaching in higher education. For a new faculty member there are tensions pulling them from one professional identity to another as they understand the new environment and the requirements of working in that environment. EF CoP faculty members found that these tensions impacted how they did their job and that they could not appropriately apply themselves to one profession without feeling a little guilty about a professional identity they seemed to be losing. This feeling is then further compounded when the novice faculty member attempts to understand and engage in scholarship and SoTL within the complexities of being an EF faculty member in a research dominant profession. To feel a sense of belonging, and not feeling inadequate or incapable, the faculty member needs to better understand themselves, who they are, their professional identity/ies, what the expectations of them are and how to achieve their goals. In doing so, the faculty member can derive their individual and professional 'place' in the new environment. To do this new faculty members need to be guided and supported as they grow and evolve.

During the first component of the program I developed for the EF CoP, the concept of professional identity and Molinero and Pereira's (2013) Professional Identity Framework was first described. I then asked a series of questions. The first was, "*How do you describe your professional identity?*". While those who had been in academia for more than seven years were able to articulate their identity, most however, found this question challenging. I then asked two further questions, "*Was 'educator' part of your professional identity or was it the role/think that you do?*" and was "*'education focussed' part of your professional identity or do you refer to this in terms of your employment track?*". For most they did not see either 'educator' or 'education focussed' as part of their professional identity. The EF faculty member stated it was challenging to distinguish between professional identity and your role/job. These last questions were confronting as the EF faculty members realised they

had not considered that being a teaching faculty member (or educator) and/or an EF faculty member was part of their professional identity.

The discussions from this EF CoP session, and the challenges being experienced by faculty members indicated that people saw professional identities as one or the other and that you could not be both. Chng's reference (from Contextualizing SoTL of this book) to hyphenated identities, aligns and extends the singular professional identity many associate with. That is, where a faculty member moves between their identities formed from their multifaceted roles and engagement with various environments, for example health professional-educator-SoTL leader or artist-educator-researcher. While there are different models or frameworks describing professional identity, regardless of which you chose to refer to in terms of constructing and adapting your professional identity, in essence, as EF faculty member engaging in teaching and SoTL, understanding and acknowledging your evolving and integrative professional identity is key to informing your teaching and education philosophies and approaches to teaching, research and SoTL leadership.

### Continuum of scholarship

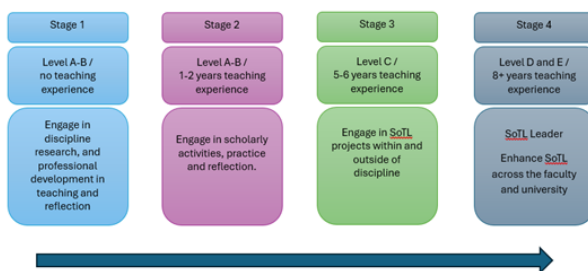
SoTL involves the systematic inquiry of teaching and learning using educational methodological approaches and publicly disseminating the findings (Felten, 2013). Leadership in SoTL, extends the SoTL definition and is defined as, '*a distinctive form of strategic inquiry for educational leaders with an explicit transformational agenda of educational practices within and across the disciplines in diverse university contexts*' (Webb et. al., 2020; Webb et. al., 2021). Engaging in SoTL as a new faculty member or one who has never engaged in scholarship previously may feel daunting. For others engaging in scholarship and SoTL, they believe they have to start learning a new area of inquiry, but don't realise they may already be informing and evolving teaching and learning through scholarship and SoTL in their own discipline areas. Ensuring faculty members understand the progression or continuum of scholarship and where they are in this continuum is important for the development of SoTL scholars, advocates and leaders. As many EF CoP faculty members were novices to scholarship and SoTL, this topic formed the second part of the program I developed for the EF CoP.

The continuum of scholarship comprises a strategic and scaffolded approach, that guides novice faculty members through the stages of scholarly activities, scholarship, SoTL and SoTL leadership. This approach also ensures faculty members are adequately equipped with the knowledge and skills to undertake rigorous and widely accepted scholarly inquiry (Simmons et. al., 2021; Webb & Tierney, 2020). Through this approach higher education institutions can foster a culture of scholarship and SoTL into everyday practice. Faculty members can build

their confidence, capacity and expertise in SoTL and become advocates and leaders in SoTL. The continuum of scholarship as represented in Figure 1 below, is adapted from Hubball et al., (2015) and outlines the progression for a new faculty member with no experience in scholarly practice to being a leader in SoTL. While each stage has been attributed an academic level, these are based on a new faculty member commencing employment at a Level A (Associate Lecturer) or Level B (Lecturer) and are a guide. The stage at which you align with the continuum is dependent upon your previous experience.

### Figure 1.

*Continuum of scholarship across academic faculty member levels (adapted from: Hubball, et al., 2015)*



The activities for each stage as proposed in Table 1 are aimed at building faculty member knowledge, capacity and capabilities so they can strategically and systematically become rigorous and strong SoTL leaders. Each level is expected to meet and continue with the activities listed in the previous level. The example activities below are listed as a guide and are not inclusive of all activities for each stage. You do not have to wait until you are Level C to engage with SoTL. In fact, my first SoTL project, while I did not know it at the time, was my PhD.

### Table 1.

*Suggested activities for each of the levels of the Continuum of Scholarship (adapted from: Gayle et. al., 2013; Hubball, et al., 2015; University of Canberra, 2023) (Link to downloadable PDF of Table 1)*

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read educational discipline research and scholarly papers on best practice and incorporate into your teaching.</li> <li>• Complete a Certificate or equivalent in Higher Education teaching.</li> <li>• Engage in Professional Development to enhance your teaching and scholarship.</li> <li>• Undertake regular reflective practice.</li> <li>• Seek peer review of teaching feedback.</li> <li>• Start thinking about your teaching philosophy.</li> </ul>	<p>In addition to Stage 1 activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform your teaching using curriculum and pedagogical theories, frameworks, best practice and innovations.</li> <li>• Engage with the literature to build knowledge and experience in different methodologies, methods and rigour in preparation of SoTL inquiry.</li> <li>• Be aware of and engage with scholarly activities being undertaken by the unit/subject convener OR if you are the unit convener engage in scholarly activities in the unit/subject you are convening.</li> <li>• Disseminate your scholarly activities at faculty or institutional forums.</li> <li>• Develop your teaching philosophy.</li> </ul>	<p>In addition to Stage 2 activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct and lead discipline SoTL projects locally and nationally.</li> <li>• Engage with program and faculty based SoTL projects.</li> <li>• Disseminate your scholarly activities at faculty, institutional or national forums.</li> <li>• Undertake curriculum review/ reform activities that are informed by relevant theories and frameworks.</li> <li>• Mentor faculty members in teaching and scholarly practices.</li> <li>• Apply for local grants relating to learning and teaching.</li> </ul>	<p>In addition to Stage 3 activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote and advocate for SoTL locally, nationally and internationally.</li> <li>• Conduct and lead national and international SoTL projects.</li> <li>• Mentoring and involve faculty member in your SoTL projects. Disseminate your scholarly activities at national and international forums.</li> <li>• Develop faculty and institutional programs to enhance scholarship and SoTL.</li> <li>• Apply for national and international grants relating to SoTL projects.</li> <li>• Develop your educational leadership philosophy.</li> </ul>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan a strategic pathway to SoTL leadership.</li> </ul>	
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ve practice and a log, and store this in their SoTL portfolio. Building the SoTL portfolio early allows faculty members to take stock and identify where they need to strengthen their knowledge and skills and plan their pathway to being a leader in SoTL. The following tips may assist you when planning your pathway:

- Make the most of what you are currently doing: scholarship and SoTL does not have to be something additional in your workload and you do not need to design a new activity or project that does not relate to what you are already doing. Embed scholarly practice in all activities of your teaching, design a SoTL project in the areas in which you already teach, and engage others who have similar areas that need investigating in these projects.
- Demonstrating leadership in SoTL does not require you to be in a formal leadership role, nor at a specific academic level. As stated in the Case Study by Pandit & van Leeuwen (in this book), ‘leadership is a process or practice that promotes change’, by doing SoTL you are contributing to the changing SoTL landscape, and through your actions and advocacy can lead this change.
- Be strategic in your approaches to SoTL, particularly early on in your journey. Engaging in too many projects can result in no projects being completed in a timely manner. Review your plan to SoTL leadership and review how this ‘new’ opportunity can contribute to your plan. If it does not fit, you can say No.
- Find a mentor, someone who is a SoTL leader. A mentor can help guide you through the continuum and provide advice on where you can develop the gaps in your knowledge and skills. Mentors are also good sounding boards.
- Don’t be afraid to be a SoTL champion.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided a snapshot of what we have been doing to build the confidence, capabilities and capacity of EF Health faculty members in scholarship

and SoTL. While the context and examples are informed by this work, the application of the suggestions and activities are transferable to other disciplines, professions and faculty areas. Central to this work has been building a CoP and the evolution of the EF CoP as a mechanism to grow scholarship and SoTL through supported boundary crossing, challenging professional identities and providing a strategic approach to moving through the continuum of scholarship to become leaders. While this chapter has touched on two of the components of the scholarship and educational research program specifically for EF faculty members, together with the other case studies in this book they provide a comprehensive approach for those striving to be a SoTL leader.

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## Reflecting on Our Journey Towards Building a SoTL Community Within and Across Disciplines: Six Lessons Learned

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### Abstract

This chapter examines the three-year interdisciplinary and interfaculty SoTL Advocates program at Utrecht University, the Netherlands: “*Get started and keep going with SoTL!*”, aimed at fostering Faculty-wide engagement with SoTL by establishing local networks, supporting Faculty staff and teachers to initiate SoTL projects, and embedding SoTL into Faculty policies and practices. At the end of the program, each SoTL Advocate brought an artefact representing their personal SoTL journey. Four of these artifacts served as a tool for further discussion and reflection from our perspective as SoTL Advocate. These symbolic objects, a metal spiral, a protractor triangle, a knitter’s work, and a Rubik’s Cube, visualized the tensions, vulnerabilities, collaborations, and learning processes that shaped our SoTL Advocates’ experiences during the 3-year journey. Our artefacts revealed patterns that helped to distill six practical lessons for introducing and expanding SoTL via SoTL Advocates, with an emphasis on timing and motivation, program structure, shared language, community building, alignment with disciplinary research cultures, and the interplay between bottom-up and top-down strategies. The six lessons offer a framework for educators, faculty staff members, and institutions seeking to develop sustainable and inclusive SoTL communities that are grounded in authentic scholarly inquiry. In the end, we discerned an unexpected seventh lesson, by realizing that in shaping and coloring the SOTL landscape, we unintentionally developed integrative leadership skills.

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SoTL refers to a systematic, research-informed approach in which educators critically reflect on their teaching practices to enhance student learning and educational quality (Felten, 2013). Engaging teachers in SoTL has benefits for student learning, course experiences, student satisfaction, and the use of innovative, student-activating teaching methods (Brew and Ginns, 2008). Globally, SoTL is recognized as a powerful tool for professional development and sustainable educational innovation. At Utrecht University (UU), SoTL has been embedded in strategic frameworks. However, until recently, UU support for teachers on SoTL

was provided through specific courses and/or individual consultations. However, this did not start Faculty-wide conversations about systematic inquiry into teaching and learning or promoting engagement of teachers in SoTL. Experiences with and outcomes of SoTL projects were shared, however, only within departments and among smaller groups of teachers within disciplines. As such, its lessons mostly remained under the surface. In this chapter, we demonstrate how an interfaculty SoTL network was built, what challenges emerged, and which practical strategies you can apply when developing an interdisciplinary SoTL community in your own context.

Around 2022, the SoTL Advocates program was started. To strengthen SoTL across the UU, that year the interdisciplinary and interfaculty project: “Get started and keep going with SoTL!” was launched. The project aimed to foster Faculty-wide engagement with SoTL by establishing local networks, supporting educators in initiating SoTL projects, and embedding SoTL into Faculty policies and practices. The approach was interfaculty and built on the principle of “teacher empowering teacher”. Each Faculty appointed two SoTL Advocates meaning that within the UU, 14 Advocates were appointed in 7 Faculties (including Utrecht medical school). University College Utrecht also joined the Advocate group with two Advocates. The (16) Advocates were to act as catalysts for change, role models, and creators and facilitators of Faculty-based learning communities (FBLCs).

The SoTL Advocate project was not designed as a traditional leadership program. Instead of developing individual leadership competences, the focus was on collective influence: educators enabling other educators to engage in SoTL. General leadership programs mostly focus on personal strategy and effectiveness and aim to develop individual competences to navigate complex management levels, influence team performance and often strategically impact hierarchical structures or positions (see for examples *Organizational Culture(s)* and *SoTL Leadership* by Mårtensson & Roxå, in this book). Therefore, leadership programs can be individual by nature. In contrast, the SoTL Advocate project was designed and, as this chapter shows, also perceived as a joint effort of 16 Advocates together travelling to reach the common goals. Although formal individual leadership skills were not the main aim of the project, some Advocate role components align with integrative leader characteristics (*Working the Boundaries* by Miller-Young, in this book). The three-year long road in the SoTL Advocate program was paved with discovery and inquiry, and SoTL Advocates were to collectively bridge disciplinary and Faculty differences, cross boundaries, and stimulate and enable peers to be involved in SoTL. Drawing on Latucca’s work, Miller-Young states: “In integrative collaborations, learning is both process and product as collaborators co-create their new understandings”, and that mirrors the perspective in the SoTL Advocate program about a less hierarchical and instead a more integrative form of leadership. Integrative leadership in educational and SoTL terms can then be understood as ‘leading of learning’ (Miller-Young,

2026) and requires skills not commonly associated with leadership in the traditional way. Individual capabilities related to exerting power, strategic and hierarchical positioning, and initiative taking as "senior, mid-level and informal leaders" (Mårtensson & Roxå, 2026), make room for listening, being attentive to others' needs and capabilities, sensitive to other participants' drivers and barriers, and having and showing an eagerness to build, discover and learn *together* – to jointly imagine and explore new opportunities. In other words: a leader who is a learner as well – on equal footing with other learners. Here, building trust among participants and jointly developing strategies for meaningful shared influence is key.

Over the three years of the project, the Advocates worked to raise awareness, activate engagement, and ensure sustainable integration of SoTL within their faculties. The Advocates had dedicated time for their activities at their respective faculties, but also to participate in 14 structured meetings organized by the SoTL Advocates Project team. In these meetings, different topics were addressed with ample opportunities to discuss differences and similarities between faculties but also to share different challenges that they faced while trying to get the SoTL conversation started in their departments. The experiences of the Advocates in bringing the SoTL message across, the barriers and drivers they encountered, and the solutions and strategies arising from the interdisciplinary discussions, have led to the development of tailored strategies to meet the unique needs and structures of each Faculty.

### **The outcomes of the SoTL Advocates program**

The outcomes are promising: several Faculties established active SoTL networks (e.g., Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences in the Faculty of Science), integrated SoTL into promotion criteria (e.g., Geosciences), and embedded it in funding and professional development procedures (e.g., Social Sciences). In addition, an online module was developed which is now part of teacher qualification programs and supports educators across UU. At the same time, the project revealed that long-term embedding of SoTL requires ongoing commitment, institutional support, and formal recognition of educational scholarship. Faculty contexts vary widely, and sustainable change demands both bottom-up community building and top-down policy alignment.

This project demonstrates that interfaculty collaboration, strategic support, and educator-led initiatives are essential for building a vibrant SoTL community across faculties and academic disciplines and that the first results are already visible. Furthermore, the networks, tools, and insights developed through this initiative provide a strong foundation for continued growth in educational scholarship at Utrecht University.

Between the set-up of the program and the outcomes, the SoTL Advocates undertook a three-year journey which was at times a bumpy road. Their experiences are insightful for groups of teachers in higher education thinking about introducing and expanding SoTL in their institutes through designing such a program.

In the last formal meeting of the program, all Advocates were asked to bring along an artefact representing their personal SoTL journey. Apart from a short explanation, there was limited time to elaborate on each other's journeys. That is why we, four Advocates from four quite different disciplines, decided to share and discuss our artefacts (including a short description) and reflect on them in more detail. This process resulted in six hands-on lessons for future practitioners in higher education to build interdisciplinary communities of practice. Below, the artefacts and lessons are presented.

### Artefacts visualising experiences from our journey as a SoTL Advocate

By translating our lived experiences into symbolic forms – in our case artifacts – we were able to reflect critically on them, each from our own perspective, as we had different starting points in our SoTL Advocates journey. Discussing our reflections created a deeper understanding of our individual lived experiences and allowed for the distillation of lessons for future practice. For this chapter, each of the contributors chose an artifact that represented their lived experience as a SoTL Advocate (see Figures 1-4).

#### Case 1 – Navigating Tensions Between Educational Practice and SoTL (Roos)

This case illustrates how SoTL leaders balance uncertainty, vulnerability, and peer connection when introducing SoTL in clinical and educational contexts.

#### **Figure 1.**

*A metal spiral*



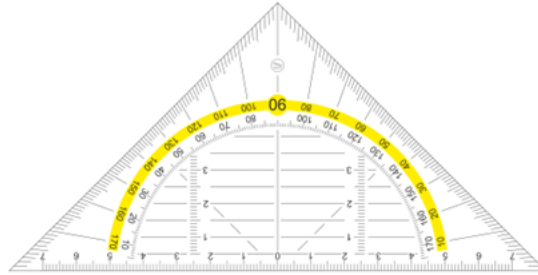
The metal spiral symbolizes how I sometimes felt pulled in different directions between the theoretical knowledge that needs to be integrated into teaching and the practical delivery of education. In both aspects, I strive for high quality. Once the spiral is set in motion, it moves with great energy—like a train—but it remains delicate. If it gets tangled, it’s hard to unravel, and if it breaks, it’s difficult to restore it to its original form. This vulnerability represents my experiences with the SoTL program as I had to cope with and learn from these pulls from different directions and insecurities along the way. My listening and sharing skills, however, helped me to recognize and acknowledge fellow SoTL Advocates’ experiences, to focus more on overlaps and similarities than on differences, and to learn from them. Sharing and discussing pressing issues at the SoTL Advocate meetings helped to feel energized and to even pass this on to my (disciplinary) colleagues (Roos, University Medical Center Utrecht, Education Center).

Case 2 - Aligning Bottom-Up and Top-Down Change (Veronique)

This case focuses on policy alignment and institutional recognition, showing how SoTL leadership operates across organisational levels.

**Figure 2.**

*The protractor triangle*



The protractor triangle has three sharp angles or perspectives, but most of all: it is a transparent triangle with a broad base and small peak. The triangle thus visualizes the need for both a bottom-up and top-down approach in introducing and stimulating SoTL in the broad interdisciplinary Faculty of GeoSciences, which at the UU combines both natural sciences and social sciences academic fields. Furthermore, transparency of the triangle stands for (the need for) clarity of SoTL concepts, a shared recognition of SoTL-endeavors in academic professionalization, and clear and common understanding of educational research by both teachers, their supervisors, and students.

The three sharp angles stand for the three main achievements of the SoTL-Advocate program in Geosciences as I see them: increasing awareness, stimulating engagement in SoTL, and the structural embedding of SoTL in the Faculty. But also, the three sharp angles of the triangle stand in deep contrast with the ‘round’ and as such seemingly smooth Utrecht SoTL Roadmap picture. The process of embedding SoTL within the Faculties and academic disciplines can be and feel prickly – and sometimes even painful. During the program, I learned from situations, experiences, and strategies from other SoTL Advocates. Our honest discussions, especially when colleagues shared their painful struggles, disappointments, and less successful strategies to overcome (hierarchical) barriers, helped me to open my mind to other viewpoints and sometimes even solutions (Veronique, GeoSciences Faculty, Human Geography and Spatial Planning).

### Case 3 – Building Shared Understanding Across Disciplines (Rianne)

Here the challenge was not policy but perspective: developing a shared language across disciplinary traditions.

### **Figure 3.**

*A Rubik’s Cube*



A Rubik's Cube, that looks different from every angle and at the same time asks for collaboration to complete the puzzle. The Rubik's Cube represents the different perspectives that are there to research in general and to SoTL in specific. Being a SoTL Advocate at the Humanities faculties made me realize that different perspectives to SoTL need to be appreciated and need to be made explicit in conversation with colleagues. At the same time this cube represents the need for a collaborative goal; with the right combination of colours the Rubik's Cube can be completed. Combining the colours together calls for cultivating collaboration at both the SoTL-project level and my (inter)disciplinary context. The 26 smaller cubes of the Rubik's Cube illustrate different contributions that can be brought together in multiple ways depending on the collaborative goal. Looking at the changing combinations of colours, resulting from collaboration increased my feelings of 'being in it together' and co-creating the SoTL trajectory and its outcomes together (Rianne, Faculty of Humanities, Liberal Arts and Sciences).

Case 4 - Sustaining Community Through Care and Persistence (Anneke)

This case highlights the long-term relational work required to maintain SoTL communities.

**Figure 4.**

*A knitter's work*



The knitter's work shown above is one part of a larger work, in most cases a cozy cabin log blanket, and could reflect the outcome of the SoTL Advocates project. Each cabin log block resembles how every SoTL Advocate had to follow their own path on dealing with Faculty policy, members, and teachers. Besides overarching issues, SoTL Advocates had their own discipline-based issues on introducing and expanding SoTL, with some of us already had a lot of experiences with SoTL whilst others were just starting to engage with SoTL. The different colors used in this block are connected to one another, reflecting how we tried to relate and hold onto each other for support, within our discipline and across our disciplines. As SoTL Advocates we are not finished with exploring and expanding SoTL, on the contrary it just started. It will take time, resilience, continuous reflection, flexibility, creativity, and perseverance. This requires specific skills: being attentive and patient, carefully listening to the needs and expectations and hopes of potentially interested colleagues, recognizing energy and enthusiasm in them and quickly act on SoTL opportunities for all involved as they present themselves. If the blocks are stitched together to form a completed blanket, it will give warmth and coziness, much like home coming and feeling to be loved and cared for (Anneke, Faculty of Science, Pharmaceutical Sciences).

From the above mentioned artifacts and their descriptions, we distilled six lessons that served as a foundation for further expansion of each lesson into broader practical implications for setting up SoTL networks and communities. These distilled lessons contained themes within leadership, policy, and institutional organization of SoTL, which places our lessons in line with the observational framework of Myatt et al (2017).

### Lesson 1. Engage the right people at *their* right moment

A key insight is that successful SoTL initiatives depend on inviting the right people at the right moment. The success of a Faculty-based SoTL initiative depends not

only on institutional support but on identifying the right individuals—those who are intrinsically motivated to improve teaching and learning. These are often educators and teachers who have long engaged in reflective practice, even before they knew that it was SoTL what they were doing. By inviting them at a moment when they feel ready to act, we tap into a deep reservoir of energy and commitment. This calls for patience and attentively waiting for the right time and right moment – a typical skill of integrative leadership. All SoTL Advocates have witnessed that it is not the (SoTL) message alone that counts, but also the timing, phrasing, and intensity of getting this message across to the right colleagues. Only acting upon this careful evaluation is key.

*“Although I did not know yet what SoTL was at that time, I already had a SoTL mindset; reflecting on my teaching, reflecting on how students learn in the classroom and how this could be improved by taking a research-based approach.”*  
(Rianne)

Our reflections show that many Advocates had early experiences with educational innovation – whether through interdisciplinary course design, problem-based learning, or informal peer collaboration. These experiences often sparked questions about student engagement, learning outcomes, and the role of evidence in teaching. What united them was a desire to connect their disciplinary expertise with educational development, and a willingness to step outside their comfort zones.

*“For years, I have wondered why university teachers do not use their research capabilities to improve their teaching, and why so many are focused on advancing their disciplinary research while neglecting their teaching and their students’ learning.”* (Veronique)

We also learned that pairing junior and senior Advocates within faculties creates a dynamic learning environment. The difference in experience fosters mutual growth, echoing Vygotsky’s concept of the Zone of Proximal Development. Moreover, having at least one Advocate with direct access to Faculty leadership proved essential for embedding SoTL in policy and practice.

*“Our community of practice was initiated by a senior SoTL leader to bring together SoTL-mined teachers. This diverse group has different SoTL experiences and skills but learn with and from each other. The community is very vulnerable in its existence due to the lack of allocated time for teachers joining the community”* (Anneke)

Ultimately, engaging the right people at the right time is not just a strategic move – it’s a cultural intervention. It allows SoTL to grow organically within faculties, rooted in authentic questions and sustained by peer support. When educators feel

seen, supported, and connected, they become powerful agents of change. For SoTL leaders, recruitment is therefore not an administrative task but a relational one.

## Lesson 2. Design a clearly structured program directed at a common goal (even beyond program's deadline)

Gathering motivated colleagues is only a first step. You also need a structure that helps them collaborate towards a shared goal. The program structure can be used to keep enthusiastic scholars motivated, right from the start. In the absence of external motivation, such as UU or Faculty recognition for the still relatively unknown SoTL activities and output, at the program's start the SoTL Advocates had to rely on their own energy and enthusiasm. Although we think it was rather unintentional, the setup of the UU-SoTL Advocate program acknowledged the three basic elements from Ryan & Deci's pivotal work (2000) on intrinsic motivation and self-initiated behavior: the need for autonomy, for competence, and for relatedness. The program and its activities throughout the meetings offered plenty of room for Advocates to freely and autonomously explore Faculty-specific goals, develop particular dissemination opportunities in their Faculty, engage in (inter)national conferences and debates, and find (creative) ways to get colleagues within our faculties on board. The relatedness factor was accounted for in the many opportunities for informal contact with colleagues from other disciplines during the Advocate project meetings. However, the program especially fulfilled the need for competence for the scholars involved, in two major ways: a structured program to commit us to being a SoTL Advocate and building competency by addressing SoTL specific themes and topics.

First, the program was not only highly structured in its set-up over three years, transparent in team (management) responsibilities, and had finite goals, but it made us commit to making it a success.

*“Here I found that we could be part of a larger community within the UU, having the same goal of encouraging SoTL” (Rianne)*

From the start, the SoTL Advocate program aimed at putting SoTL on each Faculty's agenda and giving birth to Faculty learning communities that *would survive the program's end date*. This implied that during the program, we would be learners and builders, but also that we would end up as experts of and maybe even leaders of the SoTL communities in our respective faculties. We were to work on a sustainable new type of scholarship in higher education that was meant to stay and to continue and to develop further – beyond the SoTL Advocate program's border. Veronique characterized the program as follows,

*“So using the project as “incubator” that would deliver energetic Faculty start-ups.” (Veronique)*

The structured set up of the program gave us the opportunity to develop our competence, ‘freeing’ us of the need to be competent already at the start. We were learners with ample time and space to develop, which closely aligns with the learning aspect of integrative leadership.

Second, the SoTL Advocate meetings were clearly structured around specific topics, also inviting the Advocates to actively come up with their own topics. On time, a clear agenda was sent with ample opportunities for sharing. Often, we had to prepare small assignments, such as developing and designing a poster to advertise and invite colleagues to SoTL information meetings in our respective Faculties or Departments. We had both practical discussions about how to organize a SoTL workshop and more theoretical or reflective dialogues about ethical guidelines in the faculties and challenges of encouraging SoTL in the faculties. The presentation of our assignments at the SoTL Advocate meetings received positive feedback from both peers (other SoTL Advocates) and the program coordinators. This encouragement highly stimulated our work, ideas and -more hidden- also addressed our need for increasing our competence.

Building competence through these elements has helped our collaboration, also because we were SoTL Advocates from different disciplinary backgrounds. This required us to actively make the translation between our own disciplinary context and SoTL at a higher level. It allowed us to be very specific about what we would like SoTL to be within our disciplines, but also to reflect on the purpose of SoTL at the collective level. According to Anneke, this also benefitted newcomers:

*“It needs a common purpose (or goal) and structured program that guides collective growth and learning opportunities – this proved to be important also when onboarding new members during the program” (Anneke)*

One critical note, though. We believe that the SoTL Advocate program level would have benefited from a slow but persistent embedding in the UU institutional framework around teacher development, for instance in the UU SIG SoTL right from the start. Thus, although the clear articulation of common goals is key, securing it on or tying it into existing institutional educational programs would help justify the SoTL program for us and outsiders.

### Lesson 3. Slow down to first create common ground and language

In this lesson, we would like to focus on the value we found in first creating a common ground amongst ourselves as SoTL Advocates about what SoTL is and

how we can communicate the meaning of SoTL to others in the Faculty. Some of us were not familiar with the concept of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning but were practicing it in their context. We took the time to explore the different approaches to research-based teaching and to discuss in what context these would work. By explicitly addressing the language that we use, we could talk about the difference between SoTL and research-based education or disciplinary based educational research and how we would like to approach this in the different faculties. Language in this way was also the basis of a vision we created together.

*“The concept of SoTL initially proved abstract and difficult to define for many. Through intensive dialogue, a shared language and vision emerged. This enabled the community to speak with one voice, significantly strengthening the positioning of SoTL within the university.” (Roos)*

Next to our own Advocates meetings, in our Faculty context it is important to pay attention to the language of SoTL and educational research and to be explicit about the meaning of different concepts. It is not necessary to exclude initiatives that are not SoTL, but to be able to discuss the relation between different types of educational research and their purpose. This can be useful to make a start with a group of people who connect to a range of educational research activities. SoTL is not something opposite from these existing activities, but part of a range of valuable ways to encourage scholarly teaching.

*“Especially in the early stages, finding a common language among the group of Advocates was challenging, but it also created a fruitful space for exploration. This growing awareness of the power of words and language proved highly valuable in subsequent communication with colleagues across the various faculties.” (Veronique)*

It takes time to learn this new language. Webb (2016) and Tierney (2017) explain this with the idea of ‘threshold concepts’ that students need to learn and adopt while encountering new disciplines. These concepts are specific to a discipline or research field. We as Advocates, but also our colleagues in the faculties need to interact with these new threshold concepts that belong to SoTL research – knowledge about the meaning of concepts and theories related to SoTL. To actively learn this new language and at the same time integrating it with the language of the discipline someone is already familiar with is an interesting, but challenging task.

*“Finding a common language is challenging, as different disciplines use different terms for the same phenomena. Even engaging in SoTL takes time, as it brings together at least two disciplines: one’s own teaching discipline and the language of discipline-based education research. Discussing these differences in language is joyful and deepens our learning and development as a community of SoTL*

*Advocates. It has also created opportunities for collaboration across disciplines to advance SoTL.” (Anneke)*

Language is important and when language is not connected to the disciplinary context or context within the Faculty, it is difficult to encourage participation in the community. Concepts need to be made explicit, but also differences need to be discussed. Also, if there is a difference between preference in SoTL, or research-based education, there needs to be room for that as well and to shy away from the conversation that one of these methods is ‘better’ than the other. We had to learn about the other disciplinary languages and what is more, postpone and get rid of our judgments and prejudices. This requires listening and learning – typical integrative leadership skills, which we have developed during the program.

One SoTL Advocate meeting we were asked to bring in examples from SoTL literature in our own disciplinary practice. We found that having those, as well as showing examples of our colleagues doing SoTL helped to make the language of SoTL more accessible.

*“We organized community meetings in which we invited colleagues to discuss their educational research, including SoTL. We intentionally included different types of research within Humanities higher education. These meetings proved valuable, as they demonstrated what educational research in the humanities can encompass and what SoTL can look like in humanities education.” (Rianne)*

Finally, metaphors are helpful as well. Asking participants to bring an object (as we did at our last SoTL Advocates meeting) encourages them to actively reflect, slow down and have meaningful conversations that mobilize different perspectives.

#### Lesson 4. Organize formal interdisciplinary meetings which in time and place stimulate informally sharing experiences and exciting plans

In this lesson, we want to elaborate on the allocated time and activities that came with the Advocates program. As we experienced throughout the program, SoTL requires time, structure, and institutionally supportive culture to let SoTL flourish. Without support and dedicated time, SoTL often remains an additional task and therefore easily replaced by more immediate demands of teaching tasks. Time is one of the most critical resources in this context (Huber & Hutchings, 2006) and time pressure may hinder experienced autonomy (Ryan and Deci, 2000). On one hand, when hours for SoTL are explicitly reserved within formal workloads, staff gain the capacity to engage in SoTL and disseminate their findings. Such time allocation signals institutional recognition that SoTL is not a pursuit but an essential part of educational quality enhancement and a way to recognize and reward SoTL, and its

Advocates and their integrative leadership development. On the other hand, time allocation also comes with challenges regarding the scheduling of the meetings. These meetings were arranged in such a way that they would interfere as little as possible with the teaching schedules of the Advocates, meaning that they were started in the late afternoon and ended at the beginning of the evening.

Veronique reflected on the challenges of the timing of the meetings,

*“At the UU level, including within the SoTL Advocate program, it was sometimes difficult to maintain focus. Although time was formally allocated for all Advocates, the wide range of competing tasks in research and education hampered full engagement in the program. The timing of meetings, often at the end of the day, also posed challenges, as participants were frequently tired” (Veronique)*

Equally important is how our SoTL meetings were organized. Our meetings had both formal and informal activities. The formal activities ensured progressing in the Advocates program and entailed shared planning, updates on ongoing projects, opportunities to exchange insights with the works of other SoTL Advocates within their Faculty or institution.

We all held positive experiences to the formal activities as illustrated by Roos, Veronique, and Rianne:

*“Sharing experiences across faculties revealed key similarities and differences, which—together with expert input—were transformed into actionable SoTL research. Collaboration built strong connections and tackled urgent themes, made possible by dedicated time from the SoTL Advocates project.” (Roos)*

*“The main benefit of the USO SoTL Advocate program was the ease to share experiences and learn from both the best and worst practices of colleagues from other faculties and disciplines in introducing SoTL. During the program, we discussed, laughed, and designed new practices with each other during the 14 in-depth training sessions of 3 hours, guided and supervised by colleagues from UU Educational Support and Advice.” (Veronique)*

*“The structure of the SoTL Advocates meetings gave us the push to take action within our Faculty, while also providing the opportunity to reflect on what was happening and compare it with other faculties. Sharing practices helped us identify differences and similarities across contexts.” (Rianne)*

Informal activities, however, give time and space for spontaneous and open interactions, which often sparks creativity, fun and laughter and a feeling of belonging to a community. It also gives opportunities to meet and learn from teachers outside your discipline, whom you normally do not meet. The lively pizza

gatherings at the end of the day offered joyful and informal opportunities for SoTL Advocates to share their lessons learned, opportunities seized, and barriers encountered. The informal activities also ensures that relatedness is addressed (Ryan and Deci, 2000) as experienced by Anneke, Veronique, and Rianne:

*“Our informal dinners added joy and space for meaningful conversations.”*  
(Anneke)

*“Informally, we also joined smaller workshops, panels, and presentations at UU and beyond. These interactions helped SoTL Advocates connect, support, and energize each other. Our program built a Community of Practice, which we later replicated within our own faculties.”* (Veronique)

*“Because SoTL Advocates were highly motivated to improve teaching and engage in educational projects, we quickly built connections and a shared practice that encouraged informal conversations. The meetings fostered openness, allowing us to share not only successes but also challenges.”* (Rianne)

In summary, time allocation and informal activities are elements in building (inter)disciplinary SoTL communities that positively contribute to further extension of SoTL in our own disciplines. Making time for lunch or dinner is important as it functions as acknowledgement and contributes to a sense of belonging.

## Lesson 5. Connect to disciplinary research practices

As SoTL Advocates, our task was to encourage SoTL in our faculties, which meant that we could leverage our existing network and connect to our own disciplinary background and disciplinary research practices. In this lesson we advocate for SoTL as something that strengthens disciplinary research rather than a choice teachers must make.

As SoTL Advocates, we often had conversations on how the disciplinary approaches within our faculties related to SoTL research, embedded in the social sciences. As Repko and Szostak (2021) state, disciplines are defined by their core elements such as epistemology (how the discipline approaches the truth), assumptions, concepts and methodology. These might be different from the core elements used within SoTL. This is also illustrated by research from Tierney (2017), who presented categories of “Troublesome Knowledge” for scholars from the life sciences engaging in SoTL, such as engaging with the literature, how to analyze data and understanding the paradigm.

As SoTL Advocates we encountered these challenges of dealing with a new research paradigm when doing SoTL as Veronique illustrates:

*“(..) The (mis)conception among geo-colleagues that we geo-scientists lack knowledge and skills regarding educational theory and educational methods to fully engage in SoTL-projects – and that it would take much time to dive into this new field.” (Veronique)*

Also, from the experience of Anneke, the narrative of opposing disciplinary research practices to SoTL research could be holding back colleagues to practice SoTL.

*“We face several challenges: first, SoTL is often seen as an educational activity rather than research. Second, balancing the value of studying one’s own practice with the time required for SoTL projects. Third, overcoming disciplinary research paradigms and adapting to qualitative and quantitative approaches.” (Anneke)*

When actively advocating for SoTL in different faculties, we found it is valuable to address these differences and challenges and to talk with the community of scholars about their hesitations with SoTL and by doing just that, acknowledge their reluctance. This was done by discussing existing SoTL research practices which also allow disciplinary groups to talk about where the connection to their disciplinary research practices might be. For example, within Humanities the SoTL roadmap that was developed at Utrecht University (Meijerman, Wijsman and Kirschner, 2024) was discussed with a humanities perspective, as Rianne reflects upon –

*“I recognized the importance of connecting SoTL to colleagues’ disciplinary backgrounds, creating space for their preferred research approaches. I applied this when organizing a meeting to adapt the SoTL roadmap for the humanities. Together, we discussed how each element resonated with our context and adjusted it accordingly.” (Rianne)*

Having a language that is understood by all (see lesson 3) helps, but also the ability of us as SoTL Advocates to connect to disciplinary research practices, because we are embedded in a disciplinary culture. Using integrative leadership skills, such as engagement and especially alignment (Miller-Young 2026), we actively used our own SoTL-ideas and even SoTL projects to show our disciplinary colleagues that these are complementary to instead of opposed to disciplinary research practices. In our SoTL Advocate meetings we then shared how this looks like in practice, for example by discussing different practices in ethics applications within the faculties. Here we specifically dedicated one session to sit down and look at different cases in SoTL to explain our ethical practices to each other. We used this to define the problem and possible solutions, actively taking these back to our disciplinary communities.

Finally, next to our own role, the social context of a Faculty is important as well in

leveraging SoTL as something of value to your work as a scholar. As Roos reflects upon, this is not always the case:

*“There is little structural support for reflecting on the impact of teaching on students and colleagues. Due to a shortage of teaching staff, decisions are often pragmatic: “Just teach, and if you do it this way, it’s fine” (Roos)*

In contexts that are not as supportive of teaching innovation, connecting SoTL research to disciplinary practices could alter the perception of SoTL. The social context would benefit from having SoTL research recognized as a research activity (as also emphasized in lesson 6) at the level of the Faculty management. This is a good step to move towards a culture of valuing SoTL in the faculties.

As a SoTL leader, connecting SoTL to disciplinary identities reduces resistance and increases engagement.

## Lesson 6. Combine top-down and bottom-up strategies in Faculty and disciplinary settings

During the SoTL Advocate program, we found that embedding SoTL in the respective Faculties was quite hard. We noticed that for encouraging SoTL it is valuable to connect SoTL to existing educational innovation initiatives in the Faculties or departments and to show our colleagues that this is not an element added to education or research, but that it is an instrument to innovate our education and reflect on its quality. As SoTL Advocates and (mostly) assistant or associate professors with many and various teaching tasks, we were standing quite close to our colleagues in education. Here, we could ‘walk the talk’; we were the living examples of people setting up and executing our SoTL projects, struggling with Ethical Board requirements, new types of research methods, and literature and outlets we were unfamiliar with the ‘lived experience’ Godbold, Matthews, and Gannaway (2024) talked about. In several cases, we as SoTL Advocates took other colleagues along in their project or encouraged and supported our colleagues who initiated their own projects to investigate the learning effects of their teaching. This led to some successful applications for funding and publications in an academic journal on higher education. In the end, we might conclude that putting energy into a bottom-up strategy came quite naturally for most of us.

However, for SoTL to become structurally and sustainably embedded in the faculties, the realization of its benefits for educational quality and educational innovation should be shared with the Faculty (or university) management as well. As Rianne put it:

*“Sustainable change requires support from above and energy from below.” (Rianne)*

The need for a simultaneous two-way approach (both top-down and bottom-up) to embed SoTL in the faculties was recognized and articulated by many SoTL Advocates. To encourage the bottom-up SoTL initiatives of colleagues it is important that they are valued by their managers and supervisors, for instance by including this in the assessment of their academic efforts and to allow SoTL to be part of someone's research output (see also White & Mpamhanga, 2024). The process of setting SoTL on the Faculty agendas varied substantially; from quite natural to more regulatory. In the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, there was a renewed interest in a community of practice on SoTL due to a major curriculum renewal towards an integrated pharmacy curriculum before the start of the SoTL Advocates program. This renewed interest facilitated an energetic start and an increasing interest in evidence-informed innovations reflected by a rise in members and applications for funding these innovations. In the Faculty of Geosciences, more regulatory or institutional 'top down' support proved to be important to recognize SoTL as an important academic endeavor in two ways. First, initiated by the vice-dean of Education, SoTL has been introduced in formal reward and recognition (TRIPLE) criteria and with that, also in mindsets of HR managers and supervisors when issues regarding promotion are at stake. Second, the dean set up a specific program (2025-2027) to stimulate educational scholarship throughout the Faculty, with departmental ambassadors and support from UU Educational Advice & Support. Here it proved quite important that key persons at the Faculty (board) level were interested and believed in SoTL, and actively promoted SoTL (see also Kenny, Watson, & Desmarais, 2024). Also involving the HR and educational support officers was essential in adding educational scholarship criteria to calls regarding university or Faculty Education Stimulation Funds.

To summarize; as a bottom-up strategy is essential for getting colleagues acquainted with, interested in and motivated for SoTL, a top-down approach is necessary to keep SoTL alive and kicking, also after specific SoTL programs end. We recognize that dividing energy between both levels seems ineffective, but in the long run this pays off.

We have two extra recommendations regarding combining bottom-up and top-down strategies. First, and linked to the Pharmaceutical Sciences top-down experience mentioned above; try *free-riding*. Be keen on linking the introduction of SoTL or educational scholarship to existing or upcoming strategic (educational) strategies at the Faculty or university level. At Utrecht University for instance, the recently revised Educational Model offers ample stimuli to investigate (and research) educational innovations. Second, at the teachers (bottom-up) side, we experienced that the colleagues highly motivated to reflect on their teaching, often are the ones with temporary contracts and as such have relatively few research or career opportunities. This is reflected in the illustration of Rianne:

*“A paradoxical situation as the genuinely motivated colleagues will in the end not benefit from embedding SoTL in Faculty (reward and recognition) regulations or criteria.” (Rianne)*

As we have witnessed that junior teachers/colleagues can play a pivotal role in driving educational innovation, we suggest that this group of (temporary) teachers receive extra time for tasks in research on education – and that their efforts are rewarded in some way or another.

## **Summary and conclusion**

From the set-up of the SoTL Advocates Program to its outcomes, our journeys unfolded by visualization of the artifacts and through sharing our experiences within and beyond our Faculties. We have identified several lessons from our experiences as SoTL Advocates. However, the overarching lesson perhaps is that the Advocate Community consists of people, structure, energy, flow, and joy. This means that our message can be eventually seen as ‘one voice’ and is therefore more powerful than the sum of each individual tone or part. By going through our experiences as SoTL Advocates, we created a similar mindset. All together, we illustrate how collaboration can work within disciplines and across disciplines leading to a network of SoTL Advocates.

Our interdisciplinary SoTL network eventually facilitated short communication lines and accelerated the achievement of our goals. The interfaculty collaboration and shared commitment create a dynamic and responsive environment where educational innovation can truly take place and expand.

Our approach serves as an inspiring example for other groups of people seeking to build a SoTL community: practice-oriented, interdisciplinary, and driven by lecturers and teachers themselves.

Maybe the most unexpected program outcome is that after its formal ending, we as SoTL Advocates still feel and act like Advocates. We are still energized and enthusiastic about collaboratively working on SoTL within and across our own disciplines. While the SoTL Advocate project did not start off as an individual leadership program, we as learners, brokers and builders of bridges between disciplines, management levels, and separate research and education domains, in the meantime rather unconsciously developed and trained some typical leadership skills we developed from being a “learner among learners” to a “learning leader of learners” along the way and started to colour the landscape of SoTL in our university. This hints at a seventh, more hidden lesson: integrative leadership skills can also be developed as an unintentional bypass of the SoTL journey.

Together, these lessons show that SoTL leadership is less about managing change and more about cultivating relationships, alignment, and shared ownership of educational inquiry.

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## Authorship

Authors are in alphabetical order and have made an equal contribution.

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## Networks and Communities in SoTL

In the previous section, we explored how engagement in SoTL becomes part of an evolving academic and leadership identity. A key insight that emerged is that this development does not occur in isolation. Rather, identity is shaped through relationships—through conversations, collaborations, and shared inquiry with others.

This section builds on that insight by focusing on the networks and communities that sustain and extend SoTL leadership. If the previous section addressed the question “*Who am I becoming in this work?*”, this section asks: “*With whom, and through what relationships, does this work take shape?*” It highlights that SoTL leadership is fundamentally relational and collective, emerging through connections that enable collaboration, trust, and shared purpose.

Across the chapters in this section, networks are presented not simply as supportive environments, but as active sites of learning, identity formation, and change. Professional networks, communities of practice, and collaborative initiatives create the conditions in which SoTL can grow, enabling individuals to expand their understanding of teaching and learning while also contributing to broader institutional and disciplinary developments.

While the chapters all focus on communities and networks, they do so from distinct but complementary angles. Lord offers a research-informed analysis of different types of networks—formal, informal, and communities of practice—clarifying how these structures operate and what conditions support their effectiveness. In contrast, McSweeney positions SoTL leadership explicitly as community work, focusing on the intentional development of Communities of Scholars and outlining how such communities can be established, grown, and sustained. Together, these perspectives move from understanding what SoTL networks are and how they function, to exploring how they can be purposefully cultivated as sites of leadership and change.

Taken together, the contributions in this section show that SoTL leadership is not enacted alone. It develops through relationships that enable individuals to learn with and from others, to build shared practices, and to coordinate efforts across disciplines and institutions. In this way, the identity development explored in the previous section is shown to be inherently relational, grounded in the networks and communities that support and extend individual practice.

This section invites you to reflect on your own connections: the networks you are part of, the communities you contribute to, and the relationships that shape your work in SoTL. It also encourages you to consider how you might intentionally create or strengthen such connections as part of your own leadership practice.

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## Case Study: Building a Community

Anne M. Tierney

What impact does a network or being part of a community have on one's understanding of SoTL? It's one of those questions that is both simple and complex. For me, having a network – or rather several networks – is absolutely central to my enjoyment of, and participation in SoTL. I illustrate this with some examples from my past that were pivotal experiences for me.

When I started teaching at university, we were not even considered to be academics. This changed when my institution subsumed a teacher training college to become its School of Education in 2003. To accommodate teachers, it created a new academic role, the description of which fitted the role that my colleagues and I were doing. Several years later we were recognised as academic members of staff on a teaching and scholarship track. Around that time, a few things happened concurrently – I was asked to be an institutional rep for the Higher Education Academy (HEA) Centre for Bioscience, I was invited to take part in a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) (Cox, 2004), and I started an MEd.

Suddenly I had three networks whose purpose was SoTL, or educational research, or scholarship. I wanted very much to be a part of those communities. I liked the people, I liked learning about education and I wanted to know more. I also wanted to understand why the conversations taking place in these three networks didn't happen in my workplace – we were teachers, right? But we never talked about teaching in the way I did within those three networks. The HEA Centre for Bioscience supported teachers in Life Science departments in UK universities develop their scholarship, through events, conferences and funding. The small team, based at the University of Leeds, serviced the whole of the UK, and relied on its institutional reps to spread its activities within departments and schools. We shared practice with one another, we supported one another, we learned from each other. The Faculty Learning Community's remit was to look at the definition of SoTL. Following Milton Cox's (2004) Miami Model, we spent a year having conversations about what SoTL meant. The FLC was life-changing for me. Suddenly I could see how I could be an academic. I loved teaching, and SoTL was what I had been looking for (Bell et al., 2006; MacKenzie et al., 2010). Through the contact with the university's Learning and Teaching Centre, I made the decision to complete an MEd, looking at how including students in curriculum design and academic development transforms the landscape (Pritchard et al., 2008). Interestingly, this took place prior to the emergence of "Students as Partners" (Cook-Sather et al., 2014), which has

gained traction in higher education, and I always view it with a sense of irony. The group that was in my cohort were generous, welcoming and we supported one another through the two years of the programme. We all laughed when we forgot to register to graduate, so we organised lunch on graduation day instead.

Why are networks important? Looking at Wenger's (1998) definition of a community of practice, the domain, the community and the practice are all vital components. This is what was on offer in those three examples – a chance to spend time with other people who cared about teaching, who were knowledgeable about it and who wanted to share that knowledge and an opportunity to give back to the community that was supporting me. Those networks formed a community which still exists today – I am still friends with these people, we still have those conversations, we still present workshops and write papers together. And I still wonder why I'm not having those conversations when I am at work. That, I believe, is because we are all too "busy" doing other things. We spend an inordinate amount of time on operational things, when we should be spending time on creative things. I now turn to the present and retell a lovely story about SoTL which is happening in my institution right now. I sit on the advisory board of Improving University Teaching, an annual international conference. In 2020 we had to make a decision about whether to go ahead or not. In the end we held the conference online. To encourage people to attend we introduced an institutional rate for 5, 10 or 20 delegates. My institution and another in Scotland took up those places and we sent 20 people to the conference. Fast forward four years, and we are still sending 20 delegates online to the hybrid conference. My colleagues are now also attending in-person, my institution has hosted the conference, and my colleagues want to get more involved in supporting the conference. This year the conference was in Milwaukee. We had a record number of delegates, and it was clear from the outset that this opportunity was one that didn't come around too often for these people, and many of them want to come back to the conference next year. So, communities and networks still matter – and we need to remember that.

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# **“I’d die if you weren’t here”: The Importance of a Network for Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Leadership**

Kate E. Thomson; Sarah Nash; Julie Blackford; Frances Gray; and Timothy B. Davies

## **Abstract**

This chapter explores the theoretical foundations of networking within the context of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) leadership. It examines why building and sustaining communities is essential for academic leaders, particularly in contexts where leaders are expected to solve complex problems, improve the quality of teaching and learning, and develop the educational capacity of their colleagues. It describes how these leadership networks contribute to professional development and the sustainability of SoTL initiatives, through the authors’ reflections on our own experience and selected literature highlights. Drawing on established theories and research, and using health professions education as the illustrative context, the chapter presents principles and practical strategies for establishing networks for SoTL leadership.

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## **Building and Participating in SoTL Networks**

In this chapter, we reflect on our experiences of building and participating in a SoTL network within the context of health professions education. Drawing on theory and literature, we highlight what we see as key elements of networks that support sustainable growth—networks in which ideas, practices, and the members themselves continue to develop. Although our examples are situated in health professions education, the principles underpinning our network are not discipline-specific and may be relevant to other higher education contexts where leaders aim to build and sustain SoTL networks.

As part of writing this chapter, we held a series of meetings to reflect on what has enabled our network to function well over time and how it differs from other groups in which we have participated. Our aim was to identify the key qualities of this network and connect these with relevant theories in an accessible way, generating a set of principles for building communities and networks that advance the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Our discussion centred on two main questions:

1. Why is building a network essential for effective academic leadership in SoTL?
2. How do networks contribute to professional growth, knowledge sharing, and the sustainability of SoTL initiatives?

Like Tierney (Case Study: Building a Community, this book), we value meeting colleagues who care deeply about teaching and who generously share their knowledge. Being supported to share problems, brainstorm ideas, and celebrate wins underpins the effectiveness of our network.

Tierney describes the role of a network in understanding SoTL, and we agree, while adding that our network allows us to *apply* SoTL. Like so many SoTL colleagues, our roles require us to solve problems with diverse stakeholders who have competing priorities, within the constraints of time, policies, and systems. This network is the reason that we can navigate those complexities. More significantly, it also enables us to ask thoughtful questions, design initiatives to improve teaching and learning, and provide peer support for our teaching staff, while brokering connections across disciplines and organisations.

### Reflexivity statement

The five authors of this chapter each have a formal leadership role, titled the Health Professions Education (HPE) Lead – [Discipline]. This is similar to a Program Director or Degree Coordinator leadership role. We are situated within the School of Health Sciences at a metropolitan, research-intensive Australian university and represent a unique academic cohort tasked with overseeing student placements in five allied health disciplines (Exercise and Sport Science, Medical Imaging Science, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, and Speech Pathology). Each discipline has multiple degree programs which produce health professional graduates through either undergraduate or postgraduate pathways.

Each of us brings a strong sense of identity with our individual professional backgrounds. These include allied health professionals in our discipline field or the field of education development. In the professional networks we have engaged with as clinicians and academics, both formal and informal, we acknowledge the benefits of mentorship, collegiality, learning and connection. The lenses we bring to our current roles are strongly underpinned by these as is the network we have formed. Like many SoTL communities, we bring different levels of experience in the field of SoTL and research in health and higher education. It is important to note that while discussing and writing this chapter, some of us were outside of our comfort zone – particularly those of us new to research and/or new to being a SoTL researcher.

Becoming comfortable in this space is a work in progress; and we intentionally dedicated time to lengthy conversations as a group, as well as individual thinking and writing. We have also focused on making the writing and the ideas in this chapter accessible to all, including those without prior knowledge of SoTL – the same as within our network, we intentionally share knowledge. We appreciate that the title may feel a little dramatic, we feel confident that our ideas would die without a network.

## Theoretical Foundations of Networking and SoTL Leadership

To better understand networks, communities, and the nature of leadership, we have drawn on five theoretical frameworks. Below, each is summarised and examples provided that are linked to SoTL.

### Social Network Theory

Social Network Theory provides a foundational lens for understanding how relationships and connections among individuals influence the flow of knowledge, innovation, and professional growth. In the context of SoTL leadership, it is through networks that we share teaching practices, research findings, and pedagogical strategies.

For example, academic leaders benefit from cultivating diverse and robust networks that enable collaboration, mentorship, and dissemination of SoTL initiatives (Wasserman & Faust, 1994; Williams et al., 2013). Social networks contribute to the dissemination of SoTL practices and institutional change through informal faculty connections and collaborative structures (How, 2020; Pusateri, 2015; Williams et al., 2013).

### Communities of Practice

Wenger's Communities of Practice framework emphasises learning through participation in shared practices within a community. SoTL networks often function as Communities of Practice, where academic leaders engage in collective inquiry, reflect on teaching practices, and co-construct knowledge (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015; Wenger, 1998). These communities foster a sense of belonging and identity, which is crucial for sustaining engagement in SoTL and promoting leadership development across disciplines and institutions (e.g., How, 2020; Lukes et al., 2024; Tierney et al., 2020).

## Leadership-as-Practice

Leadership-as-Practice shifts the focus from individual traits to collective, situated actions (Raelin, 2016). In SoTL, leadership emerges through collaborative engagement and shared decision-making within networks. This perspective aligns with the distributed nature of academic development, where leadership is enacted through interactions and contributions rather than formal roles (Raelin, 2016). For example, Kensington-Miller et al. (2025) and Pusateri (2015) show how strategic leadership and brokering roles sustain SoTL initiatives; Simmons and Taylor (2019) highlight how educational developers and faculty enact SoTL leadership through distributed roles, bridging institutional gaps and fostering networks of practice.

## Relational Leadership Theory

Relational Leadership Theory highlights the social and relational dimensions of leadership. Trust, reciprocity, and mutual influence are central to effective leadership in SoTL networks. For example, academic leaders who prioritise relationship-building, create environments that support open dialogue, shared learning, trust, sustained collaboration and co-creation (Epitropaki et al., 2018; Rahman et al., 2025; Stewart et al., 2025). Stewart et al. (2025) developed a relational pedagogy tool for leadership education, emphasizing co-creative learning and moral accountability in academic development. Stewart et al. (2025) and Rahman et al. (2025) demonstrate how relational leadership and pedagogy enhance academic development through trust-building, co-creation, and inclusive practices.

## Actor-Network Theory

Actor-Network Theory offers a nuanced view of networks by including both human and non-human actors—such as tools, texts, technologies, and policies (Latour, 2005). This framework helps unpack the complexity of SoTL initiatives, showing how various elements interact to shape leadership practices, institutional structures and academic development (Mifsud, 2024; Mörtzell, 2020; Schwarz et al., 2025). If academic leaders understand these interactions, they can strategically utilise resources and relationships to advance SoTL goals.

Together, the theoretical frameworks presented above offer complementary insights into the nature and value of networking in SoTL leadership. The following section synthesises these perspectives into an integrated framework .

## Summarising Theory to inform Practice: Networks for SoTL leadership

This section explores how networks support academic leaders in building and

sustaining initiatives that advance SoTL. It synthesises the features of the theoretical foundations in the previous section; Social Network theory, Communities of Practice, Leadership-as-Practice, Relational Leadership Theory, and Actor-Network Theory. We have combined the strengths of these theories with insights from relevant literature to highlight what we see as key elements of networks that foster sustainable development in SoTL. It is important to note that in focussing on sustainable SoTL networks, we highlight the influence of relationships, ongoing change, and artefacts such as resources, tools, and shared practices. The literature discussed here includes several seminal contributions on SoTL and networks, alongside more recent studies. Collectively, these studies draw on Action Research, social network analysis, leadership theory, and organisational change literature, thereby creating a suite of mechanisms through which networks endorse professional development, knowledge dissemination, and systemic transformation in higher education. We have presented a summary of each article in Table 1 for those who would like to keep reading.

#### Networks as Dynamic Learning Ecosystems

Networks in SoTL are generative spaces where knowledge is co-created through inquiry, dialogue, and shared practice. Social network theory highlights how connections among individuals facilitate the flow of ideas and resources, fostering innovation and collective learning (Williams et al., 2013). This aligns with Communities of Practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015; Wenger, 1998), which conceptualises networks as social learning systems where shared identity and meaning emerge (Tierney et al., 2020).

Naylor (2025) illustrates how cycles of reflection, planning, and action within collegial networks can drive cultural change. Informal conversations and distributed decision-making are shown to build trust and promote shared understanding (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009, 2015). Blumenschein and Hannisdal (2024) use social network analysis to examine academic collaborations, demonstrating that well-connected individuals serve as bridges for new information, promote innovation, and help spread knowledge across disciplinary boundaries. Coppe (2024) similarly shows that teacher networks evolve from being catalysts for professional development to becoming a source. Van Waes et al. (2015) add nuance by showing that the structure and composition of faculty networks are closely linked to different stages of instructional development, suggesting that network engagement evolves alongside professional growth. Taylor et al. (2022) further identify the critical role of network hubs—centralised structures that connect dispersed actors and facilitate coordinated development in teaching and learning. These findings support the idea that SoTL leaders should intentionally cultivate networks as communities of inquiry and development—spaces for co-design, peer critique, and scholarly identity formation (Godbold et al., 2023).

### Leadership as Relational and Distributed

Effective SoTL leadership emerges through collective action rather than individual authority. Leadership-as-Practice theory (Raelin, 2016) and Relational Leadership Theory both emphasise leadership as a social process rooted in trust, reciprocity, and shared agency. Networks enable distributed leadership by fostering inclusive structures and empowering diverse voices (Fields et al., 2019; Stewart et al., 2025).

Bull et al. (2024) highlight the role of mentorship and peer networks in shaping academic career trajectories, particularly in relation to teaching excellence. Their findings suggest that informal encouragement and sponsorship from trusted colleagues inspire academics to engage in SoTL work and assume leadership roles. London (2023) argues that adaptive expertise in complex educational settings depends on collective sense-making and shared agency rather than hierarchical control. Kensington-Miller et al. (2025) emphasise the importance of brokering and strategic leadership in establishing and sustaining SoTL cultures. Van Waes et al. (2015) reinforce this by showing that knowing who to connect with—the “know-who” dimension—is essential for navigating developmental transitions and accessing relevant expertise. These studies underscore the importance of relational trust and mutual accountability in sustaining SoTL initiatives. Leaders who embrace distributed leadership practices create resilient networks that can adapt to change and mobilise collective capacity (Simmons & Taylor, 2019). Positioning SoTL leadership as a collective responsibility instead of the domain of a few experts also makes space for those who may not hold formal leadership roles such as early-career academics and placement educators, to contribute to shaping the SoTL agenda.

### Networks as Socio-Material Assemblages

Actor-Network Theory broadens the focus from people to include the material and technological elements that shape network functioning (Latour, 2005). Networks are socio-material assemblages, comprising not only human actors but also artefacts such as digital platforms, policy frameworks, assessment tools, and funding mechanisms that interact to enable or constrain scholarly collaboration (Fox, 2005; Mörtzell, 2020).

Clark et al. (2014) examine how institutional workload models, funding arrangements, and governance structures influence participation in interdisciplinary SoTL projects. Their work highlights the need for structural support—such as protected time, recognition frameworks, and administrative assistance—to ensure network sustainability. Digital platforms, shared repositories, and collaborative technologies also play a crucial role in extending the reach and inclusivity of networks, enabling asynchronous engagement across campuses and disciplines (Lukes et al., 2024; Xia et al., 2014). Taylor et al. (2022) reinforce this by showing

how institutionally embedded hubs can act as socio-material anchors, linking human actors with enabling structures and technologies to support sustained collaboration. For networks to flourish, these socio-material conditions must be considered by SoTL leaders when designing environments conducive to ongoing scholarly work (Taylor, 2005).

### Sustaining SoTL Through Networked Leadership

Sustainability is a common theme across the entire body of literature, with networked approaches suggested as a way to sustain SoTL beyond the tenure of any single leader or funding cycle. Embedding knowledge within communities—rather than relying on individuals—creates collective memory and supports continuous improvement (Knight & Trowler, 2000; Mårtensson et al., 2012).

Naylor (2025) notes the importance of aligning SoTL initiatives with institutional priorities to embed them within organisational culture. Blumenschein and Hannisdal (2024) show that networks with diverse membership and strong bridging ties are more adaptable and resilient. Mentorship networks and succession planning are also identified as critical for continuity, as they build capacity among newer academics and facilitate leadership transitions (LaFay et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2025). Hill (2023) demonstrates how boundary-spanning leadership across institutions can advance SoTL by fostering cross-contextual learning and sustainability. These regenerative networks evolve over time, attracting new members and remaining relevant in changing contexts.

Networks are a strategic necessity for SoTL leadership as they provide the cognitive, relational, and material infrastructure needed to shift SoTL from project-based initiatives to institution-wide change. They enable collaborative learning, distributive leadership, integration of enabling tools and structures, and sustained educational transformation over time. We argue that the success of SoTL initiatives is closely linked to the strength, well-being, and deliberate development of networks. Leaders who focus on building and maintaining these networks are not only enhancing their own professional growth but also boosting the collective capacity of their institutions to provide high-quality, evidence-based education.

### Networks for SoTL leadership – from microcultures to mega-networks

SoTL leadership operates across interdependent levels, from significant conversations to international communities. To support SoTL leaders at different stages, we identify four interconnected levels of network activity and offer level-specific insights into leadership development.

#### Micro-Level Networks: Trust and informal learning

Roxå and Mårtensson (2009) highlight that much of the real work of teaching development occurs in small, trusted networks. These “significant conversations” often not facilitated in formal structures, provide safety, authenticity, and intellectual stimulation.

- Leaders cultivate conditions where trust-based networks engaging in informal dialogue is valued—through mentoring, peer communities, and confidential discussion spaces.
- Networks at this level is where pedagogical innovation often begins.

#### Meso-Level Networks: Intentionally inclusive collaboration

Moolenaar (2012) shows that the pattern of relationships within departments or schools determines whether collaboration enhances or constrains practice. Network density, accessibility, and quality influence knowledge flow and collective capacity.

- Leaders intentionally design structures – such as learning communities and cross-disciplinary teams – that build social capital and foster inclusion.
- Networks at this level are where SoTL gains traction in everyday teaching culture.

#### Macro-Level Networks: Critique institutional structures and power

Clark et al. (2014) demonstrate how power dynamics influence the visibility and recognition of teaching-related work. Similarly, Bull et al. (2024) show that education-focused academics often face marginalisation when institutional networks privilege research outputs.

- Leaders engage critically with institutional politics, advocating for recognition of teaching and SoTL in promotion pathways, workload models, and governance.
- Networks at this level must challenge structural inequities and amplify undervalued voices.

#### Mega-Level Networks: Bridges to cross-institutional and disciplinary communities

Simmons and Taylor (2019) frame SoTL leadership as engagement, connection, collaboration, and advocacy. They emphasise networks that bridge local practices with disciplinary, national, and international communities.

- Leaders sustain SoTL through professional associations, conferences, collaborative projects, and publications.
- Networks at this level enable SoTL knowledge to circulate widely and influence academic culture beyond local contexts.

When considering how to cultivate and sustain networks at any level, it is worth noting that:

- **Networks are multilevel and interdependent.** Trust-based micro networks (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009) feed departmental collaboration (Moolenaar, 2012), which interacts with institutional politics (Bull et al., 2024; Clark et al., 2014) and broader disciplinary movements (Simmons & Taylor, 2019).
- **Networks are not neutral.** They are shaped by power (Bull et al., 2024; Clark et al., 2014) and can reproduce inequities or serve as sites of empowerment.
- **SoTL leadership is distributed.** It resides not only in formal roles but also in everyday acts of connection, advocacy, and collaboration across all levels.

Taken together, these studies illustrate how networks can support the development of SoTL through shared inquiry, leadership practices, and collaborative knowledge building.

### Table 1.

*Networks for SoTL leadership – key points and principles*

[Link to downloadable PDF of Table 1](#)

Sustaining SoTL leadership in a complex context: Solving time-sensitive, high stakes teaching and learning issues

Although our work is situated within health professions education, we offer this context as one example of how a SoTL network can operate in practice. The leadership lessons, processes, and principles we describe are intentionally transferable to a broad range of higher education disciplines. Our aim is for readers—regardless of field—to be able to draw on these insights to support their own SoTL communities, networks, and leadership practices. That said, some information about our context may be helpful to readers.

The authors of this chapter are situated within a School of Health Sciences and we

each have a leadership role embedded within the school's academic structure. These roles exist to ensure that the School provides high-quality placement experiences for students. Placements are essential to prepare students for their careers as registered health professionals as well as meet accreditation requirements of degree programs. Similar to Taylor's (2005) conceptualisation of academic development work as institutional leadership, our success is determined by individual strengths, defined roles, strategies, and teaching context.

Our roles sit at the nexus of academic and placement education, acting as the bridge between program leadership, teaching teams, placement coordinators, and administrative staff. Our role is both integrative and facilitative: we provide strategic direction and academic oversight while ensuring seamless communication across groups. By working closely with Heads of Discipline and Program Directors, we align placement education with broader curriculum goals. At the same time, we collaborate with unit coordinators, placement officers, and administrative teams to translate these goals into practical, high-quality student learning experiences. An organisational chart is presented as Figure 1 – and the leadership network is presented in Figure 2. Serving as hubs, and at times, brokers and connectors, enables us to champion innovation, maintain academic and professional standards, and foster a culture of collegiality that connects educational vision with operational delivery.

Our educational leadership includes designing learning activities that provide preparation for placements, supporting on-campus simulation and off-campus placements. External placements occur in settings such as hospitals, private practices, schools, and community organisations. Each year, we collectively manage approximately 5700 student placements across 1000 placement sites. Placements are facilitated by external educators, who are often experienced clinicians with little formal education training. We provide support to both students and educators to foster meaningful, pedagogically sound experiences. Our work is shaped by multiple factors and influenced by multiple groups —e.g., students' needs, expectations of educators, institutional policies, and regulations of national accreditation bodies. We need to navigate the intricacies of placement education while improving the quality of the student learning experience.

**Figure 1.**

*Organisational Chart, noting the Health Professional Education Lead 'HPE Lead' role – the illustrative context for this chapter*

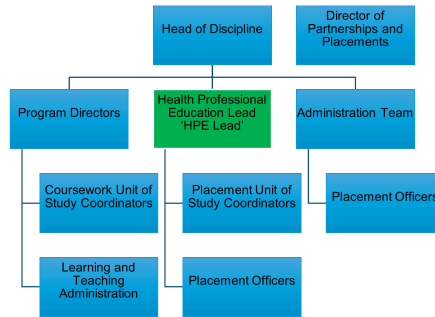


Figure 1 shows the organisational chart identifying our role, as Health Professional Education (HPE) Lead, representing the formal leadership structure that complements the networked leadership relationships shown in Figure 2. This structure also highlights that placements and coursework are somewhat siloed, as are academic roles and administrative or professional roles – contributing to the complexity of SoTL in this context and making good leadership more important.

Placement oversight is complex and unpredictable. Placements can be a stressful time for students (Rhodes et al., 2024; Zegwaard & Adams-Hutcheson, 2025) and so we need to be responsive to matters that are often time sensitive and high stakes for students.

To foster collaboration across the group, we constructed an informal, cross-disciplinary network. The informal structure grounded in trust, reciprocity, and mutual influence enables open dialogue and shared learning. Regular interactions result in collaborative engagement and collective decision-making. The network provides a conduit for sharing teaching practices, research findings, pedagogical strategies, and importantly offers a sense of belonging and space to develop a professional identity. Our experience is that the network is essential for sustaining engagement in SoTL and promoting leadership development across.

## Figure 2.

*Leadership Network (central) and each of us in our leadership role, noting that we have become hubs within our own discipline networks*

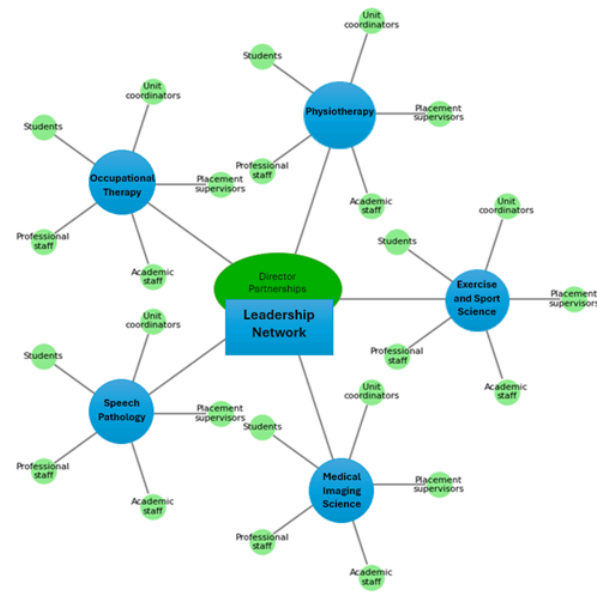


Figure 2 shows the networked SoTL leadership structure, where we broker connections across disciplines and to the Director of placement partnerships to form a central leadership network.

### Principles for Networks in SoTL Leadership: Reflections from placement education

Academic leadership within SoTL often occurs in multidisciplinary environments where educators encounter similar challenges, such as program design, student support, and curriculum alignment. This section examines fundamental principles that elucidate the importance of building and maintaining networks for SoTL leadership, focusing on our experience at a large, research-intensive university in Australia.

#### Principle 1: Networks are Developmental Ecosystems

We work across disciplinary boundaries; however, encounter shared challenges such as ensuring high-quality experiences, supporting educators, and integrating placement into broader curriculum objectives, thereby fostering an environment conducive to networked collaboration. When we engage in regular dialogue, whether through informal conversations, structured communities of practice meetings, or collaborative curriculum development, we cultivate ecosystems that endorse both individual and collective growth.

Communities of Practice promote shared inquiry, mutual engagement, and the co-creation of knowledge (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015; Wenger, 1998), conditions that are evident when we co-design educator workshops, exchange placement models, or collaborate on curriculum mapping. Coppe (2024) reinterprets teacher networks from a social capital perspective, emphasising that professional development is socially distributed and relationally embedded. In practice, this looks like convening to address common challenges, and developing solutions that are adaptable to diverse contexts.

#### Principle 2: Leadership Emerges Through Relational Practice

Our work is inherently relational, involving collaboration with program directors, unit coordinators, placement teams, and placement educators, often across disciplinary and institutional silos. Leadership in this context focuses on building trust, fostering a shared purpose, and enabling collective action, rather than relying solely on positional authority.

Leadership-as-Practice emphasises that leadership is demonstrated through daily interactions, such as conversations, decisions, and shared reflections. For us, this entails mentoring new academics into coordination roles, negotiating with external sites to redesign supervision models, or facilitating interdisciplinary learning activities.

The work of Hill (2023) on boundary-spanning leadership supports this view, demonstrating how SoTL leaders connect institutional silos and promote cross-boundary collaboration. We frequently act as connectors, linking educators, students, and external partners in ways that foster innovation and responsiveness. Investing in relational infrastructure, such as peer mentoring, interdisciplinary learning circles, and collaborative scholarship, strengthens these networks and integrates leadership into the daily fabric of academic life.

#### Principle 3: Networks are Leverage Points for Strategic Innovation

Teaching in higher education requires working within systems involving numerous stakeholders, including students, educators, placement sites, accreditation bodies, and institutional policies. We must navigate these systems strategically, often leveraging networks to influence and effect change.

Actor-Network Theory provides a systems-oriented perspective of networks, emphasising the interaction between human and non-human 'actors' (such as people, tools, policies, and spaces) (Latour, 2005). In our context, this encompasses placement databases, curriculum frameworks, workload models, and digital

platforms. Although these components are primarily administrative, they also play an active role in shaping pedagogical opportunities and limitations.

Blumenschein and Hannisdal (2024) employed social network analysis to illustrate how innovation propagates through informal structures and broker roles. Leaders with a comprehensive understanding of their network topology, including interconnections between individuals and influence, can strategically utilise relationships to expand SoTL initiatives. For us, this involves interdisciplinary coordination to pilot novel placement models, advocacy for educator training resources, or alignment of placement practices with accreditation standards.

Furthermore, strategic networking enables SoTL leaders to address institutional complexity. Although each discipline may adhere to its own pedagogical traditions and regulatory requirements, common challenges foster opportunities for collective action. Networks facilitate the identification of leverage points, the alignment of efforts, and advocacy for systemic improvements.

### Principles for Networks: What we've learned about SoTL leadership

As described above, the informal structure of our network not only allows for knowledge-sharing and shared decision-making but also creates a safe and supportive space which contributes to our growth as academics and professionals. Our specific context presents some additional themes which we believe are crucial to the success and effectiveness of our network but have been explored less by the theories and studies described thus far.

#### Principle 4. Networks require mutual trust – to solve problems requires vulnerability

Similar to colleagues working across universities, our roles sit across complex systems; for us, it is the intersection of higher education and healthcare. The frequent and often competing demands from both the university and external partners can conflict with our efforts to deliver high quality experiences for students and our own professional satisfaction. A key contributor to the success of our interdisciplinary network is the safe and collegial space it fosters among us as educational leaders. In our network, trust has been built deliberately and over time – it is a process (Pleschová et al., 2025).

The understanding that conversations are confidential allows for vulnerability and mutual support and creates a sense of camaraderie, as described by Thomson and Barrie (2021). While our network has formal features such as a regular meeting cycle, shared work outputs and advisory responsibilities, the informal elements (like conversations to share and solve problems) are equally, if not more, significant.

Principle 5. Networks benefit from a balance of collaboration and individual agendas

Where resources are perceived to be unevenly distributed and disciplines are in direct competition for attention or funding, an environment of inter-disciplinary competition and jealousy could thrive. However, the strength of our network is that these competitive undercurrents are broken down. Rather than reinforcing silos, our collaborative approach creates a space of mutual respect and empathy. The collegiality that our network creates allows us to understand the unique challenges and strengths of each other's disciplines, creating shared understanding rather than rivalry. We collaborate around common goals such as improving the student experience, promoting consistency and support for academic staff, as well as develop innovative solutions to common challenges.

Principle 6. Network members need opportunities to review roles and resourcing

Our formal and informal structures provide a space for open dialogue about role boundaries, differing expectations from within each of our disciplines, and the challenges of balancing academic responsibilities such as unit coordination, clinical responsibilities and the expectation to conduct research. Our network has supported the development of a shared and clearer understanding of our own responsibilities as well as of each other's disciplines. Furthermore, we have been able to collectively advocate for the recognition and resourcing of our roles, as well as for the importance of student placements. The network also enables us to define our professional identity, which is essential for us to have credibility within our faculty and strengthens our capacity to lead and influence.

## **Conclusion**

In higher education, networks are essential rather than optional. They are the space where shared challenges are addressed, serve as the relational foundation for practising leadership, and constitute the strategic framework for expanding innovation. For us, building and sustaining these networks was imperative. Drawing on the theoretical foundations provided by Social Network Theory, Communities of Practice, Leadership-as-Practice, Relational Leadership Theory, and Actor-Network Theory, networking in SoTL leadership can be understood as social, relational, distributed, and socio-material. Through active engagement in SoTL networks, SoTL leaders develop relational trust, reflective judgement, political awareness, and strategic alignment. Networks operate as learning ecosystems that generate knowledge, as relational spaces where leadership is shared, as socio-material assemblages that integrate tools and policies, and as mechanisms that support ongoing educational change. As SoTL continues to evolve, the challenge extends beyond participation alone to the deliberate design, relational leadership, and

strategic use of these networks. Through such approaches, we can cultivate a scholarly teaching culture that is safe, collaborative, adaptable, and—given adequate resourcing and clear role clarity—responsive to the complexities of our educational context.

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# How to Build a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Network

Janet Lord

## Abstract

This chapter is designed to support educators (including academics, learning developers and professional services colleagues) who are interested in building or developing a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) network. You might be thinking about starting from scratch or looking to strengthen an existing group; either way, this chapter offers you practical advice, always grounded in research, case studies, and lived experience. It explores different types of networks, including formal, informal, and Communities of Practice, and outlines strategies for establishing a structure, setting your goals, recruiting and retaining members, and obtaining institutional support. You will find guidance on ways of keeping your network active and inclusive; how to curate useful resources; and how to cultivate a sense of shared purpose. The chapter also reflects on the challenges of sustaining momentum over time and offers suggestions for maintaining engagement. A case study from a large UK university illustrates how a network can evolve from a successful grassroots initiative into a recognised part of an institution's strategy. The approaches described can be tailored to suit different institutional contexts, from large, well-resourced institutions to smaller or more resource-constrained environments. At its heart, this chapter is about building communities that support collaboration, reflection, and innovation in teaching and learning. If you're looking for a practical approach to SoTL networking, this chapter offers both inspiration and a clear way forward for networking in SoTL.

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Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) networks can have a significant role in enhancing scholarship of teaching and learning. The benefits of both formal and informal networks can be seen in ways such as sharing resources and enhancing professional development, and also in less obvious ways, such as fostering creativity and innovation.

In this chapter, the focus is on delivering practical guidance that will help you engage with or initiate the leadership, building and development of SoTL networks. The chapter is grounded in the current literature and relevant theories and clear guidance will be given on ways to establish and maintain these networks, offering

examples and tips that can be applied in different institutional contexts. The various forms that networks can take will be explored, including formal and informal networks, Communities of Practice (CoPs), and other types of collaborative structures.

We will consider definitions of SoTL networks, different types of SoTL networks, and think about ways of establishing SoTL networks (including ways of developing and clarifying objectives). We will consider the membership of the network, securing institutional support and the structure of potential networks. Strategies for maintaining and developing a network will be considered, and some practical examples will be given. SoTL networks may look different in different institutional contexts, and this chapter will also consider those subtleties and nuances.

## Defining SoTL Networks

### What is a SoTL Network?

A Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) network typically focuses on the systematic and ethical examination and development of teaching and learning practices. It provides a collaborative space for educators to explore, discuss, and apply evidence-informed approaches to enhance teaching and learning.

The key here is collaboration. Gale (2007) has suggested that:

*...more mileage can be achieved when two or more scholars work collaboratively, and the distance that can be covered by collective approaches to scholarship (within the department, program, school, institution, and system) is certainly significant, if not “without limits”. (Gale, 2007, p. 40)*

When SoTL practice and inquiry is conducted collaboratively, whether that be in collaboration with peers, students, or both, SoTL practice may be enhanced in several ways:

- There are advantages in collaborating with colleagues who may have more experience or different areas and levels of expertise, both in the scholarship of teaching and learning and in other areas.
- Collaboration is likely to bring richness to the work — for example by bringing in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary expertise.
- As well as subject expertise, different colleagues are likely to have different technical skills, for example in artificial intelligence, digitally enhanced learning and teaching, statistical analysis, qualitative data analysis, survey construction, focus groups, and so on.

- Depending on the area of interest, you might find it helpful to have groups of students from different faculties, subject areas or different educational settings involved in the work. Involving students themselves in the work brings a different lens to the scholarship of teaching and learning; work that involves students as co-researchers often has more power and authenticity. For example, a study into the reasons for student non-attendance, which was conducted with students as leading researchers (who then presented their work at a national conference), demonstrated more authenticity and lacked the biases that similar work conducted by faculty members could well have had (study reported by Menendez Alvarez-Hevia et al., 2020).
- It can be helpful to have colleagues with whom you can engage in the reflective and reflexive process of SoTL and also, a network within which you can disseminate and share your findings. That depends on what your aims are – an issue we will consider below.

### Types of SoTL Networks

Different institutions and aims support, and are more suited to, different types of networks, and institutions may support more than one type of SoTL network.

*Formal Networks:* some educational institutions have formal SoTL networks. Such institutionally supported networks are more likely to be structured with agreed or even imposed goals/objectives, hierarchies and resource allocation. There may be a requirement to report on the efficiency or effectiveness of such groups through the institution's governance processes. These groups might include reading groups, seminar groups and communities of practice (CoPs).

*Communities of Practice (CoP):* A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and who learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). A CoP has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest in which the members pursue their initiatives in the domain, and engage in joint activities and discussions, share information and learn from each other. In Etienne and Beverley Wenger-Trayner's (2015) introduction to Communities of Practice, they define the domain, community and practice as follows:

**The domain.** A CoP is characterized by a shared area of interest that defines its identity. Being part of the community reflects a commitment to this area, fostering a collective expertise that sets its members apart from others.

**The community.** In exploring their shared interest within a domain, members

develop relationships that support mutual learning and collaboration. They value their connections and standing within the group. Simply having a website or holding similar job titles does not constitute a CoP – true communities emerge through meaningful interaction and shared learning experiences.

*...members of a community of practice do not necessarily work together on a daily basis. The Impressionists, for instance, used to meet in cafes and studios to discuss the style of painting they were inventing together. These interactions were essential to making them a community of practice even though they often painted alone. (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015)*

**The practice.** A CoP goes beyond simply sharing common interests. Its members are active practitioners who build a collective repertoire of resources, such as experiences, stories, tools, and strategies for tackling recurring challenges. These can be physical resources, or maybe a virtual or conceptual network of resources, such as personal links and alliances. The shared practice develops gradually through ongoing collaboration and sustained interaction.

If you'd like to know more about communities of practice, there is a free downloadable book *Communities of Practice Within and Across Organisations* that I highly recommend.

Communities of practice is a term which is sometimes used as a term for a group of people coming together to discuss an area of interest. This group may or may not be a CoP as defined by the robust Wenger-Trayner conceptualisation (above), which is the one that this chapter uses. A CoP may arise quite naturally in organisational life, and in this case it is often this organic and voluntary nature that helps the CoP to thrive (Smith et al., 2016).

Anne Tierney's Case Study: Building a Community (this book) explains the value of a CoP in her case study:

Looking at Wenger's (1998) definition of a community of practice, the domain, the community and the practice are all vital components. This is what was on offer...a chance to spend time with other people who cared about teaching, who were knowledgeable about it and who wanted to share that knowledge and an opportunity to give back to the community...

When thinking about SoTL, and its intersecting elements (such as scholarship, teaching, learning and assessment), a CoP very often focuses both on shared practices in education and also on knowledge-building among CoP members. Entangling those focusses can be really useful – but complex to do. In Anne Tierney's case study, and also through her other work (e.g. Tierney et al., 2020), you can see very clearly how Communities of Practice can be important to

individuals' professional development through collaboration, sharing and dissemination, and in supporting teaching practice. In turn, outcomes for students, and their experience, are likely to be positively impacted, as will individual members' thinking and practice.

#### *Other Collaborative Structures*

Other collaborative structures, including study groups, mentoring circles, and partnerships can enhance SoTL in a variety of ways:

**Study Groups** can facilitate collaborative discussions and shared reflections on teaching practices, enabling participants to critically evaluate methods, share insights, and co-create strategies for improving learning outcomes.

**Mentoring Circles** can offer peer-to-peer or hierarchical mentoring opportunities, where experienced educators can guide others in developing research questions, designing studies, and interpreting results. These circles may facilitate and foster a culture of inquiry and growth.

**Partnerships**, whether between disciplines in the same institution or cross-institutional collaborations, can broaden perspectives and leverage diverse expertise. Partnerships can amplify the impact of SoTL projects by pooling ideas, resources, data, and methodologies.

#### *Informal Networks*

In many institutions there are informal SoTL networks. These are more likely to be flexible and often ad hoc groups which derive from connections driven by shared interests, rather than by formal structures set up or imposed by the institution. These networks are more likely to develop organically, based on shared areas of interest, in relation to SoTL or other subject areas. The organic nature of such networks means that they may fall into disuse; they may thrive and develop as informal networks; or they may result in the development of more formal networks and Communities of Practice.

Depending on context, all these types of structures can create supportive environments for SOTL practitioners and educators to engage in systematic, reflective, and evidence-informed exploration of teaching and learning practices. There are strengths and limitations to each type of network; there are obvious benefits to having institutionally supported formal networks, but the ad hoc flexible nature of informal networks can add a spontaneity and creativity to networks which is unlikely to be as prevalent in more formal networks.

## Strategies for Establishing and Building a Collaborative SoTL Network

In this section, we will discuss selecting a network structure, clarifying network objectives and goals, identifying potential members and securing institutional support.

### Selecting Network Structure

Choosing between an informal or a formal network structure will depend on the group's objectives (see below) and available resources. Table 1 shows some of the advantages and disadvantages of formal and informal networks.

**Table 1.**

*Advantages and Disadvantages of Formal and Informal networks*

	<b>Formal</b>	<b>Informal</b>
<b>Advantages</b>	<p>Enhanced credibility and visibility within the institution.</p> <p>Easier access to funding and institutional resources.</p> <p>More sustainable for large-scale projects and multi-department collaborations.</p>	<p>Easier to launch with fewer resources.</p> <p>Encourages experimentation and organic growth.</p> <p>Appeals to participants who prefer low-commitment involvement.</p>
<b>Disadvantages</b>	<p>May require more administrative effort and formal processes.</p> <p>Potential for bureaucracy that slows down decision-making.</p>	<p>May lack visibility and institutional buy-in without formal recognition.</p> <p>Limited access to funding and resources.</p> <p>Harder to sustain momentum over time without structured accountability.</p>

**Tip:** You might want to consider starting an informal network to test interest and feasibility, then transition to a formal structure as the network gains traction.

### Identifying network members

It's always a good idea to identify diverse members with complementary expertise

and to do this it's important to highlight the value of that diversity, emphasising how a range of perspectives can enhance problem-solving creativity and impact in SoTL projects. The membership will of course depend on what your strategic aim is – is this the kind of network where you want to bring together experts or innovators in a particular and well-defined area, and if so, will the network be focussing on depth of understanding, bringing together colleagues with a variety of experience in a particular field? For example, this could be a network focussing on authentic assessment in a particular subject or set of cognate disciplines – a relatively well-defined and prescribed area. Alternatively, you might want to look at a wider area. As you will read in the case study below, one of the most successful Communities of Practice I worked with was on 'digitally enhanced teaching, learning and assessment' across the whole institution. This CoP brought together academics (with expertise both in teaching and in research), learning developers, assessment experts, digital education experts, colleagues from academic services, and external partners from organisations that developed teaching and learning software and applications, as well as colleagues from the University's IT team.

It's always interesting to consider whether you might want to involve students in your network. This can have obvious advantages, but also some disadvantages too. I've found it works well to bring them in as expert advisors, maybe only for some of the meetings, or to ask them for a part of each session.

It can be a good idea to showcase examples of interdisciplinary success stories in SoTL to encourage and inspire participation. I'd suggest that you think about your overall strategic aim and then specifically target multiple and appropriate disciplines and roles. Actively invite academics, professional services colleagues, learning developers, librarians and other colleagues with a range of expertise, and at a number of levels (including senior managers, middle leaders and more junior colleagues) to encourage cross-disciplinary fertilisation of teaching and learning experiences and challenges.

When you promote the network, it works well if you can emphasise its value as a collaborative space, where members can co-create resources, share teaching strategies and educational practices, and garner support for publishing research. It's a good idea to highlight the opportunities for mentorship, professional development and leadership roles within the network, recognising the different forms of expertise that you will foster and develop (including practical teaching experience, curriculum design skills, data analysis and technical knowledge). I would also advise you to offer flexibility in how members can contribute, from being involved in the leadership of the network, to sharing resources to mentoring new participants.

You can also look around your institution and consider leveraging existing

communities, and engaging with existing SoTL and other teaching and learning groups, research centres or mentoring programmes to recruit members with complementary skills.

For some networks, you might want to consider recruiting participants both within and beyond the institution. If you are starting a network just within your own institution, I would suggest that you approach teaching and learning centres, heads of department and members of committees that are focused on teaching and learning, curriculum or assessment. You may be able to use university communication channels by advertising in newsletters, announcements and intranet sites. It can work well if you can organise short workshops, webinars or information sessions to explain the purpose of the SoTL network and its benefits; some of these can be done online to facilitate maximum participation. If you can align with existing professional development programmes, faculty learning communities or leadership programmes to attract participants who are already invested in SoTL, this can work well too.

Beyond your own institution, you may wish to engage with alumni networks, perhaps inviting alumni who have experience in education or in instructional design. It can be great to build connections with neighbouring universities and teaching networks, both to recruit participants and to foster cross-institutional partnerships. I'd suggest that you think about tapping into professional organisations such as ISSOTL or EuroSoTL and the Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Network in Higher Education to connect with SoTL focussed professionals. You can also share invitations via LinkedIn, academic social networks and relevant teaching-focussed groups on social media networks.

By combining these approaches, your SoTL network can attract a dynamic and diverse membership base, and that in itself will help you to foster rich collaborations and to develop innovation in teaching and learning practice.

#### Network Objectives and Goals

Once you've got a group of interested people, you will want to start thinking about how you might set realistic (and possibly measurable) goals for the network. There is an interdependency between the structure of the network, its members, and its aims and goals, and probably these will be developed in parallel. This is also likely to be an iterative process. The membership may shift and change, and so might the structure, and hence the goals. Equally, changing intuitional imperatives or the external context might mean that your aims and goals may evolve over time.

Examples of common SoTL network goals include promoting research, sharing best

practices, and working on collaborative grant applications. But it's important to decide collaboratively what the aims, vision and goals might be.

When you initially decide that you are going to set up some form of network, whether that be formal or informal, you might already have very clear aims and objectives, or you might just have a more general idea that you would like to set up an SoTL network. It may be that you would like participants in the network to be involved in co-constructing the network goals, roles and responsibilities. If this is the case then you might wish to circulate a short survey ahead of time asking individuals for ideas about the purpose of the network, their suggested goals, the challenges and their own particular interests. You could do this for example on a Padlet or using an online survey via MS Forms and then use the responses to work collaboratively to frame an agreed and co-constructed purpose. Alternatively, you might want to send a more open invitation initially and then dedicate part of the first meeting to an open dialogue about the purpose of the network with prompt questions such as *What issues in teaching and learning should we explore?* or *How can this network support your professional growth?*

Once this initial work is done, it can be really helpful to identify core themes together; then based on initial input, distilling common themes into key priorities as a group, and then co-creating a mission statement or a set of guiding principles, ensuring that everyone's voice is reflected.

By focusing on collaboration and shared vision-building, you can create an inclusive and purposeful foundation for the SoTL network.

Organising the initial meeting of the network can sometimes feel daunting! How might you start the network?

- It is worth considering whether your meetings should be online, face-to-face or hybrid. I would suggest that the first meeting might be better 'in real life' as it can be easier to facilitate the development of links and relationships in a face-to-face forum, but there are advantages and disadvantages of online/face-to-face/hybrid meetings that you will want to consider, depending on your institutional context.
- There are a number of ways of organising effective initial meetings that will help both to set the tone that you want and to build rapport. For example, you might want to start by sharing an engaging story from your own experience that highlights the impact of SoTL networks; this could be something that will inspire your participants and set a tone of excitement, purpose and possibility.
- It's inevitable that participants in your network will have diverse

experiences and contributions. It can be really helpful to acknowledge those contributions, possibly by getting participants to describe their own experiences in relation to SoTL., This can help support an atmosphere of mutual respect and the notion of shared ownership.

- It is unlikely just to be expertise which is shared; one of the key things about a network is the focus on shared values. The shared values in a SoTL network are likely to be related to improving student outcomes, fostering collaboration and promoting evidence-informed practice. You might want to make these values explicit and discuss them early on in the evolution of the network, or discuss them after a period of time, perhaps when you're reflecting on the success of the network; or you might choose not to talk about values at all; it will depend on the aims and membership of your network.
- Icebreakers are sometimes suggested for events like this but in my experience, the majority of colleagues really do not like engaging with anything that is called an icebreaker. Instead, it can be helpful to facilitate small group conversations, encouraging brief structured discussions in twos or threes, about why participants are interested in SoTL and what they may hope to gain. In order to do this, you might want to use some thought-provoking or possibly provocative prompts such as:
  - *What inspires your teaching?*
  - *What's one challenge you'd like to explore more deeply?*
  - *What's the best teaching you've ever done, and how do you know?*

#### Establishing Communication Channels

- Once the first meeting is over, it's important to keep communication channels open so that colleagues can share ideas in between sessions. It is important to choose an agreed method of communication such as a virtual learning environment area for your network, or Teams channels, Slack or an email list, depending on whether your membership is entirely within your own organisation or if it includes external members. In my experience, a number of different channels operating simultaneously works in reaching as many people as possible. You may also wish to use social media such as LinkedIn or Instagram. Whatever you decide, *regular* communication is essential. It's a good idea to agree that somebody will take control of the network's communication channels and to decide to send something (say) every week or every fortnight; perhaps an interesting article to read, a biography of somebody who has

done some impactful SoTL work, or a question for online discussion.

### Curating Teaching and Research Materials

An important part of many networks is the development of resources and documentation. As part of your network's online presence, it's helpful to have shared folders and repositories of teaching resources. To establish shared digital platforms, you are likely to want to select collaborative tools using platforms such as Google Drive, Microsoft OneDrive, Dropbox or SharePoint for folders and document storage. You will want to create a clear folder structure, with coherent categories (for example, research methods, case studies, templates, etc). If it's possible it can help to integrate your network repository into existing platforms such as Blackboard, Moodle or Canvas. You might want to use the following ideas in curating teaching and research materials.

- **Labelling:** tag and label resources carefully, using version control protocols as well as descriptive titles, metadata and keywords to make your resources searchable.
- **Develop Templates and Guidelines:** Provide templates for research proposals, surveys, and teaching plans.
- **Gather Exemplars:** Collect high-quality examples of SoTL studies, assessments, and curricula for reference. You may want to include examples of initiatives or studies that have been less successful as well as your flagship successes.
- **Highlight Best Practices:** Document strategies that have been effective in teaching and learning contexts, including reflections and evaluations.
- **Include Multimedia Resources:** Incorporate videos, podcasts, and interactive tools to diversify learning materials and to make them as inclusive as possible.
- **Sustainability:** If your library resource is to be sustainable, content must be regularly updated (you may wish to make this a role within your network for somebody) and you might want to formalise a policy for the library/repository.
- **Contributions:** It is a good idea to encourage contributions by inviting members to submit materials such as case studies and tools, and also to credit contributors to encourage their ongoing participation and collaboration. As well as successes, I found it helpful to document 'lessons learned' and to capture insights from projects that were less successful, which will help to build SoTL knowledge.
- **Enable easy access and sharing:** it is a good idea to use cloud-based

platforms so materials are accessible at any time and from anywhere, and to integrate collaborative tools such as Miro, Padlet or Trello. You may want to think about sharing certain resources publicly to support broader teaching and learning communities or SoTL communities too.

- **Support for using the resource:** As your repository develops, you may want to offer workshops or develop online guides to help participants navigate the tools and resources effectively. It's important that any resources are not static, and that you foster the continuous growth of your library or resource bank. You could schedule regular meetings to assess the usefulness of the resources and to identify gaps, and try and capture the impact of any shared resources on SoTL practice.

By implementing these strategies, a SoTL network can create a sustainable, dynamic, and collaborative resource hub that supports teaching innovation and research.

#### Securing Institutional Support

Although informal networks may be self-sustaining for a while, it can help to gain support of your institutional leadership by aligning network goals with institutional priorities, connecting the network goals to strategic plans, and demonstrating how the network supports institutional goals such as improving teaching quality, enhancing student outcomes, and fostering or advancing other initiatives. You might also want some financial support, even if it's just for tea and coffee at any face-to-face meetings!

When you are doing this it can help to highlight how the impact of the network can contribute to evidence-informed teaching practices that improve the institutional reputation. You may also wish to position the network as a tool to address inclusion, diversity and equity by examining practices that support all learners. You can also focus on institutional benefits, highlighting how the network could lead to increased research outputs and improved teaching effectiveness. It can also contribute to the professional development and hence the retention of staff.

In trying to gain institutional support, you may wish to share case studies from other institutions demonstrating the benefits of SoTL networks, and to use data from any pilot studies to illustrate the network's potential impact. I would suggest that you involve senior academics, heads of faculty, heads of department and senior administrators in the early planning stages of your network, inviting them to events and presentations so that they can see the benefits and the progress of your network firsthand. It can be really helpful to secure a senior sponsor or champion, such as an influential academic or professional services colleague to advocate for the network

and to speak on its behalf. I'd also suggest you think about having an intranet page and maybe also an external facing webpage so you can highlight your achievements and your particular projects to a wider audience.

Resource allocation is currently a hot topic in higher education. Securing funding, space, and resources can be very difficult. There may be internal teaching innovation or development grants offered by your institution, and it's worth looking out for these. Alternatively, you can directly approach senior leaders or heads of department with shared interests to match fund activities or sponsor events. You can also investigate the possibility of tapping into external funding sources such as (for example) AdvanceHE , ISSOTL, or the Carnegie foundation.

In terms of physical space, you will want to utilise existing facilities, reserving rooms in libraries or teaching and learning centres for meetings and workshops. It is also important to establish virtual spaces using virtual meeting tools. Beyond space, you can almost always rely on the library for expertise and support with your SoTL work, and teaching and learning centres are likely to be helpful partners as well. It's also important to build visibility and momentum across the institution to secure support. You may want to organise a launch event, a seminar series or showcase sessions to attract interest and demonstrate impact. It can be motivating to offer awards or certificates for members who actively contribute to research or resource development and success or to mentoring. By demonstrating your alignment with institutional goals, showcasing tangible benefits and building relationships with key stakeholders, your SoTL network is more likely to secure the support and resources that are needed for it to survive and thrive.

## Deciding on Leadership Structures

It is important to think about how the leadership of the network might be different from its management. As a leader in education you may want the main network to 'belong' to you, and in many ways it is important to have somebody (or a small number of 'somebodies') who have overall responsibility, but it is also important to share ownership of the network. This can be done by inviting volunteers to take on roles such as notetaking, facilitating subgroups, organising follow-up meetings, seminars or dissemination events, so that participants feel invested from the outset.

### **Table 2.**

*Possible leadership models in a network*

<b>Single Leader/ Coordinator Model</b>	<p>Ideal for small or informal networks.</p> <p>Provides clear direction and decision-making authority.</p> <p>Risk: Can become dependent on one person, limiting long-term sustainability.</p>
<b>Shared Leadership Model</b>	<p>Distributes responsibility across a core team or steering committee.</p> <p>Encourages collaboration and reduces reliance on a single individual.</p> <p>Suitable for larger, formal networks needing diverse expertise.</p>
<b>Rotating Leadership Model</b>	<p>Leadership roles rotate periodically to share workload and provide fresh perspectives.</p> <p>Works well for informal networks or project-based teams.</p>
<b>Subcommittee Model</b>	<p>Establish specialized groups (e.g., research, resources, events) to focus on specific tasks.</p> <p>Effective for scaling larger networks with multiple goals.</p>

### Other roles you may wish to consider:

- **Coordinator/Facilitator:** Manages meetings, communication, and overall organization.
- **Content Curators:** Gather and organize teaching resources, research papers, and tools.
- **Event Planners:** Organizes workshops, webinars, and conferences.
- **Tech Support:** Help with digital tools and repository management.
- **Liaisons:** Builds connections with external partners, funding bodies, and other institutions.

You might wish to rotate the leadership and the responsibilities of participants in order to prevent burnout and maintain the diversity of ideas.

By thoughtfully choosing the network type, leadership structure, and communication tools, a SoTL network can balance flexibility with accountability, ensuring it remains productive and sustainable. Which approach you choose – and the approach may evolve over time – will be dependent on your aims, membership and of course your network structure.

## **Sustaining a SoTL Network**

### **Maintaining Member Engagement**

To maintain member engagement and ensure that the network maintains momentum, it's important to check in with other network members on a regular basis. Regular check-in surveys and feedback sessions in addition to the meetings (or perhaps at the end of each meeting) will help, and will also enable you to gauge engagement and to address any issues. Celebrating the successes of the network, recognising members' contributions to the network and giving awards, hosting showcases and publishing institutional success stories will help to maintain engagement.

It can be helpful to hold regular celebratory events at significant times, for example at holidays or at the end of term. At these events, combining the SoTL work with a social occasion can help. On such occasions you can take the opportunity to celebrate the success of the network, perhaps with an award ceremony, recognising members' contributions. In my networks, we always have a Christmas event, with a review of the year (much of which is light-hearted) as well as awards for things like the most sustained contribution, the best innovation, the most useful resources, and so on.

### **Hosting Regular Events and Workshops**

It's important to host regular network events, and workshops. For example you might want to do 'brown bag' lunches, 'shut up and write' (SUAW) sessions, lunch and learn sessions, or more ambitiously, organise a network conference. It may be that you decide to have mini-networks distributed throughout the institution, such as faculty or departmental based communities of practice, or you might wish to have a lead for the network within each faculty/department who reports back to a more central network meeting. On the whole most successful SoTL events encourage learning collaboration and community building.

### **Establishing Accountability Mechanisms**

The issue of accountability is a thorny one. It may be that you don't wish to set Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for your network, or it might be important for you to do so. It might also be that your institution will require you to set KPI targets and goals, particularly if they are supporting the network with resources. If this is the case you will need to consider how to set up accountability practices such as peer reviews, reflective exercises and assessments of goals. It is important to decide what accountability structures and performance messages you are going to use as early

as possible in setting up your network so that all members are aware of and can be involved with these mechanisms and practices.

## Evaluating and Evolving the Network

Whether or not you do it formally, the importance of regular evaluation for continuous improvement cannot be overemphasised. You will need to decide amongst your network members what your strategies will be for assessing network success, for adapting to the changing needs of the network and of the context over time (for example expanding or narrowing your focus, and adjusting your membership).

Minocha and Collins (2023) have published a valuable and insightful report that may provide some ideas for evaluating the impact of SoTL projects and initiatives. They report on the findings of an impact evaluation conducted on SoTL projects within the Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics at the Open University in the UK. Their publication provides a detailed account of the ways in which SoTL initiatives have influenced teaching practices, course design, and student learning outcomes. Such evaluations are essential for showcasing the tangible benefits that arise directly from SoTL interventions or research-based projects, offering evidence of enhanced teaching effectiveness and improved learner engagement. In the case of the Open University, Minocha and Collins demonstrated that the impact of their SoTL work extends far beyond the institution itself. Their research highlights the widespread adoption of the Open University's teaching methods, resources, and instructional materials not only across the UK but also on an international scale, illustrating how SoTL practices can drive meaningful change in pedagogical approaches and contribute to broader educational advancements. The report underscores the significance of impact evaluation of SoTL work in fostering innovation, promoting evidence-based teaching, and enhancing learning experiences across diverse academic contexts.

## Some Tips for Different Institutional Contexts

In large institutions, leveraging size, resources, and varied expertise effectively in a SoTL network involves capitalising on the institution's extensive talent pool and infrastructure. These institutions can create interdisciplinary groups that connect academic and professional services colleagues across departments, enabling the sharing of diverse perspectives and approaches to teaching and learning. They can make full use of centralised teaching and learning centres, research offices, and internal grants to provide funding, meeting spaces, and administrative support. Organizing regular networking events, showcases, and collaborative workshops can help sustain momentum and promote visibility. In larger institutions, it is easier

and more viable to establish subgroups or special interest teams within the broader network that can ensure focused collaboration without overwhelming participants, while the fact that there are more colleagues likely to be available and involved means that leadership roles can be rotated to maintain engagement and distribute responsibilities equitably. On the other hand, the wide and diverse group of potential members can mean that it is difficult to keep your network under control and to ensure it achieves its aims- it's a tricky balance!

For smaller or resource-constrained institutions, building impactful SoTL networks requires creativity and strategic partnerships. If you are in a smaller institution, you could adopt a 'grassroots' or 'bottom up' approach by starting small, focusing on specific themes or projects, and gradually expanding as interest grows. Leveraging existing resources, including free online platforms for communication and collaboration can reduce costs. Partnerships with nearby educational institutions and business partners or community organisations can bring in external expertise and resources, while virtual guest speakers and online workshops can enrich the network without requiring significant financial investment. As we have seen earlier, you might want to recognise participants' contributions through certificates, newsletters, or institutional awards; this can help to sustain motivation and engagement.

For virtual and hybrid SoTL networks, success depends on selecting the right technological tools and establishing clear communication practices. Platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Slack can facilitate synchronous and asynchronous collaboration, while shared repositories such as Google Drive or institutional learning management systems can centralise resources. Establishing regular virtual meetings and asynchronous discussion boards encourages continuous engagement and ensures that members stay connected despite physical distance. To maintain a sense of community, incorporating informal check-ins, virtual coffee hours, and collaborative activities into meetings can replicate – at least to some extent—the social interactions of in-person networks. Setting clear expectations for participation, timelines, and deliverables is essential to keep remote collaborations productive and organised. If you can ensure access to training and technical support for participants who may be less familiar with digital tools, that can help to create an inclusive and effective virtual environment.

### **Reflecting on a case study and a practical example**

As we've seen in Anne Tierney's case study, which serves as the introduction to this section, it's very clear that a network or being part of a community can have a significant impact on one's understanding of SoTL. The examples that Anne uses and which she describes as pivotal experiences are interesting ones here. The way that SoTL has developed as an academic discipline, when Tierney describes how

in the first place educational developers and colleagues with expertise in SoTL were not even considered to be academics, is significant and has been an important development in the leadership of SoTL over the last two decades.

Tierney focuses on the importance of the community and the network in developing knowledge sharing and important conversations about SoTL. It's interesting that one of the key points that Anne makes is that very often the conversations that she has with colleagues in her network take place 'outside work' and it's an interesting feature of the academic life that the strategic work which is so important to the development of education, to the leadership of SoTL and to students' experiences is often done as what can best be described as 'underground' or 'corridor working' rather than as central parts of senior colleagues' everyday lives. Anne's central point however is that communities and networks still matter, and that the essential humanity of people in developing those relational networks is crucial. We need to remember that.

The following case study is an example of how a SoTL network was built at a large University in the north-west of England.

### **Case Study: Building a SoTL CoP at a Large University—the Ed Tech Community of Practice (Ed Tech CoP) at Manchester Metropolitan University**

This SoTL network was set up prior to the pandemic to share good practice and innovation in relation to educational technology. From the very beginning it was set up as a Community of Practice, following the Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2015) model.

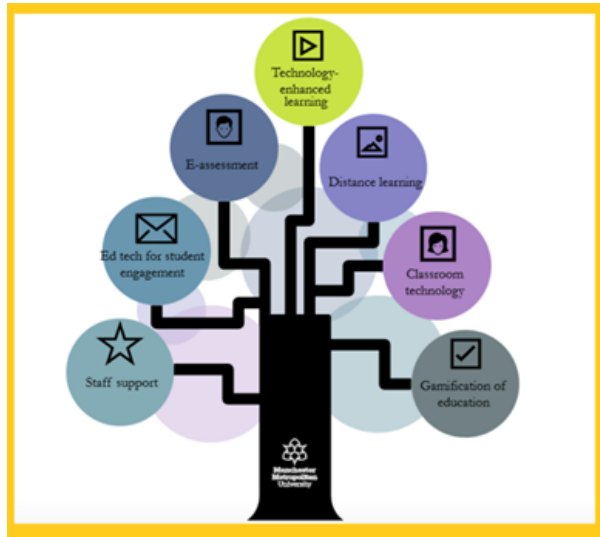
The CoP's objectives were co-constructed by network members at the first meeting. The first meeting was relatively small, of converts and advocates for educational technology in the field. That group was rather smaller than it would be now, because the burgeoning impact of education technology post-pandemic has of course increased the field of colleagues who are interested in this area.

The first meeting of the initial group of people comprised about 20 colleagues from both academic and professional services departments and directorates. The more old-fashioned method of sticky notes, felt tip pens and flipchart paper was used to answer questions about the aims and objectives of the community of practice. There was also a discussion about what the domain, the community, and the practice were in relation to this new 'Ed Tech CoP' and there were varied understandings of those concepts which resulted in lively discussions,

Following the initial brainstorm, where colleagues worked first individually, then in small groups, then in larger groups to discuss the aims and objectives, a small group of colleagues collated these data, grouping similar ideas to create the themes, which can be seen in Figure1 below.

**Figure 1.**

*Aims and areas of interest of the Ed Tech CoP, as co-constructed at the initial meeting of the network*



As well as agreeing the aims and areas of interest, colleagues at the initial meeting decided that there were too many priorities identified to be able to focus on them all at once, and the priorities that were agreed by the CoP were refined to a list of six agreed priorities for the 12 to 18 months. These were to:

- disseminate and share good practice and provide a platform for others to do the same and provide moral support and advice;
- use technology effectively to improve teaching and teaching-related activities;
- advocate for access to common technologies;
- suggest an institution wide package of technology tools/platforms (e.g. Padlet, Slack, Poll Everywhere, etc.) and persuade someone to pay for them;
- negotiate a shared approach, outlook, philosophy of education/technology enhanced learning, internal to the CoP.

Reflecting on those agreed priorities now, they seem rather generic and perhaps in many ways not particularly ambitious or specific, but this was pre-pandemic, and the priorities of the EdTech CoP evolved and developed over the years until the CoP became subsumed under ‘business as usual’ as part of the institution’s DELTA (Digitally Enhanced Learning Teaching and Assessment) strategy, an enabling strategy of the University’s Education Strategy. And we did get a package of ‘apps for teaching and learning’ that are institutionally founded and still supported!

There were difficulties in maintaining the momentum of the network over the seven years that the CoP existed. The CoP was informal, membership was fluid, and colleagues dipped in and out of meetings and seminars as they pleased. However, there was always a core of about six members who acted as an informal management committee. During and post-pandemic, Microsoft Teams channels and chats were used to communicate, and seminars, meetings and workshops were advertised through the university’s regular communication updates, and through the CoP’s internet page on the University Teaching Academy website. We held meetings on a monthly basis, alternately face-to-face and online, and although there were advantages to this, it ended up that there were two cohorts of people, one which largely attended online meetings and one which largely attended face-to-face. The informal management committee attended all meetings and sustained the momentum and the communication. Having a theme for each meeting helped with engagement and attendance; for example, a guest speaker from Nearpod; a session about Adobe Creative Campus, and a session where colleagues shared their experiences of using the institutionally supported ‘Apps for Teaching and Learning’ project which the CoP had advocated for and for which it had run the proof of concept. However, inevitably, having a theme for each meeting meant that some colleagues who were less interested in the theme for a particular meeting did not attend.

There were two events annually which were always well attended. The first was the face-to-face Christmas event, where the SoTL work was integrated with a quiz on educational technology which was designed by members of the CoP. Festive food and drinks were provided and there was a friendly competition and amusing ‘tongue in cheek’ awards for members. The second was the annual EdTech CoP conference, which was held online. Members of the CoP and other colleagues across the institution were invited to submit papers, Pecha Kuchas, discussion groups, and so on. Because the first conference was held in lockdown, there were also online activity packs for colleagues to engage with in the break, and a virtual biscuit baking competition. Again, the success of this conference, which was very well attended, with over 100 colleagues from across the institution in the two years it ran, meant that it has now been integrated with the institution’s university-wide annual learning and teaching conference.

As with the Tierney example, relationships were key to establishing this successful network and to developing it to a stage where the work it had done was considered to be important enough to be part of the University's strategic plan.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a comprehensive exploration of the strategies and approaches necessary for building, sustaining, and expanding a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) network. I began by examining the distinctions between formal and informal networks, including the role of Communities of Practice as collaborative frameworks that foster shared learning and ongoing professional development. Through this lens, we have considered the importance of establishing clear goals, defining membership roles, and setting purposeful objectives to create a strong foundation for network activities. Particular emphasis has been placed on the significance of effective leadership structures and inclusive membership models, ensuring that networks remain dynamic, participatory, and responsive to the evolving needs of their members as well as to shifting contextual demands.

In addition to organisational considerations, we discussed the development of shared repositories and resource libraries as practical tools for supporting teaching and learning innovations. These resources, including databases of materials, case studies, and best practices, not only provide members with accessible tools for their work but also strengthen the long-term sustainability of the network by enabling knowledge-sharing and collaboration across disciplines and institutions. Communication strategies emerged as another critical factor in maintaining momentum, reinforcing a sense of connection, and ensuring that members remain engaged in both virtual and in-person environments. Thoughtful approaches to communication—such as regular meetings, newsletters, and digital platforms, were identified as essential elements for keeping networks active and focused.

It is undeniable that building and sustaining a SoTL network requires considerable effort, from initial planning and recruitment to ongoing coordination and evaluation. However, as explored throughout this chapter, the rewards of investing in such networks are equally (if not more) significant. They not only foster innovation in teaching and learning practices but also create spaces for meaningful professional development, reflective practice, and cross-disciplinary collaboration. The broader impact of these networks extends beyond individual participants, influencing institutional cultures and advancing pedagogical knowledge at both local and global levels.

The strategies outlined in this chapter offer you a flexible and adaptable framework

for to create and sustain your own SoTL networks. Whether operating within large, resource-rich institutions or smaller, resource-constrained settings, the approaches discussed here can be tailored to meet your own specific needs and contexts. I'd encourage you to reflect on your own institutional landscapes and leverage the tools and strategies provided, to develop networks that address your priorities while remaining responsive to future challenges and opportunities.

Ultimately, the process of establishing a SoTL network is not only about building infrastructure but also about cultivating a shared vision and a collaborative spirit that drives continuous improvement. By emphasising collective inquiry, shared practices, and mutual support, SoTL networks have the potential to transform teaching and learning environments, inspire innovation, and contribute to the ongoing evolution of higher education. While the work involved in sustaining such networks may be demanding, its transformative impact on professional growth, student learning, and institutional development can make it a really worthwhile and fulfilling endeavour.

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# SoTL Leadership as Community Work: Establishing, Growing, and Sustaining Communities of Scholars

Jill M. McSweeney

## Abstract

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) depends on intentional relationship-building within and beyond disciplinary and institutional boundaries. Drawing on personal narrative, SoTL literature, and the model of Community of Scholars (CoS), this chapter explores how SoTL leadership is inherently community-centered work and how its principles – , grow, and sustain – can be used to build an inclusive scholarly community. Through practical strategies and reflective insights, I highlight how SoTL leaders can cultivate spaces that support scholarly identity development, collaboration, and mentorship across career stages while also demonstrating and growing their own SoTL leadership. This chapter ultimately positions community-building not as ancillary labor in SoTL, but as a core principle of SoTL leadership that reinforces SoTL as community work and strengthens the field’s capacity to respond to evolving institutional and global contexts.

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Creating community and connection has been consistent throughout my career. Like Tierney’s reflection in the opening of this section, I started in a discipline beyond educational development and SoTL. A community, or microculture (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2011), paved the path for me to find SoTL, and throughout the early stages of my career, was critical in building confidence, a cross-disciplinary understanding of my work, and developing networks for collaborations that supported my growth. My journey is not unique, for many, SoTL is a task isolated from their disciplinary community, and for some, engaging in SoTL can be, or has been, an isolated and unsupported venture (Miller-Young et al., 2018; Suart, Cassidy-Neumiller & Harvey, 2023; Vajoczki et al., 2011). While Boyer’s (1990) model of scholarship has been infusing structures in higher education, until recently, most institutions have not intentionally invested in SoTL development, practice, and dissemination for faculty and staff, and many still don’t (Kern et al., 2015; Neubauer et al., 2022); and if they have, it certainly has not been at the same scale as other research activities. As the commodification of education has grown over the last two decades (Bailey et al., 2021; Naidoo, 2003), and with current political tensions around the value of higher education, it is more important than ever for institutions

to demonstrate measurable impacts on student learning. As Baily et al. (2021) note, one trickle-down benefit of this consumer-based education is the increase in teaching-focused jobs which are required to demonstrate scholarly teaching and engage in SoTL production. And so, while SoTL may benefit institutions, and institutions are asking more academics to engage in such practices, many of us still face a barren institutional landscape when it comes to SoTL support (e.g., funding structures, peer mentorship, professional development), thus opportunities to find community beyond one's discipline or institution are much needed.

As more colleagues explore SoTL, there is an increasing need to support them in their development and engagement in this work (Suart, Cassidy-Neumiller & Harvey, 2023), particularly for academics transitioning, changing, and/or evolving disciplinary identities (Simmons et al., 2013; Webb & Tierney, 2019). However, many lack access to this support institutionally, making the external community even more essential for the growth and advancement of SoTL as a normalized practice in our teaching. In recent years, there has been a call for more partnerships and collaboration, particularly across disciplinary and institutional contexts to be a central principle of SoTL (Hamilton & McCollum, 2024; McSweeney & Schnurr, 2023). Networks allow us to come together at both national and international levels to advance our collective knowledge and expertise in SoTL, as well as finding ways to expand the field. Such spaces structured around a set of goals aimed at supporting and building relationships can create a trusted environment where participants feel able to share concerns, anxieties, difficulties, and challenges (Chang, 2017).

The field of SoTL may also see the development of large global networks as a way to both model and reinforce that fundamental value of 'appropriately public' (Felten, 2013). While institutional or smaller networks of communities of practices (CoPs) have been shown to have significant impact on nurturing learning through authentic reciprocal relationships (Hannah & Lester, 2009; Rienties & Hosein, 2015; Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009; Roxå & Mårtensson, 2011), they are also limited in their knowledge sharing (Hannah & Lester, 2009; Roxå et al., 2011; Roxå & Mårtensson, 2011). In this sense, while CoPs offer a significant tool to generate community and build connection, I would argue that an inherent and fundamental goal of the field of SoTL should be the generation of broader interconnected networks. Intentionally expanding and nurturing a broad SoTL community reinforces Boyer's original intention of SoTL's role in the academy (Kern et al., 2015) and echoes the idea that teaching is 'community property' (Shulman, 1993).

### **Existing models for building SoTL community**

A range of names exist for the various forms of communities dedicated to building a professional's capacity. These range from more localized and institutionally

bounded Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (DuFour, 2007), CoPs, (Lave and Wenger, 1991), or Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) (Cox, 2004), to larger networks (both in people and geographical expanse), such as Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) (Brown & Poortman, 2018) or Communities of Scholars (CoS, Ramani et al., 2021). While there is growing success for the use of CoPs and FLCs in SoTL (Bailey et al., 2022; Dich et al., 2017; MacKenzie et al., 2010; Richlin & Cox, 2004), they often do not provide sustained and intentional access to scholars beyond institutional boundaries like larger networks. Such broader networks (e.g., International Society of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, EuroSoTL, Society of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, or Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia) focus on intentional relationship building and knowledge sharing through shared interests and mentorship focused on building capacity in one's work. These communities centralize their efforts around a shared interest or identities.

While models have been successfully applied to micro-community networks (e.g., FLCs, CoPs), Ramani et al.'s (2021) Community of Scholars (CoS) has recently been used to explore SoTL community at institutions (see Ford et al., 2024). The CoS model offers a promising framework for building professional networks aimed at fostering the co-creation and sharing of teaching and learning scholarship, developing capacity for engagement in SoTL, and facilitating both formal or informal mentoring. A key strength of this model lies in its flexibility, allowing us to shape and refine these goals according to our needs. Given the diverse nature of SoTL across disciplines, institutional contexts, and methodological approaches, this flexibility ensures that CoS-based communities remain inclusive and responsive to varying scholarly landscapes and to the changing climate of higher education (Yarris et al., 2019). While Ford et al. (2024) have successfully demonstrated this application on a small scale, here I propose that it can offer us guiding steps towards large-scale community creation. Through **establishing**, **growing**, and **sustaining** community (Figure 1), the CoS offers a framework that allows for its purpose to be shaped and adapted as community needs evolve (Ford et al., 2024; Ramani et al., 2021), offering longevity and expansion that traditional micro-community networks often are unable to maintain.

## **ESTABLISH - GROW - SUSTAIN**

### Building your own community of scholars

At local, national and global levels, CoS can bring together scholars at different career stages, from novice to SoTL experts, thereby accelerating community development while providing a rich space for exploring diverse perspectives. Unlike FLCs, which often conclude once their predefined goals are met (Cox, 2004), CoS

structures are inherently sustainable – offering an evolving ecosystem of networks and engagement that can grow and adapt over time.

SoTL professionals looking to build a CoS can apply Ramani et al.'s (2021) model (Figure 1) through three iterative steps (1) *establish* – building a community with an intentional focus, vision, audience and goals; (2) *grow* – set out to cultivate a space that offers growth internally through the curation and cultivation of resources, tools, supports, and short and long-term initiatives, and a space where intellectual, personal, and professional identities and values are shared and supported; and (3) *sustain* – focus on developing metrics of success that can guide growth and are appreciative of changes in membership, leadership, and larger socio-cultural and economic contexts.

**Figure 1.**

*Adaption of Ramani et al's (2021) Community of Scholars (CoS) model*



## Establish

There is a particular need to develop and expand the sense of community for SoTL scholars, given that many of us feel alone, displaced, or foreign in the field (Miller-Young et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2013). Both national and international SoTL organizations can be a critical source of providing us with a sense of community, particularly for those who wish to expand and grow in SoTL but lack the resources, professional development, collaboration or training to do so. While institutional or local CoPs may naturally develop over time, efforts to bring our colleagues together across contexts, particularly geographical, will need deliberate and intentional purpose and goals (Ramani et al., 2021). CoS may come from a shared experience, a known gap or need, or the desire to form intentional relationships. As the idea of establishing begins to percolate, consider how the purpose of your network can appeal to a array of members across a spectrum of institutional, disciplinary, global, cultural, and career contexts, as the success of your network is largely measured by its value to your audience (Bailey et al., 2022). Within SoTL, looking at Special Interest Groups from established organizations such as ISSOTL, EuroSoTL or the POD Network could help you to explore specific topic areas, sub-communities,

or geographic clusters that may help you define your audience (a great place to start are the rich communities of Collaborative Writing Groups through ISSoTL and EuroSoTL). Alternatively, you might develop your community based on one of the many processes in the SoTL lifecycle, such as methodology or specific dissemination areas. Once you have determined a need or purpose for your community, you can begin the following steps for its establishment.

#### Explore existing opportunities

As noted above, local and international organizations exist that might already meet your needs or at least offer you insight into additional areas and gaps. For example, early in my career the development of a local SoTL community in Atlantic Canada came out of engagement with the larger SoTL Canada organization. Colleagues found that while SoTL Canada offered some opportunities for collaboration and community building, there were enough Atlantic Canadians in that community to begin to develop a more localized community to support in-person and cross institutional collaboration. Thus, while there were existing opportunities to engage in a broader SoTL community, creating and facilitating a localized community provided more specific and accessible opportunities locally for us. In this example, the community spontaneously formed around a shared need (Bailey et al., 2022), while for others your community might be deliberately developed out of your own needs, that of others, or forecasting potential needs.

#### Define your purpose and vision

If there is one thing that folks entrenched in the community of teaching and learning know, it's the importance of outcomes when planning. If you were to do a quick scan of existing organizations that support SoTL (e.g., ISSoTL, EuroSoTL, POD Network) you would easily see a thoughtful and concise overview of the goals for their community which influence and guide how those communities have grown and are sustained. Unlike CoPs or micro-communities where goals are co-developed through a shared vision (Happel & Song, 2020), larger organizations with their intention to grow and expand will often co-develop their vision and goals with founding members, and work over time to ensure those reflect and align with their membership, which can promote a sense of collective responsibility during the *engage* stage of development (Alrubian, 2022; Happel & Song, 2020). While goals and intentions can adapt and evolve over time, the first step should be to spend time thinking about what impact and intentions the network should be striving for in order to build a vision for your plans. An important goal of your purpose and vision is to establish a shared investment across your community (Ford et al., 2024). To help with this, consider the following:

- Is this community responding to urgent needs? A predicted need?

- What are your short and long-term goals?
- What are common values and interests that will be shared across the community?
- Who is your audience?
- How might you be able to achieve your goals?
- Why is this network important to your audience?

Consider what the goals of the network might be and dream big at the start! It could be developing and sharing practices; creating a mentoring network; nurturing collaborations across institutions, disciplinary, or international boundaries; or/and offering professional development opportunities and events. The goal is to consider how your community is filling a need or is directed to a specific focus or theme within the area of SoTL or teaching and learning. Your initial exploration of existing opportunities will likely have given you an idea of potential gaps, so consider how you might lean into establishing goals through necessity. Offering your organization a roadmap for success, which identifies short- and long-term goals, progress markers, and timelines can help you establish achievable and realistic goals (from your big dreams!) within a specific timeframe that will ultimately lead to greater success and clarity across leaders and members.

#### Identify and know your audience

The audience of SoTL at its heart is diverse, welcoming travelers and guests from all disciplines, across various entry points, and with different needs to the table. Given this diverse community, who your audience is will ultimately need thoughtful consideration, as with this diversity comes colleagues with varying personal and professional goals, competencies and comfort with SoTL, and disciplinary perspectives (Ford et al, 2024). Some might say SoTL as a field has a longstanding identity crisis, not quite knowing who we are given the multiple paths we have traveled down, while others would say that inherent in SoTL's identity is the diversity of our community. While you will likely not be able to solve this wicked problem, it is important to consider *who* might best serve your community, as this will naturally impact your objectives and the relevance of your work for others.

My work with building community has shifted over the course of my career, as my role required me to not just build community for myself, but also for others. If I were to build a community ten years ago, I might have focused on an audience of colleagues just entering SoTL in order to find partners that supported my own growth and offer opportunities for collaboration and/or mentorship. As I transition to mid-career, having grown my SoTL identity and now supporting others through my SoTL mentorship, I approach building community with other intentions,

such as creating a space for returning SoTL scholars looking to reinvigorate their scholarship or even a community of faculty developers who support SoTL development. Consider what you need for your own professional growth and as you transition from SoTL scholar to leader, how a community can support others, as this will help you to navigate the complexity of who we are as SoTL scholars. For example, my time with SoTL Canada allowed me to identify at least four distinct groups that we were serving at any one time: students engaging in SoTL as a partner, scholars new to SoTL, scholars who identified themselves as SoTL scholars, and those supporting SoTL at their institution. While some may hold multiple identities, these four specific groups would often be engaging with our organization with very different intentions, making it difficult to create supports that fit all these needs. So as you consider who your audience is, think about your own needs, where you are in your career, and how your own SoTL leadership might grow with this endeavour.

#### Bring together founding members

Every community requires a small group of individuals who are willing to put forth the work for its development. Consider individuals who you currently know who are working in this area (this could be inside your institution or discipline, or beyond!), bring characteristics and strengths that complement each other, and are committed to contributing to the *establishment* and *growth* of your community (du Plessis et al, 2025). Below are a few tips to help you identify who you might invite with you as you start:

- *Who are existing leaders that might be able to support or mentor you through the development?* Often these individuals will come with a network themselves and professional credibility that will lend itself to growing your membership. They can offer insight and mentorship to members as well as mentorship to the core leaders of your community.
- *What skills and experience do you have and where might be gaps that you will need to fill?* Successful communities have a diverse team of individuals that bring unique strengths to help you grow. One person can't do it all, so consider what you'll need to *grow* and *sustain* and how you might seek colleagues (new and old) to help with that.
- *What distinct roles will you need for your team?* As your community grows, consider how unique roles can help spread the workload and highlight strengths of the core team. Roles may be based on administrative tasks (e.g., treasurer, communications), event and engagement leads (e.g., professional development organizer, conference planner), or even based on sub-groups of your constituency (e.g., Educational Developers, Students).

- *Is my audience represented?* Every community has a diverse membership and having individuals that can give insight into who your audience is and their needs is helpful in guiding your objectives and work. Representation also supports a psychologically safe community and its longevity, as it recognizes that members should feel valued and supported within their community.
- *Are there individuals who can bring resources to support the network?* Consider if it's possible to leverage institutional support from members. Resources such as listservs, website hosting, or institutional funds can be a strategic advantage when starting out and help you with quickly expanding your membership through sustained communication.

#### Establish communication pathways

Depending on the formalized nature of your community, organization or group, consider what your audience will need in order to facilitate their engagement. A colleague and I wanted to build an informal hub of communication with local institutions around SoTL as a means of networking, sharing information, and planning small group meetings associated with local conferences. Our goals for this were small – generating an easy means of folks across universities with a similar interest to talk with each other. To do this, we created the “SoTL Atlantic Listserv” through one of our institutions. We advertised at local meetings, through national listservs associated with other communities, and slowly generated a growing list of local colleagues who would use that space to share local events, new literature, collaborative interests, etc. Given our goal, our communication plans were simple: we wanted to ensure constant advertising of our space for recruitment purposes, and allow for member-initiated discussion. However, with an organization like SoTL Canada, our communication structure was much more formal and intentional, we wanted to recruit, advertise, produce, support, and build. This communication required much more than a listserv, as our goals were diverse and our audience needed to know much more about what we were doing, our annual goals, and how we would support them as members. This resulted in organizationally branded social media accounts, a website regularly updated, thoughtful and intentional advertising for our organizational events, a designated platform for hosting resources and events, and organization-branded materials.

Building out a communication plan requires you to define your purpose and vision, know your audience, and lean on the skills and experience of your core leadership team. Starting out, think about how your communication will establish your organization or network, and then consider if those same tools (Table 1) can help you with growing and sustaining your community, or if you'll need to have a plan for additional communication measures.

**Table 1.***Tools for communicating with your community*

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Communication tools</b>
Recruitment and advertising	Existing listservs, professional gatherings, social media, directed emails to institutions or centers, information in your email signature, digital flyers for presentations and social media sharing
Hosting webinars, events, and other asynchronous or synchronous gatherings	Slack, Microsoft Teams, Google Groups, Zoom Events, Learning Management Systems, hosted website
Membership-led communication	Organizational discussion platform (e.g., Google Groups, institutional listservs), social media hashtags, organizational blog/newsletter
Communication from leadership team	Membership mailing list, social media, hosted website, organization discussion platform
Static information about the organization	Hosted Website, LibGuide, EduBlogs

Below are a few goals you should consider when establishing your community and potential tools you can utilize for success.

- *Recruitment and advertising*: Think about ways that both your leadership team as well as network members can bring in new colleagues and share information about your organization. Lean on existing platforms and professional groups, such as the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) or the Professional and Organizations Network (PON), which can help share an expression of interest, advertise events and resources developed, or find collaboration opportunities. Utilizing social media from members, the leadership team, as well as officially branded accounts can help spread the word. (Note: With changing engagement with social media platforms, a tip is to research prior to investing in a social media plan to know what type of platform your audience is engaging with (e.g., LinkedIn, BlueSky, etc.) As platforms evolve and spring up, it can be helpful to keep track of where your engagement will be most effective).
- *Hosting webinars, events, and other asynchronous or synchronous gatherings*: Virtual events can create greater accessibility across time and

space, offering more support and community to diverse groups who may otherwise be unable to participate. Considerations for time zones, availability, depth of engagement, and member-member interaction are all factors for consideration between asynchronous and synchronous communication and engagement.

- *Membership-led communications:* Organizations nurture growth and relevance when members have a means to engage with each other, this allows for the larger network and personal networks to grow. Centralizing a member-focused communication space can build community, grow resources, increase engagement, and draw in new members. New organizations can utilize free resources such as Google Groups or inquire about institutional supported listservs as a way to create a hub to grow their communications. However, if this becomes part of your communication plan, plan out intentional engagement early so that it becomes a place where community members see value and a relevant use of their time.
- *Communication from the leadership team:* As the leader of your organization, you're not just managing the administrative tasks and logistics, you're also shaping SoTL culture within your community. How might you develop a mission and identity for your community that are grounded in SoTL-aligned values like reflection, inclusivity, accessibility, and evidence-base? As the guiding voice of your network, you have the responsibility of setting a vision for your colleagues and translating that into practice. Bring in what you know about your own SoTL work or scholarship from our community to guide how you engage with members. This might include inquiry-oriented newsletters framed around questions like Hutchings' (2000) Taxonomy of Questions; an evidence-oriented website or hub of resources that models practices that are grounded in scholarship and reflection while being appreciative of context and diverse ways of knowing; or regular updates from you that share what you and the leadership team are learning as your community grows, or how your work is evolving in current and/or uncertain times within higher education. As a SoTL leader supporting others, focus on communication that invites dialogue and partnerships from members rather than broadcasting authority, model curiosity and experimentation as your community grows, and use language that normalizes iterative growth and productive failure.

## Grow

Who your audience is will naturally shape how you engage with prospective and existing members, where you direct resources, and who you partner with.

Develop a leadership and membership strategy

Once established, your community will want to spend time intentionally cultivating leadership and membership. A successful community must consider distributed and collaborative leadership, focused management to ensure goals are met, and active fellowship and followership (McKimm & McLead, 2020, pp 968 as cited in Ramani et al., 2021). To help you quickly grow, you should consider how you can reach your audience through academic conferences, institutional networks, and professional organizations, and how you can regularly promote your community through other spaces your audience engages with. Consider ways members of your community can build relationships through scholarly collaborations, mentorship, and purposeful engagement from your leadership team (Ford et al., 2024), in doing so you will reinforce the value of your community to colleagues who are already limited in time. Deciding if membership must be active or fluid will determine community engagement. As Wenger (2010) suggests, fluid membership is a strategy that allows an individual to join through peripheral participation and move towards the center of engagement. This can help members develop a community identity and shared purpose as part of their initial engagement, without feeling overwhelming. Over time, consider if members might take on diverse roles that lead into named community positions (Ramani et al., 2021), this can support their SoTL leadership and offer purposeful mentorship to again, move from the periphery to the center.

Plan for meaningful engagement and direct your organizational time

Prioritize building a space where your audience can meaningfully engage with each other to build personal connections. As Ramani et al. (2021) note “since such communities are often voluntary, time and effort must be invested in planting the seeds, nourishing the soil, and cultivating relationships so that they bear fruit” (pp. 967). A variety of activities can generate active and passive engagement of community members:

- Webinars and Workshops: Organize virtual or in-person events focusing on SoTL topics.
- Collaborative Research Projects/Collaborative Writing Groups: Facilitate opportunities for members to collaborate on SoTL studies.
- Discussion Forums: Provide spaces for ongoing dialogue about challenges and innovations in teaching and learning.

- Curate a Resource Library: Share publications, tools, and case studies relevant to SoTL.
- Offer Professional Development: Provide training sessions or certification programs in SoTL practices.
- Create Publication Opportunities: Encourage members to co-author articles or contribute to a network-hosted journal.
- Grants and Awards: Offer incentives for engagement and recognition of colleagues who are modelling the values of your community.

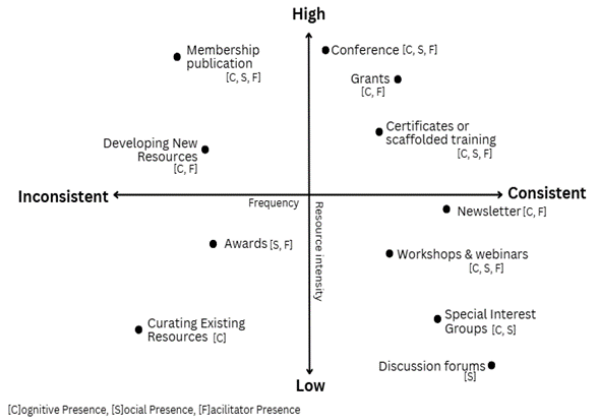
Increased engagement that is relevant and purposeful can lead to greater membership satisfaction (Ford et al., 2024) but can also require sustained frequency and considerable resources (e.g., time, funding, humans). Offering opportunities for sustained engagement, or sporadic engagement based on an individual's need can be helpful to initially draw folks in and increase your community but will not necessarily guarantee active engagement thereafter. Sustained engagement of the community requires thoughtful consideration of both small-scale and larger-scale activities that will create growth while also sustaining momentum.

As your community grows, it will be important to balance the resource investment with impact, remembering that you want to create sustainable expectations, and that this is likely work that is over and above your full-time job. Here, the foundations of the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model can be helpful to direct your time and support community development (Hubball & Clarke, 2010; Hubball, Clarke, & Poole, 2010), by focusing on 1) cognitive presence – how members construct meaning through sustained engagement, reflection, and discourse; 2) social presence – how members socially and emotionally engage with the community in order to develop a sense of belonging and a supportive environment, and 3) facilitator presence – how does the leadership structure intentional and meaningful experiences for members that ensure that the community is meeting its goals, values, and vision.

In reflecting on my own experience being a member and leader in SoTL communities for this chapter, I went back and considered the diverse ways I participated and encouraged participation in communities over the last decade. Using the CoI model as a lens for generating presence, I mapped out community activities based on frequency of leadership engagement (how consistency of output for leadership, verses low or inconsistency of frequency) and how resource demanding (high verse low) and activity might be (Figure 2). As you consider how you want to engage membership, consider its impact on presence, the number of resources needed for it to be successful, and if this is a one-time or annual endeavour.

**Figure 2.**

*Community activities by frequency of occurrence and resource intensity (i.e., capacity needed for success)*



Creating a space that embraces diversity and promotes psychological safety

As you grow, consider the environment that your community creates and conveys to new and existing members from diverse backgrounds. As noted with CoP's, their effectiveness relies on members engaging and reinforcing a “cohesive and harmonious community” (Wilson-Mah et al. (2022) cited in du Plessis et al, 2025, pp. 8), so consider your community's culture and how your values are espoused and reinforced through engagement, artefacts, and collaborations. If individuals feel unsafe or an inability to develop authentic and trustworthy relationships (Bunnell et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2025), they are likely to discontinue their engagement. Ramani et al. (2021) note challenges such as language proficiencies and expectations, cultural differences, visible or invisible hierarchies, time zones, and resource access as important considerations. I would add disciplinary assumptions and jargon, inherent biases towards differing epistemologies and methodologies, accessibility, neurodiversity, gender, and academic rank as additional considerations particularly important when developing an inclusive and safe SoTL community. This also applies to core leadership and ensuring a unified team that appreciates all voices, while working both as a collective and being appreciative of the individual. Thus, critical to the function of a community is a commitment to continually reflect on, redefine, and reinforce shared values to ensure that leadership and membership engagement nurtures trust, support, growth in a positive environment (Ramani et al., 2021; Wilson-Mah et al., 2022). du Plessis et al. (2025) found that one way to work towards this is ensuring that your short-term and long-term goals are achievable and acknowledged by leadership and members. In doing so, natural collaborations form, relationships are built, and individuals find personal relevance. Similarly, support for individual growth at leadership and membership levels is equally important (du

Plessis et al., 2025; Tierney et al., 2020), as it can emphasize value for the individual and appreciation for their own projects, SoTL development, and leadership growth.

## Sustain

We've discussed the work and intentions that go into *establishing* and *growing* your community, the hardest part may be sustaining it. The initial growth of a community is often able to lean into the excitement and novelty of its beginning. Leadership and members are reinforced through the joy of meeting new people, experiencing new engagement, and watching hard work develop into a materialized community. But once the enchantment of the newness wears off, the realities of workload, time, and outside commitments materialize, sustaining the community can be difficult to prioritize, and I believe is the hardest work you as the leader will do. So how can you plan for sustained engagement?

Build meaningful relationships within your community and collaborative external partnerships

Relational opportunities are critical in fostering sustained engagement as your community grows. Sustained engagement comes from creating a “motivated, active, and fulfilled” community (Ramani et al., 2021, pp. 969), where members build relationships, grow together, celebrate diverse perspectives and experiences, and recognize accomplishments. The initial growth and sustained growth of an organization is dependent on nurturing and leaning on important partnerships that draw members in, adding relevance through events and offerings that support membership interests, and collaborations that can provide support through sponsorships and funding. These partnerships can quickly and easily turn into friendships that pop-up when it matters the most (McSweeney & Rahman, 2026). I'm reminded of the POD Special Interest group that I joined over four years ago. We met regularly to discuss literature on the scholarship of educational development and share the SoTL culture and programming at our institutions. Our meetings were not frequent, but we tried our best to meet the goals of POD and connect at least once a semester. A year in my life drastically changed as my husband fell ill. I'm not sure how they knew, but suddenly I was receiving gift cards for meals, photos of their own family and pets to cheer me up, and other personal notes. That community was no longer just a professional space, it was a personal one that provided care. Our group is no longer associated with POD, but we still meet regularly for collaborative projects and to catch up. While my example is of a smaller community, these relationships still exist and are incredibly powerful in professional communities where shared interest extends to the human. In some ways, I think this is what many of us need, and is another way that SoTL's person-centered values can be embedded and modelled in our leadership and communities.

While you'll want to focus on building relationships with core members, there are a range of external partnerships available to support your organizations in order to sustain your presence:

- Universities and teaching and learning centers: These organizations can help to extend your research through organizational marketing, partnering for events, or welcoming you into SoTL workshops.
- Professional Organizations: Existing organizations, as mentioned in the communication strategies can also help with providing extended reach to audiences consistently over time. Utilizing listservs, social media, and other forms of advertising through their communications or partnering for a workshop can help build your credibility through your association with a trusted community/organization, as well as provide you with resources for consistent activities (Figure 2).
- Special issues: Partnering with existing journals for special issues related to SoTL or your specific SoTL context (e.g., regional, part-time academics, etc.) can help with spreading the work of who your organization serves while also creating an opportunity for collaboration with your community's members. Products can then also be used as marketing tools to demonstrate your goals.
- SoTL Experts: Inviting experts in the field or known scholars can help build trust with your membership or pull in new members after you've been established is a great way to revitalize recruitment activities. You can also utilize these relationships to mentor you (and your team) in a variety of ways, as often these experts have experience building, engaging, and supporting communities, or can be a way to plan for your own transitional growth, as you become a mentor to new leadership as you rotate out.

Be responsive through measured impact

Given the range of communication and engagement strategies a community can use, it's important to think about how you can track their impact, check-in with both leadership and membership, and establish ongoing consensus building around goals and vision. From the onset, building metrics that offer you a way to direct your efforts, demonstrate impact for funding requests, convey engagement for advertising, and allow you to understand who is engaging with your work and why. Just like in our SoTL, consider a wide variety of evidence you can use and model the diversity of data available to us in our own teaching. This also offers the leadership team an opportunity to engage in their own scholarship of educational development (Cruz et al., 2022; Kenny et al., 2017; Little, 2014), growing their own experience

and skills in SoTL leadership. We can use the literature on center evaluation for insight into potential metrics of success for our own communities (Hines, 2017; Miller-Young & Poth, 2021; Smith & Gadbury-Amyot, 2014; Wright, 2023), once again modelling values of SoTL (Table 2).

**Table 2.**

*Diverse examples of measuring the impact of our SoTL communities*

Quantitative metric examples	Qualitative metric examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New and renewal memberships (i.e., growth and retention rates)</li> <li>• Membership demographics</li> <li>• Professional development attendance and feedback</li> <li>• Social media and website engagement analytics</li> <li>• Number of posts via member-driven communications (i.e., listservs)</li> <li>• Publications elicited from community collaborations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development feedback</li> <li>• Focus groups and interviews with members</li> <li>• Testimonials</li> <li>• Depth of engagement with member-driven communications (i.e., listservs)</li> </ul>

Plan for long-term sustainability

Lastly, consider sustainability of the community. I believe that this should be divided into two important aspects: sustainability of the community and sustainability of yourself.

*Sustainability of community:* As your community grows over time, members of the leadership team will likely need to rotate as careers transition, membership expands, and new individuals want to be involved (this can help to ensure leadership reflects the evolution of and growth to the field of SoTL.) Three critical aspects of community sustainability should be considered:

1. Leadership succession planning: How will individuals rotate in and out of leadership without stalling momentum? How will you plan for leadership mentorship? What information around the history of the community, the administration, and day-to-day will a new leader need?
2. Equitable rotation: To ensure that your community maintains a space of

inclusion, ensure fairness when rotating leadership roles. Bringing in new members or creating new roles that capitalize on strengths within the membership not only shares workload but also sustains community growth and models mentorship (Ford et al., 2024).

3. Develop a vision and mission to guide the growth of the network: Without these, your community risks growing in ways that do not reflect the intention of the membership and field of SoTL. This helps to determine when you say ‘yes’ to initiatives, or potentially ‘no’, and helps the leadership plan for short-term and long-term successful. (Note: As leadership rotates, consider how often the vision and mission should be revised.)
4. Secure needed resources: Events, networking, funding for grants, promotional materials, and so much more comes along with growth. Securing renewable resources will help strengthen the security of your vision and long-term goals, and your external partnerships can be a place to start. As you grow, you may wish to consider a membership model to guarantee annual funding to support initiatives.

*Sustainability of yourself:* Much of the work discussed in this chapter is on the shoulders of volunteer labour from our community. To sustain this work, you must consider the scope of what you and the leadership team can reasonably do. Remember that you do not need to be everything to everyone, and in fact, finding a niche area to build your community can help provide much needed structure to avoid burnout. Building a team allows you to lean on others and embraces calls from our community to integrate self-care into your daily practice (Kolomitro et al., 2020; McGowan & Felten, 2021; McSweeney & Rahman, 2026).

## Conclusion

Like communities of practice, a community of scholars at a larger-scale has the opportunity to create an environment in which academics across disciplines, institutions, and geographical contexts can come together to share and co-develop knowledge around pedagogical practices within a supportive and inclusive environment (du Plessis et al., 2025). Large communities and networks can offer a dynamic experience where collaborative learning, relationship building, and personal and professional growth can occur, providing meaningful engagement for new, returning, and well-established SoTL scholars to build both their SoTL practice and leadership skills.

Over time, I have worked to build community at a local institutional level, a geographic level, and an international level. In Canada I felt deeply rooted and

connected to a national network, but as I settle into a new role, I'm having to find a new community. I now navigate not only integrating into existing communities but look to see what communities might be developed to support my personal and professional contexts. Having recently changed institutions and countries, I am now at a moment of reflection on what communities I still have to support me, and what communities I want to (re)build.

I would like to return to the opening case study and Tierney's comment that we "spend an inordinate amount of time on operational things, when we should be spending time on creative things." While this is true for many of us, I argue that creating community is a critical operational task that is essential to our SoTL work, and in fact should be considered an extension of Felten's seminal principles in that relationships, collaboration, and connection are integral to the quality of our SoTL.

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# Institutional Cultures and SoTL Leadership

In the previous section, we explored how networks and communities provide the relational foundations for SoTL leadership. These connections enable collaboration, shared inquiry, and the development of scholarly identity. At the same time, such relationships are always situated within broader institutional contexts that shape what can be sustained, recognised, and extended.

This section builds on that insight by focusing on institutional cultures and their role in shaping SoTL leadership. If earlier sections addressed questions of identity and relationships—“*Who am I becoming?*” and “*With whom do I work?*”—this section asks: “*Within what structures and conditions does this work take place, and how do these influence what is possible?*”

Across the chapters, institutional context is presented not as a fixed backdrop, but as something that is interpreted, navigated, and, at times, reshaped through practice. Contributors examine how policies, reward structures, leadership priorities, and organisational norms influence the visibility, value, and sustainability of SoTL. At the same time, they show how individuals and groups create space for SoTL within these conditions, often working across formal and informal boundaries.

The chapters approach this theme from complementary perspectives. Some focus on the challenges that arise in institutional environments, including issues of recognition, competing priorities, and tensions between disciplinary and educational priorities. Others highlight strategies for working productively within these contexts, such as aligning SoTL with institutional goals, building alliances, and developing structures that support scholarly teaching and learning over time.

While these contributions share a concern with institutional conditions, they differ in how they position leadership within them. Some emphasise navigation, illustrating how SoTL leaders sustain and advance their work within existing systems. Others focus on influence and change, showing how individuals and groups can shape institutional priorities, cultures, and practices over time. Together, these perspectives highlight that institutional context is not only something that constrains SoTL leadership, but also a space in which leadership can be enacted in strategic and transformative ways.

Taken together, the chapters demonstrate that SoTL leadership at the institutional level requires both sensitivity to context and the capacity to act within it. It involves

recognising opportunities, building coalitions, and working across boundaries to align individual, collective, and organisational goals. In this way, the relational work highlighted in the previous section is extended into organisational contexts, where leadership involves not only participating in institutional cultures, but also contributing to their ongoing development.

This section invites you to reflect on your own institutional context: the structures, expectations, and cultures that shape your work, and the possibilities they offer. It also encourages you to consider how you might engage with these conditions—not only by navigating them, but by contributing to change within them as part of your SoTL leadership practice.

## Case Study: Institutional Cultures and SoTL Leadership

Manon Kluijtmans

This case study on institutional cultures and SoTL leadership starts with my personal journey, as my experiences have shaped and inspired my leadership roles. I will discuss our vision and the practical steps taken to foster SoTL. By focusing on competency development, support, grants, visibility, and recognition, we aim to build a strong institutional SoTL culture at Utrecht University.

### Journey Toward Educational Scholarship and Leadership

My path to becoming an educational scholar began as a disciplinary researcher in biomedical sciences at the University Medical Center in Utrecht. After earning my PhD, I shifted my focus entirely to education, teaching abroad in Peru, and later taking on multiple roles in teaching, innovation, and policy at Utrecht University. I developed and coordinated master's programs, led the medical skills lab, and served as the education director for Clinical Health Sciences. Over time, I gained practical and theoretical insights into teaching and learning in health professions education, but often found that existing educational research didn't fully address my specific practice questions.

This gap led me to investigate my educational practices, aimed at bridging the research-practice divide in healthcare. As my leadership roles expanded, including the position as director of the Center for Academic Teaching and Learning of Utrecht University, my research also broadened to include faculty development. Alongside the research-practice gap in health care, the research-practice gap in higher education – which SoTL seeks to bridge- also became a central theme of my work. I see my educational leadership and scholarship as mutually reinforcing, and this is the vision I have aimed to instill across the institution in my role as Vice-Rector for Teaching and Learning.

### Institutional context and building infrastructure to foster Educational Scholarship

In 2016, I was tasked with developing a Center for Academic Teaching and Learning (CAT) at Utrecht University. As a leading research university, Utrecht has long invested in teaching and learning, dating back to the 1990s when education often

took a backseat to research. To counter this, the university introduced several initiatives, including the University Teaching Qualification (UTQ) in 1995 and an educational leadership program in 2000, both aimed at improving teaching quality and career prospects for educators. These initiatives were complemented by support for educational innovation and a broad range of teacher development offerings, laying a strong foundation for a culture that values education. Today, our teacher development offerings range from very beginner ('Start to teach') to highly advanced ('Senior Fellow Programme').

In establishing CAT, we not only consolidated and extended existing support for teacher development and educational innovation, but also introduced a third area of support: Educational Scholarship. Through this third pillar, we aim to enhance evidence-informed teaching and learning across the university. We launched initiatives such as the SoTL roadmap and e-module (see also the case study of Irma Meijerman in the Introduction), SoTL grants, a Teacher Scholars Programme, and an annual SoTL conference.

Beyond CAT's support, we successfully advocated for Higher Education Research to be recognized as one of the university's eight 'Focus Areas'. I currently chair this Focus Area, which secures funding for SoTL for eight years and, more importantly, provides institutional recognition.

### Impact and Broader Vision

Our vision is to improve teaching and learning by inspiring and empowering university teachers and the wider teaching community. The CAT's three pillars—Teacher Development, Educational Innovation, and Educational Scholarship—are synergistic, as can be illustrated by the Senior Fellow Program. This program supports senior academics in pursuing education-focused full professorships by integrating personal development, innovation leadership, and scholarly investigation (Bovenschen & Kluijtmans 2019, Crone, et al. 2023). It promotes evidence-informed education while fostering education-centered academic careers.

While the Centre for Teaching and Learning plays a key role in inspiring and facilitating SoTL, this nurturing can potentially land on barren ground when institutional culture -both at department and institutional level - does not foster and support educational scholarship. As Vice-rector for Teaching and Learning from 2019 until 2025, my main mission has been to improve the recognition of teaching -including SoTL- both in formal structures and informal culture. This mission is reflected in the university's Recognition and Rewards Vision (TRIPLE 2021), which promotes diverse and dynamic academic careers that prioritize quality

over quantity and supports education-focused career paths. I strive to transform institutional culture through continuous communication and ambassadorship, exemplified by the book I co-authored ‘The University in Transition’ (Kummeling, et al. 2024).

### Teach as you preach: Evidence-Informed Leadership in SoTL

Effective SoTL leadership must be rooted in evidence. Institutional leaders should model the culture they wish to cultivate. Throughout my career, I have sought to integrate educational leadership with scholarship, from classroom teaching to university policy. An example of the latter is a review on university teacher expertise development conducted by a CAT PhD fellow (van Dijk et al 2020), whose findings informed CAT’s teacher development portfolio and contributed to national and international discussions on educational careers. Another study on the expertise development of educational leaders indicates that leadership and scholarship are mutually strengthening (Van Dijk, et al. 2024). This brings the case study full circle: to foster SoTL at institutional level, we should address institutional culture by facilitating competency development, providing support opportunities, valuing SoTL, and modeling evidence-informed leadership practices.

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Her research examines teacher development and the education of dual-role professionals, including clinician-researchers, clinician-teachers, and teacher-scholars. Central themes in her work include identity development, boundary crossing, and the development of teacher expertise.

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## Organisational Culture(s) and SoTL Leadership

Katarina Mårtensson and Torgny Roxå

### Abstract

This chapter examines the relationship between organisational culture(s) and leadership in relation to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) in higher education. It addresses the persistent challenge of embedding SoTL beyond individual engagement and situates SoTL as a cultural and institutional endeavour rather than a standalone practice. Drawing on theories of institutional culture, microcultures, and organisational change, the chapter explores how norms, values, and practices surrounding teaching and learning are formed, sustained, and reshaped at multiple organisational levels. Particular attention is given to disciplinary and departmental microcultures, local teaching and learning regimes, and the role of frontstage and backstage conversations in mediating change. The chapter conceptualises SoTL as both a developmental and a leadership-oriented activity, highlighting the importance of formal, informal, and distributed leadership in supporting cultural organisational change. The chapter provides conceptual tools and practical insights for those seeking to foster institutional cultures in which SoTL is valued and sustained.

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The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) has emerged as a powerful movement within higher education. It seeks, among other things, to attend to teaching by embedding inquiry, reflection, and dissemination into everyday educational practice. In a recent report from the European University Association (2025), it is concluded that SoTL is not just an individual practice but a cultural and institutional endeavour that enhances teaching quality, fosters professional development, and strengthens accountability. However, stimulating SoTL within higher education requires a shift in how institutions, leaders, and individuals conceptualise teaching and learning – aspects that this text aims to shed light on.

While SoTL has gained wide recognition, its institutional embedding remains a challenge (Collins et al., 2025; Fanghanel et al., 2016). Likewise, national, economical, and political contexts may influence different SoTL initiatives – as shown by Chng et al. (2020) with examples from Asia, South Africa, and Europe. For SoTL to thrive, it must not only be practiced by committed individuals but also supported, legitimized, and sustained by the cultures and formal structures of the

academic contexts in which it unfolds. Leadership, therefore, among other things becomes crucial—not only in the sense of formal authority but also through informal and distributed forms of leadership that can influence cultural features at multiple institutional levels.

This chapter explores institutional cultures and SoTL leadership, mainly from a theoretical perspective. It situates SoTL within institutional and micro-cultural contexts, and theorizes how culture changes, as well as how SoTL specifically has the potential to contribute to cultural change. Understanding culture is the cornerstone of effective SoTL leadership. The theories presented here provide SoTL leaders with lenses for understanding local cultures, designing interventions, and fostering sustained change. Along with Kezar & Eckel (2002), we argue that a deep understanding of an institution's unique cultural norms is crucial for successful comprehensive change. The chapter therefore also outlines strategies to support SoTL as a vehicle to influence institutional culture; including practical implications for how leaders—formal and informal—can stimulate SoTL. The aim is to provide both conceptual inspiration and actionable guidance for those seeking to cultivate institutional cultures where SoTL can grow.

### **SoTL in an institutional culture**

As stated initially, we argue that stimulating SoTL within higher education requires a shift in how institutions, leaders, and individuals conceptualise teaching and learning. Or, in other words, the more SoTL can become an embedded feature of an institutional culture, the more norms will shift. Too often, teaching has been treated as a private, isolated activity, while research is seen as collective, shared, and publicly accountable (Handal, 1999). SoTL bridges this suggested dichotomy by defining that teaching, like research, should be subjected to systematic inquiry, peer review, and some form of dissemination (what is most often in the SoTL literature called 'going public'; Boyer, 1990). For this shift to take root in institutional cultures, conditions need to be created, and norms be established, where scholarly teaching is not an exceptional practice but a cultural expectation. This is arguably a slow, incremental process, requiring a multitude of activities and approaches at all organisational levels. As an example, Kluijtmans (Case Study: Institutional Cultures and SoTL Leadership in this book) in her practical leadership narrative from Utrecht University, provides details on how the university introduced several complementary initiatives. She summarises that in that context they were "focusing on both competency development, support, grants, visibility, and recognition [...] laying a strong foundation for a culture that values education".

To think institutionally about SoTL, several perspectives are helpful:

## SoTL as culture, not just practice

SoTL involves not only what teachers do but also the shared meanings, values, and norms around teaching (Mårtensson, 2014; Roxå & Mårtensson, 2015; Trowler, 2020). SoTL encourages a view on teaching similar to that of research (Boyer, 1990), where observations of teaching and subsequent decisions about development of teaching for the benefit of student learning is communicated frontstage (Goffman, 2000) in academic local and organisational contexts. This implies that SoTL has the potential to influence the norms and values of an academic culture, to treat teaching and learning as a scholarly endeavor.

## SoTL as developmental

Engagement with SoTL provides opportunities to better understand one's own teaching and the students' learning in that context, with the main purpose to improve and develop it (Larsson et al., 2020) as well as to contribute to knowledge about teaching and learning, in support of the broader aims of higher education (Chick et al., 2025). In other words, SoTL has a strong feature of being developmentally oriented.

## SoTL as leadership

Institutional leaders, formal and informal, play a pivotal role in shaping cultures where SoTL is recognised, resourced, and connected to long-term educational quality (EUA, 2025; Kluijtmans, 2026). Stimulating SoTL institutionally therefore requires leadership at multiple levels: senior leaders must signal its importance; mid-level leaders must create supportive structures; and informal leaders must champion SoTL-engagement in conversations and networks (Kenny et al., 2016; Verwoord & Poole, 2016). Thus, thinking about SoTL institutionally means seeing it as a lever for cultural development, not merely as a set of projects or individual scholarly outputs. In the following, we will introduce some perspectives that can help SoTL leaders to understand and potentially change institutional cultures.

## **Institutional culture at the organisational meso-level**

At an overarching level, a university may be characterised by being mainly research-intensive or teaching-oriented, or something else, and to have different general "organisational ideals" (Stensaker, 2006). In this text, we argue that academic institutions do not have "one culture" but many. Culture is created through regular interactions, and it defines and differentiates a group as compared to others (Alvesson, 2002). A description of a teaching culture says something about how a

group of for example academic teachers talk, interact, and act in relation to teaching – their ways of thinking and practicing (Hounsell & Anderson, 2009). Some parts of the culture can be observed, other parts are patterns of thinking, and the most central and fundamental part, the ethos (Kezar, 2007) of the culture – underlying assumptions linked to the very existence of the culture (Schein, 1985). In all, culture is a collective feature that saves cognitive energy for its members. The sense of “this is how we do things here”, provides members with guidance, identity, and stability, offering them cognitive space to focus on what appears important for the group. These traits have been shaped over time, is part of the group’s history, and is what members are socialised into at the same time as each member continues to shape and recreate the culture. In ideal cases a culture can be perfectly adapted to tasks at hand, while in others it can be dysfunctional (Ostrom, 1990).

Yet, from a cultural perspective the ecosystem of a knowledge-intensive organisation, such as a university, consists of a number of “semi-autonomous knowledge networks” (Hannah & Lester, 2009), all shaping their own cultures – their own unique ways of knowing and practising, gradually shaping that “way we do things around here”. In relation specifically to teaching and learning in higher education, Trowler (2008) provides a crucial lens by describing such group-cultures as local *teaching and learning regimes* – where norms, values, habits, and taken-for-granted practices regarding teaching, student learning, and assessment develop over time. Trowler argues that rather than focusing solely on institutional cultures at the university-wide level, it is more fruitful to consider the disciplinary, departmental, or subject-specific communities where most academics anchor their professional identities as the main loci of potential change.

This perspective has been further developed by Roxå & Mårtensson (2011, 2014, 2015), exploring *microcultures* in higher education, where disciplinary epistemologies, traditions of practice, and everyday norms shape attitudes toward teaching and learning. This research explores how teaching cultures are sustained, generated or changed. Change initiatives introduced from the top of the organisation are always filtered through the meanings and practices of the local microcultures (Mårtensson et al., 2014). Strong microcultures, in their study, were characterised by a shared responsibility, high levels of trust, and a developmental agenda. Within such microcultures, the norms will mediate how SoTL is interpreted and valued. SoTL initiatives may be embraced enthusiastically, while in other kinds of microcultures, where perhaps trust or a shared responsibility is lacking, SoTL can be resisted as a distraction, or simply ignored. Recognising this diversity is essential for SoTL leadership: strategies that work in one microculture may fail in another. We will return to this matter later.

Thus, a cultural perspective on SoTL must attend to these local contexts, treating departments, disciplines, educational programmes, and teaching teams not as neutral

recipients of institutional policies and initiatives but as a plethora of active cultural sites where the relevance and meaning of SoTL is negotiated. Change ambitions must therefore include a firm understanding of how these microcultures are continuously reconstructed and how practices propagate from one microculture to another and further across the targeted organization.

### **Changing institutional culture through change in microcultures**

Kezar (2018) suggests, from a meta-perspective on organisational change, that change in higher education organisations can be described through five approaches: Scientific management (top-down, led by informed leaders), Evolutionary (outside-in, external forces), Political (internal stakeholders, through debate, alliances and power influence), Social cognition (informed decisions, practitioners learn how to support student learning), Cultural or Neo-institutional [see Endnote 1] (reconfiguration of norms). As argued in another chapter in this book by Kluijtmans (2026) and in line with Kezar's conclusions, we also suggest that all these approaches should be considered and applied as means for change. Due to limited space, though, we will focus on cultural change and how SoTL can be used to influence microcultures.

Microcultures may appear stable over time but at closer look they are in a constant dynamic state of evolution where members collaborate in reconstructing the culture on a day-to-day basis. Vollmer (2013) demonstrates that key features in this reconstruction include a) the relationship between members (e.g. status and hierarchy); b) the value assigned to various cognitive material (knowledge); and c) the way members behave towards each other and the outside world (norms). Vollmer's interest concerns how stability is upheld collaboratively by members. The mechanisms he identifies may however be used in attempts to influence microcultures. In short, change in a microculture is linked to one or all of the three aspects: *Who* decides (status and hierarchy) *What* is relevant (cognition and knowledge) and *How* this is communicated (norms)? Change efforts can thereby intentionally consider which of these aspects should be the entry point for change and help negotiate processes that in the end are likely to influence all three aspects. For example, change through project funding may support individuals in a microculture to develop new ways to teach. This will temporarily support the recipient of funding and potentially shift hierarchies in the group. If norms and/or cognitive priorities in the microculture remains the same, practices run the risk of returning to normal as the funding ends, a frequent outcome (Kottman et al., 2024; Lane et al., 2020). For change to become sustainable, it may start in one of the three aspects but needs to also proceed to influence the others.

## SoTL as a way to influence microcultures

In academic organisations and perhaps especially in research intensive contexts, SoTL can be argued to align with the ethos of academic culture, i.e. the scholarliness. However, what it does not automatically do is to influence culture. It can very well remain an individual enterprise where the individual seeks out other venues than the local workplace to share SoTL-experiences (described as trajectory 1 in Roxå et al. (2008), see later in this text for a more detailed account). Attention therefore should be directed to how to increase frequency and quality in scholarly conversations locally (trajectory 2). A key to achieve this is to focus on SoTL as production of local knowledge (Ashwin & Trigwell, 2004), anchored in the specific organisation at hand.

A feature we have not yet touched upon is microcultures' frontstage (Goffman, 2000) characteristics. Culture is reconstructed daily through interactions and negotiations (Alvesson, 2002; Vollmer, 2013). Cultural change therefore would imply, as indicated by Vollmer's (2013) perspective above, change in how members interact, what cognitive material they use in these interactions and the internal distribution of status among members. But there is also a backstage aspect (Goffman, 2000) of this. In parallel to collegial conversations frontstage, individual academics also have sincere conversations privately about teaching and learning with a few selected, trusted colleagues, so called significant networks (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009). In these networks academic teachers discuss teaching and students in sometimes different ways than while participating in the daily frontstage interactions with colleagues sharing a microculture. Attempts to influence microcultures should therefore also include a perspective on and awareness of these significant networks, since ideas and innovations as well as resistance to change often move through these more hidden channels (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2012).

SoTL offers a mechanism through which backstage conversations can be drawn upon and used in change efforts. It *allows or even requires backstage conversations to move frontstage* and thereby actively influences how microcultures evolve. Engaging in SoTL entails going public with observations, reflections, and conclusions about teaching and student learning. If this is to be useful in change efforts, a key issue concerns how to engage more academics in this; how to increase the number of backstage conversations to move into the frontstage domain. An ample example on how to do this is provided by Førland et al. (in press). They argue that providing a multitude of entry points for teachers into scholarly conversations and to offer this over a long time can result in a measurably larger proportion of academics to engage. An easy entry point might be to engage in a web-based seminar, a more advanced is to present a SoTL-inquiry at a local campus conference, at an international conference or even publish in relevant peer reviewed journals. The authors provide empirical evidence of increased engagement over a period of

ten years, both in terms of the number of academics engaging as well as an increased sophistication in how to engage.

In short, we argue that by creating and offering structures and venues where backstage conversations can be out in the open in ways suitable for the local contexts and to do this over time will influence individual microcultures especially concerning *how* teaching and learning is talked about. This way, change starts in the normative aspect (Vollmer, 2013) because going public locally requires attention to how observations are made, how these are interpreted and how findings are reported. This change will then influence the *what-* and the *who-*aspects.

To understand how SoTL then exerts influence beyond the borders of a microculture, we need to consider a system of microcultures. Centola (2018) offers such a perspective through social network analysis and through experiments on social media. He shows that systems change, not through being targeted by strong policies or an intensified general flow of information but instead through the mechanism where members of different microcultures (or clusters using a network terminology) encounter each other. Information is shared from person to person and moved from the periphery of a microculture into its center, thereby contributing to change. As argued by Centola, influence depends on interaction with some degree of intricacy leading to complex influence. If the process is repeated in many places and over time, new practices may spread in the system. Influencing cultures therefore becomes a matter of perseverance. The process will take time. New ideas must be formulated, and new practices be described and renegotiated to suit various microcultures. SoTL, with a focus on creation of local knowledge, integration, and going public provides an opportunity for academic teachers to incorporate teaching innovations through micro-cultural renegotiations. The process may be further scaffolded if the SoTL-reports, the tangible artefacts of SoTL, are curated locally and continuously referred to as an asset by change leaders (Brown et al., accepted).

In short, we conclude that individual microcultures and wider cultures in higher education organisations develop through the power of *more and better conversations about teaching and learning*. SoTL provides a strategy for achieving this.

Following from the above, as a widespread initiative to positively influence existing teaching and learning cultures, SoTL encourages a more elaborated practice for observation of teaching, decisions about teaching, and last but not least, how teaching is talked about. New material related to teaching and learning gathered in more advanced ways are fed into an ongoing, supported organisational conversation where gradually more people take part. In relation to Vollmer's (2013) perspective, it involves a normative shift, where new voices are heard and new information

is considered. Consequently, former hierarchies will be dislocated. SoTL thereby also becomes a political enterprise in respective organization that embarks on such a journey – something that SoTL leaders need to be aware of and take into consideration.

### **Strategies for supporting SoTL and cultural change**

One question then becomes: what could, and should institutions and leaders do to cultivate SoTL cultures? First, and following from the above, it is crucial to recognise and acknowledge that cultural change requires sustained engagement, reinforcement, and visible recognition. Returning to Kluijman’s leadership example from Utrecht University, she also stresses the importance to “address institutional culture by facilitating competency development, providing support opportunities, valuing SoTL, and modeling evidence-informed leadership practices.”

As already indicated, SoTL has been shown to be not only a scholarly activity but also a powerful mechanism for cultural change (Førland et al., in press; Mårtensson, 2014). Mårtensson et al. (2011) showcase that SoTL has the capacity to influence how teaching is locally valued, discussed, and improved within academic communities and institutional cultures if and when a multitude of various activities in the organisation are linked.

It may be important – institutionally – to stress the focus on the local level going public, which can also be perceived as a difference between SoTL and regular research expectations. Roxå et al (2008) differentiate between two trajectories of SoTL engagement: Trajectory 1 where an individual academic undertakes a SoTL project and attends a teaching & learning conference (outside of their institution), but without support or follow-up, the impact remains personal and limited. Colleagues in their own context may not even know of this project or the learning opportunities it has provided. The local culture therefore does not change because the engagement does not ripple outward. Trajectory 2 on the other hand is a more networked SoTL participation where individuals engage in SoTL and primarily bring their learning back into their local microcultures. They share findings, initiate discussions, and contribute to collective reflection in the local, institutional context (Ashwin & Trigwell, 2004). Over time, this networked engagement begins to shift cultural norms. Obviously the two trajectories can be combined, one doesn’t have to exclude the other – but for the institutional culture to change then it is insufficient only to encourage and reward SoTL-trajectory 1.

Furthermore, for SoTL to significantly contribute to cultural change, Mårtensson (2014) argues there must be *arenas* for dialogue, reflection, and sharing within the local context. This can be departmental meetings, teaching seminars, reading

groups, campus conferences or informal networks – all of which can be initiated and supported by leaders. Additionally, and previously indicated *artifacts* such as teaching portfolios, blogs, online repositories, presentations or SoTL papers make teaching practices and inquiry results visible and serve as boundary objects that fuel conversations. We therefore argue, along with Schein (1985) that culture can change when new artifacts (in this case such as teaching portfolios, departmental seminar presentations, or SoTL publications) and routines (such as peer discussion of teaching) become embedded in daily life. Consequently, supporting the production, collection, curation, and sharing of artefacts within an institution may then contribute to enhance the value of teaching and changing teaching culture (Brown et al., accepted) – another activity that SoTL leaders can initiate and support at various levels.

Because cultural change is slow and incremental, the effects of SoTL engagement on the institutional culture will evidently take time (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2012). Hence, SoTL leaders must cultivate patience and persistence, recognising that results may only become visible over years or even decades. As indicated previously, Roxå & Mårtensson (2009) highlight the importance of *significant conversations* and *informal networks* in fostering cultural change: When academics engage in trustful, meaningful discussions about teaching with selected peers, their perspectives shift, and new practices take root. Following this, cultural change occurs when networks of colleagues begin to normalize new practices (Roxå et al., 2010). The authors argue that a single, isolated attempt to change culture is likely to fail, and rather “a multitude of inter-related initiatives over a long period of time is likely to distinguish strategies that are successful in influencing academic teaching and learning cultures” (99). Therefore, leaders – in whichever organisational role they act, formal or informal, and at various institutional levels – need to create conditions for such significant conversations. This can be done by legitimizing them, by providing time and space (arenas), by recognising their value and by making sure that a multitude of inter-related initiatives support the institutional value of engaging in SoTL. Cultural change may be slow, but it is possible. Through sustained, trust-based conversations and visible SoTL engagement, leaders at all levels can gradually reorient the academic culture toward valuing teaching as a scholarly act.

## Endnote

[1] Kezar separates Cultural and Neo-institutional but in our view they are very similar and we therefore in this context treat them as one.

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## Understanding and Navigating Institutional Culture: The SoTL Seed Program as Case Study

Adriana Briseño-Garzón; Trish Varao-Sousa; and Natasha Pestonji-Dixon

### Abstract

Faculty engagement in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) is often constrained by two persistent challenges: navigating unfamiliar methodological and epistemological traditions outside disciplinary training, and managing teaching-related workload within research-intensive university contexts. This chapter presents the SoTL Seed Program at the University of British Columbia as a practical case study of an institutional support model designed to address these barriers while fostering a sustainable culture of scholarly teaching. Situated within a large Canadian research-intensive institution, the program moves beyond traditional funding-only approaches by pairing faculty members with trained graduate students—SoTL Specialists—who provide embedded methodological, research design, and evaluation support. Drawing on more than ten years of iterative program development and evaluation, the chapter illustrates how institutional context and culture shape both the constraints and opportunities of SoTL leadership. The SoTL Seed Program is framed as an institutional leadership intervention that aligns resources, people, and structures to enable faculty agency, shared responsibility, and cross-disciplinary collaboration. Particular attention is given to how the program supports educational leadership faculty, promotes student–faculty partnerships, and contributes to professional development for both faculty and graduate students. The chapter also highlights complementary supports—such as consultations, workshops, communities of practice, and low-barrier dissemination initiatives—that collectively reinforce an institutional ecosystem for SoTL. Through reflection on challenges, adaptations, and lessons learned, the authors offer practical insights for institutional leaders, educational developers, and teaching and learning centres seeking to cultivate inclusive, scalable, and context-responsive SoTL initiatives. The chapter argues that meaningful institutional change requires patience, ongoing evaluation, and a willingness to design supports that attend to both individual capacity and organizational culture. Ultimately, the SoTL Seed Program demonstrates how thoughtfully designed institutional structures can help normalize, value, and sustain scholarly engagement with teaching and learning.

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Two common barriers faculty face when engaging with the scholarship of teaching

and learning (SoTL) are: expanding their methodological/epistemological frameworks and managing ongoing challenges associated with teaching-related workload. Faculty often find it challenging to step out of their disciplinary training and expertise, and immerse themselves in methodological and epistemological frameworks in social and behavioral research that might be unfamiliar to them (Hubball & Clarke, 2010). Workload and burnout also challenge faculty's capacity to engage with SoTL (Gehrke & Kezar, 2015). Exclusively providing institutional funding to support SoTL work fails to recognize these roadblocks. In this practical chapter, we present an innovative institutional support program that addresses both barriers. We discuss how we have enriched our program by identifying and responding to the challenges and opportunities of our institutional context. We frame this program not only as a support mechanism, but as an example of institutional SoTL leadership in practice—one that aligns structures, resources, and people to enable scholarly teaching cultures.

### **Institutional Context and Culture**

The University of British Columbia (UBC) is a large Canadian research-intensive institution, with almost 8,000 faculty, over 70,000 students, and over 13,000 staff across two campuses. UBC has both tenured and non-tenured faculty appointments; tenure-track faculty appointments include a research stream and an educational leadership stream. It is home to a range of unit-level teaching cultures, with central and academic unit-level teaching and learning support.

The Institute for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISoTL) is hosted by UBC's Centre for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT), a central service unit that offers a range of teaching and learning programs and services. The ISoTL serves UBC's SoTL community through programs, support, events, and resources. Teaching and learning centres help institutions address the challenges of teaching in higher education and have become critical central units in institutions worldwide in the past few decades, providing cross-disciplinary expertise and support in teaching, inspiration and innovation for pedagogical practices, and a space to build community and break down silos (Asimakopoulos, Karalis, & Kedraka, 2021; Kelley, Cruz, & Fire, 2017).

### **The ISoTL's Programs and Services**

The ISoTL's mission is to (a) support faculty members in reflective practices and pedagogical research across disciplines; (b) increase faculty members' agency as independent SoTL researchers; (c) promote institutional-level recognition of SoTL; and (d) include student perspectives on teaching and learning processes.

The Institute attains its academic mission through:

1. The SoTL Seed Program, a support model that establishes contractual partnerships between faculty members and graduate students with knowledge of learning theories and education/behavioural research methodologies
2. Workshops, events, and curated resources that increase awareness of evidence-informed pedagogies, methodologies, and ethical research practice
3. Consultations on faculty's SoTL projects, from inception to dissemination
4. Hosting and fostering a SoTL community of practice across disciplines
5. Dissemination of SoTL outputs through financial support and the ISoTL Press (a dissemination venue to showcase the work of UBC's SoTL community)

### The SoTL Seed Program

This chapter highlights the SoTL Seed Program (<https://isotl.cltl.ubc.ca/services/sotl-seed-program/>), a unique support model that goes beyond providing funding to support faculty-proposed SoTL projects at UBC. The current support model was established in 2015, and since then it has undergone iterative evaluation to fine-tune to meet the needs of our faculty. In 2022, a paper was published that details an evaluation of the program and provides a more fulsome description of the program operations (Moghtader, Briseño-Garzón, Varao-Sousa & Roll, 2022). The goals of this program include:

1. Supporting faculty members in engaging in reflective practices and pedagogical research in various disciplines
2. Increasing faculty members' agency and capacity as independent SoTL researchers
3. Promoting a culture of SoTL at UBC
4. Facilitating student-faculty partnerships on teaching and learning.

At an institutional level, the program functions as a leadership intervention by creating conditions that enable faculty agency, shared responsibility, and scholarly influence beyond individual projects. The ISoTL is allocated \$50,000 annually from the UBC Provost and Vice-President Academic office. Faculty members (academic staff) apply with SoTL project ideas and, once projects are approved, are paired

with graduate students who provide direct support for the work. The majority of the ISoTL's operating funding is allocated to this graduate student support. Our program offers up to 70 hours of expert graduate student support, as well as limited discretionary funds for research (e.g., participant incentives) and dissemination expenses (e.g., SoTL conferences). We hire graduate students based on their competency in research methodologies, background in behavioural sciences and education, and interpersonal and communication skills. Students are further mentored and trained in their roles by staff and peers. Through partnering with faculty on SoTL projects across disciplines, they gain further expertise, expand their own repertoire of methods and epistemologies and are thus known as *SoTL Specialists*. Their support focuses on the research and evaluation aspects of SoTL projects, including scoping research questions, project design, data collection and analysis, and providing a summary of results. On average, the ISoTL employs 10-12 SoTL Specialists at a time. The ISoTL team and SoTL Specialists meet twice a month to share and get feedback on project progress, troubleshoot challenges, and collaboratively review methodological choices. Additionally, these meetings provide an opportunity for the students to engage in professional development activities related to enhancing their SoTL expertise. The team discusses topics such as the use of inclusive language in data collection tools, the use of specific analytical software and methods, the integration of GenAI into our practice, etc. SoTL Specialists typically remain with the team for 2-3 years, many leaving the team when they graduate from their program or move into new positions that help expand their desired skillsets (i.e., student-facing support roles, teaching positions). Annually, we host a professional development session where team alumni share their current role in academia or industry and highlight the importance of their time as a SoTL Specialist.

Entry to the SoTL Seed Program is competitive, with two project intakes per year since 2017. In their application, interested faculty explain the focus of their inquiry and, in connection with the existing literature, indicate its potential contributions to their classroom context and beyond [see endnote 1]. Faculty are prompted to begin conceptualizing a methodological approach and indicate the areas of support they anticipate needing. Adjudication decisions consider potential impact on teaching and learning within the discipline, relevance to the SoTL landscape, and scope/fit of needed support. As of July 2025, the SoTL Seed Program has supported a total of 171 projects. The overall acceptance rate averages approximately 60% per year. The program has supported projects led by faculty from diverse departments, with most accepted applications led by pre-tenure educational leadership faculty [see endnote 2].

A systematic evaluation of our program indicated our partnership model facilitates faculty engagement with SoTL by providing support and expertise from committed and experienced students (Moghtader, Briseño-Garzón, Varao-Sousa, & Roll, 2022).

Working collaboratively with a SoTL Specialist supports faculty members' professional development by enhancing their confidence and agency as SoTL researchers, which is particularly critical and valuable for our educational leadership stream faculty. As one faculty partner stated: *"I am really impressed with the model you have created. For example, it's great that you are not giving me funds and, instead, are mentoring and paying [the SoTL Specialist]. They are learning and getting paid, [and] our team is also learning, from [the SoTL Specialist] and also from each other."*

The SoTL Seed Program, in combination with the ISoTL's host of services and supports (e.g. workshops, resources, opportunities for dissemination and networking), promotes and nurtures student-faculty, faculty-faculty, and student-student collaborations, which contribute to a robust and collegial SoTL culture at our institution.

## **Navigating Challenges and Opportunities**

The success of the SoTL Seed Program is the result of thoughtful program design and operations, iterative evaluation of our activities and decisions, and constant adaptation to institutional culture and evolving needs.

The ISoTL operates with a small ongoing budget that provides salaries to our SoTL Specialists, and its programs and services are managed and administered by three CTLT staff. As a result of having this dedicated staff, it is possible for us to consult with faculty at any point in their journey (from initial proposal consultations to dissemination of outcomes), collect timely feedback from faculty to address potential challenges, facilitate regular workshops, and curate resources. Having a staff team also allows us to hire and mentor graduate students thoughtfully and support our student team to do their jobs well, through regular meetings, project sharing, and professional development opportunities. We also get the privilege of working side-by-side with passionate faculty, staff, and students as they embark on their SoTL journeys. It is fascinating to witness faculty's agency and confidence as SoTL practitioners develop and solidify.

Being in a large, research-intensive institution, we are aware of the disciplinary silos and lack of communication among our faculty. The ISoTL has been a hub for networking and collaboration, peer feedback, and interdisciplinary projects that bring together faculty across disciplines, streams and ranks. We facilitate regular and tactically timed peer-feedback/networking meetings to build community amongst our faculty members.

Our team continuously engages in self-improvement. We assess and revise processes and services based on the needs of the UBC community, to align with the

ISoTL's mandate, and due to financial and institutional realities. For example, the SoTL Seed application form has been revised multiple times with the goal of making it accessible to more faculty, especially SoTL novices, while keeping the projects at the highest scholarly standards. More recently, in response to the challenges of disseminating SoTL work, we launched the ISoTL Press: a low-barrier, peer-reviewed online dissemination venue that invites the UBC community to share their SoTL projects and journeys. The non-anonymized peer-review process also promotes mentoring and support amongst SoTL practitioners at UBC.

### **Thinking of starting your own SoTL Seed Program?**

Over the 10+ years since the SoTL Seed Program was first founded, the leadership team has engaged in formal and informal evaluation of the program. From this evaluation and personal reflection, we have key lessons and practical tips for those interested in developing their own program.

From a SoTL leadership perspective, these lessons highlight how institutional leaders can move beyond funding alone to design ecosystems that support learning, risk-taking, and scholarly growth.

1. Funding alone is not enough. SoTL often requires the use of methodologies and methods outside of one's comfort zone. By pairing faculty with graduate students with behavioural research expertise, they are able to help faculty (disciplinary experts) define their research questions and apply the methods best suited to answer them.
2. Capacity for conducting SoTL is the biggest challenge and also the biggest point of gratitude for the SoTL Seed Program. Offering tangible support in the form of graduate student and staff time and expertise helps offload the difficulty of starting from scratch to learn how to conduct a SoTL project.
3. Build in professional development and networking opportunities. The chance to share project successes and challenges is fundamental to creating collegial support and community. This could be in the form of a community of practice, "show-and-tell" sessions, writing groups, or other events.
4. Patience and self-reflection are key. Even 10+ years after inception, we continue to make changes to the ways we communicate the program to faculty, the application details, and the activities and resources we offer as additional guidance. Systematic and iterative evaluation of your program will help you determine what works best for your faculty members, the graduate students, and the leadership team.

## Final Thoughts

The SoTL Seed Program demonstrates that strategic support can help “faculty members to move beyond disciplinary research boundaries, embrace broader social science methodologies, and collaborate with students, colleagues, and key stakeholders in the field” (Hubball, Pearson, & Clarke, 2013, p. 51). Each year, we see new project leads, new SoTL Specialists, and changes in institutional priorities which guide the projects. This continuously dynamic environment offers ongoing opportunities to learn, grow, and adapt our contributions to UBC’s SoTL culture. We recognize that there is still work to be done to keep propelling an institutional culture shift towards one that values and rewards excellence in teaching. Nonetheless, we hope our support model serves as inspiration to institutional SoTL leaders seeking practical ways to support faculty engagement with reflective practice and pedagogical research.

## Endnotes

[1] Please contact [ctlit.isotl@ubc.ca](mailto:ctlit.isotl@ubc.ca) for a copy of our application form.

[2] At UBC, two tenured faculty streams are available: Research and Educational Leadership (established at UBC in 2010). Those in the Educational Leadership stream allocate approximately 80% of their workload to teaching and educational leadership activities – with the expectation that this work will advance “innovative contributions to curriculum development.” On the other hand, Research stream faculty focus on contributing to “a growing body of productive scholarly activity,” with 40% of their workload allocated to teaching (UBC Faculty Association, 2024).

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Trish Varao-Sousa is an evaluation and research consultant at the University of British Columbia. Her work includes supporting research and evaluation of teaching and learning activities (including SoTL) through consultations, project design and

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Natasha is an evaluation and research consultant at the University of British Columbia. She supports the design, implementation, analysis, and dissemination of teaching and learning research and evaluation projects. She is also part of the Institute for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning leadership team, and helps manage the fantastic team of SoTL Specialists, including professional development support, mentorship, and resource development. She has a PhD in Cognitive Psychology from the University of British Columbia, where she studied decision-making.



# If SoTL is Not Recognised: Strategies for Creating Opportunities

Helga Dorner; Gorana Mistic; and Anna Maria Wach

## Abstract

This chapter explores strategies to overcome barriers to faculty engagement in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) in institutional contexts where SoTL is new or marginalised. We share stories of initiating and leading teaching development programmes, mentoring initiatives, and centres for teaching and learning, and illustrate how moments of deficit can become catalysts for institutional transformation. Through these accounts, we highlight how SoTL leadership emerges from local, often informal, acts of commitment and collaboration; how it reshapes pedagogical practice and the visibility and value of teaching itself. Ultimately, we argue that SoTL leadership is built through trust, relationships, and shared purpose, takes multiple forms, and is deeply contextual.

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The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is often described as a systematic study of teaching and learning that needs to be made public, open to questioning and feedback, and available for others to draw on in their own teaching and research (Shulman, 1998). Still, in practice, SoTL is not always easy to explain. For some colleagues, it is something they may have heard of, but not quite understood. Others wonder and question whether SoTL is ‘real research’; what relevant methodologies are, what a generalisable study looks like, and what constitutes reliable evidence in SoTL. This is a result of how academia signals values and priorities, and how academic success and academic role are perceived.

The reality is that faculty need to navigate multiple roles, such as those of teachers, researchers, mentors, managers, administrators, advisors – and the key challenge lies in the teaching–research nexus which has often been associated with tension and conflicting agendas (Kaasila et al., 2021; McKinley et al., 2021). In many universities, research productivity carries far more weight than teaching quality, and faculty who devote time pursuing inquiry into their teaching or publishing SoTL studies, risk being seen as doing a less relevant or prestigious task – the one unrelated to their disciplinary research. As Kreber (2010) notes, the institutional orientation toward the teaching–research nexus deeply shapes what faculty can do and how they see themselves.

However, SoTL offers a way to bridge this divide. By treating teaching as a practical activity that can be rigorously studied (Boyer 1990), SoTL provides opportunities for integration (Gansemer-Topf, et al., 2022). It allows faculty to study their own teaching in systematic ways, to share insights with colleagues, and to build communities around a shared commitment to student learning. SoTL faculty not only deepen and expand their competencies to foster student learning, but also often initiate developmental activities for their colleagues within the institution. As agents, they can encourage others to take an active role in enhancing teaching and learning (Kreber, 2002; Wach, 2019). One way this agency becomes visible is through communities of practice (CoPs), where faculty committed to scholarly teaching gather to share ideas and collaborate.

But context always matters. The ways in which SoTL becomes established are highly context-dependent. In some institutions it emerges from top-down initiatives, with strategic support and formal recognition. In others it grows from the bottom up, through grassroots communities of faculty who support each other in undervalued and sometimes unsupportive environments. This chapter brings together our own stories of leading and establishing SoTL in different countries and institutional contexts. Each of us has faced challenges such as lack of understanding of what SoTL is, limited funding, a lack of strategic vision, or priority of research over teaching. Despite these obstacles, we found ways to gather people, to build communities, to show the relevance of SoTL in contexts where it was new, misunderstood, or marginalised. By reflecting on our SoTL journeys, we show how SoTL leadership takes shape on the ground and highlight how SoTL contributes to institutional learning: it is not only about changing how we teach but also changing the visibility of teaching itself. These experiences highlight how SoTL leadership can be enacted through programme design, mentoring, and community-building, even in the absence of formal recognition.

### **Strategies for overcoming institutional barriers: Planting the seeds of faculty communities invested in teaching**

We now turn to strategies that evolved over time for overcoming barriers to faculty engagement in SoTL in particular institutional contexts. All of this happens in systems where there is no legal obligation for teaching certificates, meaning that expectations for faculty qualification are left to individual universities to decide. At the same time, faculty are expected to continually develop their skills, with performance evaluated across teaching, management, and research. The result is a varied landscape shaped by local policies and priorities, marked by a common reality: the absence of formal institutional obligation to support or recognise teaching development. We bring stories of initiating and leading the foundation of teaching development programmes, mentoring programmes and centres for teaching

and learning in different contexts, and turning what may be described as moments of deficit into opportunities for change.

### Preparation for teaching: a teaching excellence programme for doctoral students – Helga and Gorana’s story

In institutional contexts where SoTL is not yet firmly embedded, creating structured opportunities for faculty to engage in reflective and evidence-informed teaching is rarely straightforward. At the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest, we grappled with this challenge and began experimenting with ways to foster SoTL through academic development initiatives. One of our earliest efforts was to design a programme that would introduce pedagogical training to doctoral students, offering them opportunities to engage with SoTL at the very beginning of their academic careers. This became the CEU Centre for Teaching and Learning’s Programme for Excellence in Teaching in Higher Education, widely known as the Teaching Certificate Programme.

During the first decade of the Programme, CEU was a small but highly international, research intense, graduate-only institution. Because of the absence of large undergraduate cohorts, doctoral students had very limited teaching opportunities – usually just two or three mentored sessions as teaching assistants in courses led by faculty. It was precisely this constraint, combined with doctoral students’ strong interest in developing their pedagogical skills, that led us to launch the Teaching Certificate Programme in 2011. While the initiative arose from what might be perceived as a deficit context, it soon became an exemplar in the region and beyond (Dorner & Kumar, 2022; Mistic, Rymarenko & Dorner, 2021).

In shaping the Programme, we built it around three pedagogical principles that, in our experience, have proven essential for integrating SoTL into teaching practice: peer teaching as a bridge between theory and practice, design for learning with an emphasis on course and assessment design, and support for becoming a reflective teacher who is aware of the research underpinning their practice (Mistic, Rymarenko & Dorner, 2021). We operationalised these principles through collaborative course and syllabus design, co-teaching, peer observation, and scaffolded reflective assignments such as letters to future selves and teaching philosophy statements. The capstone project for the Programme was the creation of an online teaching portfolio, which provided a tangible product of students’ learning (Dorner & Renc-Roe, 2016).

As academic developers, we provided leadership and structure for the Programme, but what struck us most was its reciprocal nature and learning that emerged in practice between teaching assistants and faculty. While faculty brought deep

disciplinary knowledge, the doctoral students, through their pedagogical training, often developed sharper insights into learning theories and instructional design. This created a genuine two-way exchange: faculty began integrating new strategies into their teaching, and doctoral students grew more confident and prepared for their future academic careers.

Some of the most powerful moments of cross-fertilisation came through practices we deliberately designed to open up dialogue between doctoral students and faculty. Poster sessions, for example, allowed doctoral students to present their innovative session designs, developed during the Programme, to the broader academic community. These events sparked vibrant conversations and gave faculty a window into new pedagogical approaches. Likewise, when doctoral students implemented innovative strategies in graduate-level courses, faculty observing them could witness these ideas in action. Since doctoral students always taught alongside faculty rather than independently, the classroom itself became a shared space for experimenting, observing, and rethinking teaching practice.

Looking back, we see how the Programme created not only a pathway for doctoral students to develop as reflective teachers but also a community where faculty and students could learn from one another. In this sense, the Programme became a lived example of how SoTL can be cultivated in contexts that might initially appear to limit pedagogical opportunity, and how distributed leadership in teaching and learning can emerge through genuine collaboration.

#### Launching the CEU CTL Global Teaching Fellowship Online Mentoring Programme

When we first began designing the CEU CTL Global Teaching Fellowship Online Mentoring Programme (Online Mentoring Programme for GTFs), our intention was to extend CEU's commitment to reflective, research-informed teaching beyond its own classrooms. We developed the Online Mentoring Programme for GTFs to support Global Teaching Fellows -novice faculty who teach at partner universities across the world. Long before the pandemic made online interaction a necessity, we experimented with online mentoring as a means to connect across geographical, cultural, and institutional boundaries. Our goal was to create a personalised, developmental mentoring process that could accompany fellows as they navigated new and often very different academic environments: from Bangladesh to Brazil or Kyrgyzstan. Working entirely online, we learned that mentoring can transcend physical distance when grounded in trust, authenticity, and reflection. Establishing an online mentoring model in this way was both a bold institutional experiment and a response to the growing need for flexible, context-sensitive academic development. Nevertheless, the experience showed us that online mentoring, when intentionally designed, can cultivate agency, reflective teaching, and cross-cultural understanding – while also modelling how universities can build faculty

communities of practice that are boundaryless and globally connected (Dorner, Mistic, & Rymarenko, 2020).

Rather than imposing models of teaching from CEU, we invited fellows to adapt their practices to local contexts through dialogue and inquiry, which reflected SoTL principles. Fellows nevertheless completed the CEU Centre for Teaching and Learning's Programme for Excellence in Teaching in Higher Education, which became the natural entry point into the Global Teaching Fellowship, preparing candidates to think critically about teaching and learning before embarking on their international placements. In this way, mentoring did not begin once Fellows were abroad, it was integrated into a longer developmental trajectory that connected initial training, guided teaching practice, and reflective inquiry.

This initial preparation period, which we considered the first phase of the mentoring process, supported Fellows in developing course designs and teaching strategies tailored to their host institutions. This involved individual consultations—online or in person—with CTL mentors to adapt learning goals, assessment approaches, and classroom activities to new contexts. The second phase focused on ongoing mentoring and collaborative professional practice during the fellowship. Through monthly online meetings, we worked with Fellows to discuss teaching challenges, share classroom experiences, and co-develop strategies for active learning, assessment, and course redesign. These sessions often involved mentors from host institutions, forming a triadic relationship that encouraged mutual learning across institutional boundaries. The third phase emphasized reflection and documentation. We guided Fellows in capturing their teaching experiences and professional growth through structured reflections and teaching portfolios that included syllabi, student feedback, and analyses of specific teaching moments. Upon their return to CEU, Fellows shared their insights with future cohorts, completing a cycle of mentorship that continually renewed itself.

In designing and institutionalising this programme, we deliberately moved away from hierarchical models of academic supervision toward a coaching-oriented, collaborative approach. Rather than prescribing solutions, our role as mentors has been to create the structure, guidance, and psychological safety that enable Fellows to experiment, adapt, and grow as teachers. This leadership model – distributed, dialogic, and reflective – has allowed this Online Mentoring Programme to evolve into an international community of practice. It continues to demonstrate that innovation in mentoring is not only about technology or delivery mode but about fostering agency, trust, and cross-cultural understanding in the service of meaningful teaching and learning. In this way, mentoring functioned not only as academic support, but as a form of distributed SoTL leadership that cultivated agency across institutional and national boundaries.

## Mentoring in the EDUflow faculty fellowship programme – Helga’s story

The idea of faculty as change agents has been central to my work at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Hungary. When the institutional context began to open more fully to grassroots initiatives in teaching and learning, together with staff from the Office of Academic Development and Talent Support, we saw an opportunity to build on existing momentum and design a programme that would not only support individual faculty but also strengthen the university’s organizational capacity. Drawing on my experiences from CEU and principles of organizational development, we wanted to create a structure that empowered faculty to act as change agents – brokers of ideas and practices (Kensington-Miller et al., 2025) – while also embedding SoTL more firmly across the institution.

This vision took shape in 2024 with the launch of EDUflow, a two-semester programme aimed at enhancing pedagogical expertise across all faculties. We invited applications from colleagues across the university, and the selected participants formed a cross-faculty cohort. From the outset, we imagined them as more than learners: they were potential leaders, positioned to informally carry forward and share repertoires of good teaching within their local contexts.

The programme itself combined three curricular elements. First, online, self-paced modules introduced foundational topics such as course design, interactive lecturing, project- and group-based learning, and digital content creation. Second, in-person workshops encouraged deeper reflection on themes that are often less visible yet equally important, such as academic identity, integrating student feedback, and resilience. Finally, a structured mentoring component brought these strands together by connecting pedagogical knowledge with disciplinary expertise and institutional learning. The programme culminated in three tangible outcomes: the creation of an innovative course design, a draft teaching portfolio, and a proposal for a pedagogical inquiry project; the latter could be presented at the university’s annual teaching and learning conference.

Of these elements, mentoring proved particularly transformative. By design, it created a community of practice that brought together senior mentors – experienced both as university teachers and as academic developers, many with expertise in digital learning – with participants eager to grow in their teaching. Rather than a top-down model of guidance, mentoring became a reciprocal space of co-learning. Mentors and participants formed alliances that stretched across faculties, strengthening the university’s capacity to enhance teaching and learning.

What had been emerging was a model of leadership that was horizontal, distributed, and embedded in practice. Participants not only refined their own teaching repertoires but also began sharing ideas within their faculties, thereby shaping a

wider culture of pedagogical innovation. Currently, the second cohort is making its way through the programme, and in my role as lead mentor I have come to see EDUflow as far more than a structured initiative. It has grown into a mechanism for cultivating SoTL engagement at ELTE, strengthening institutional resilience, and nurturing a community in which leadership in teaching is shared and collectively enacted.

### Higher Education Pedagogy Courses and Certificate Programme for Faculty – Anna’s story

As discussed above, courses or certificate programmes in teaching and learning in higher education offer more than just training. In the context of faculty, they create spaces where faculty can step back from the daily routines of research and teaching and begin to see their work through a new lens. Within these programmes, faculty engage with evidence-based strategies for teaching and learning, while also being encouraged to reflect critically on their own practices – often for the first time. In doing so, they begin to see how theory and research can inform what happens in their classrooms, gradually promoting a culture of continuous improvement (Pleschová & McAlpine, 2016).

In such structured and formal encounters, faculty develop a sound theoretical base as well as a solid methodological grounding in classroom-based research, which are prerequisites of meaningful SoTL inquiry. On the one hand, such programmes can provide an entry into the world of pedagogy, equipping faculty with the language, frameworks, and practical strategies for teaching and related research. On the other hand, they can spark deeper journeys of professional growth, leading some to create their own grassroots initiatives or contribute to building SoTL communities within their institutions. In this way, the programmes do more than improve individual teaching – contribute to making teaching itself more visible.

With this in mind, the first step in programme development at the Poznań University of Economics and Business (PUEB) was the pedagogical course, which I began coordinating in 2011. I redesigned its curriculum by drawing on Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon models, encouraging participants to prepare teaching portfolios and to learn from one another through peer discussions. This modest beginning grew into something larger. The success of the course paved the way for the DNA Programme – Academic Teacher Development, implemented in 2014/2015 and 2016/2017 through participatory budgeting. Workshops with national and international experts broadened the scope of teaching development far beyond what I had initially envisioned, and these collective efforts were later recognised with the Rector’s Prize. This programme has now been continuously offered since 2011 for early-career faculty with up to five years of professional experience (100 hours).

Since 2022, it has also been available to faculty with more extensive teaching experience who have not previously completed certified training in teaching and learning in higher education. For all positions, both on the research-and-teaching track and the teaching-only track, documented pedagogical training is required. Thus, completion of the training has become an essential criterion for career advancement to the positions of assistant professor, associate professor, or full professor. [see endnote 1]

The formal requirement to complete pedagogical training was met with a mixed response. At first, many faculty saw it simply as an obligation, something they had to do. However, as they moved through the course, most began to recognise its real value – in strengthening their teaching skills and in giving them new ways to support student learning. Alongside the mandatory course, the Academic Teaching and Learning Centre also offered shorter, thematic workshops, repeated regularly so that faculty could continue building their skills step by step. Taken together, this created a comprehensive approach that not only supported continuous development but also encouraged faculty to see professional growth in teaching as both necessary and meaningful.

Faculty have come to recognise that designing and delivering courses is about far more than technical skills or tools. Through training, they began to see that higher education pedagogy is grounded in educational research and theory, which helps them better understand and articulate their own teaching practices. At PUEB, many faculty now actively engage in SoTL: they lead workshops and training sessions, and they contribute to the wider academic discourse on teaching and learning through publications. This growing involvement in SoTL does more than strengthen individual competencies; it is gradually reshaping the culture of teaching at the university.

I see my role here as both leader and facilitator. By redesigning the course, coordinating its growth, and advocating for its institutional importance, I helped to create structures in which faculty could develop as scholarly teachers – and build their own SoTL communities and act as change agents. My work as an academic developer was not only to provide training but also to shape institutional culture. While Polish universities remain at an early stage of adopting SoTL, I am convinced that its systematic development requires sustained commitment, adequate resources, and supportive policies. The journey that began as a small initiative has gradually evolved into a collective endeavour, with growing momentum and a community of dedicated colleagues.

Consultations and a developmental model of teaching observation

Sometimes extraordinary events, even those that are generally disruptive and

unwelcome, can create unexpected opportunities for change. The pandemic, which abruptly moved all classes online, sparked a surge of interest in more individualised support for faculty. In response, the Professional Competency Development Unit introduced new opportunities for consultation – spaces to share ideas, discuss challenges, and explore both technical and methodological solutions to strengthen student engagement. Nowadays, in the Academic Teaching and Learning Centre there are six academic developers with whom faculty can speak about various teaching and learning issues they face, such as introducing a new teaching method, grading, teaching online, and similar.

Alongside these consultations, we offered a developmental model of teaching observation (Gosling, 2002). In Poland, classroom observations are most often evaluative, conducted by a supervisor. By contrast, the developmental model is designed to identify strengths and challenges in teaching practices and to create a tailored plan for growth. These observations are voluntary, confidential, and non-directive, conducted by academic developers using a coaching approach. Through questions and guided reflection, faculty are encouraged to think more deeply about their teaching practices and skills, a process that promotes both self-awareness and growth.

When I took on the task of institutionalising a new approach to class observations, my aim was to break with the long-standing habit of using them as corrective measures. Instead, I introduced a coaching-based model that emphasized dialogue, reflection, and mutual learning. This shift – initially developed during the pandemic and sustained afterwards – invited faculty to see observations not as evaluations but as opportunities for professional growth. My role became one of creating the structure, guidance, and space for colleagues to experiment, reflect, and refine their teaching. By fostering curiosity rather than correction, this approach has helped build confidence, encouraged self-awareness, and contributed to a broader cultural shift in which class observation serves as a shared, developmental practice rather than a judgmental one.

### **Centres for Teaching and Learning as Catalysts for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) – Our shared story**

When we look at how academic development has evolved globally, it's clear that in many universities, supporting and inquiring into teaching has long been institutionalized. Centres for teaching enhancement – under names like *Center for Teaching Excellence*, *Center for Teaching and Learning*, or *Center for Academic Development*—have been part of the academic landscape for decades. In places such as the UK, Ireland, the US, Australia, New Zealand, and across Scandinavia and Western Europe, these centres provide systematic, university-wide support

for improving teaching and learning. Their role goes beyond workshops or consultations; they help build a shared culture where teaching is valued, studied, and continuously developed. For those of us working in Central and Eastern Europe, where such traditions are newer, these models offered both inspiration and a reminder that strong institutional support for teaching doesn't just improve classroom practice – it shapes how a university understands learning itself.

The establishment of the Academic Teaching and Learning Centre at the Poznań University of Economics and Business (PUEB) was a long journey, even though the professionalisation of university teaching competencies can be traced back as far as the 1970s. Efforts to establish a Center for Academic Pedagogy began in 2015 but initially failed to gain traction. However, in 2020, through the combined efforts of many individuals and the university's accreditation goals, the Professional Competency Development Team was established. The process began with the introduction of a pedagogical training course and was further strengthened when funding from the European Union became available for a range of programmes aimed at enhancing teaching competencies, including the project *Enhancing the Teaching Competencies of University Teachers at the Poznań University of Economics and Business* (2017–2019). This project enabled 220 academic staff to strengthen their pedagogical knowledge and teaching skills through a combination of local and international trainings. Although these programmes substantially expanded professional development opportunities, they remained fragmented. Still, building on this, the Professional Competency Development Team was established in 2020 through the joint efforts of numerous stakeholders and in line with the University's accreditation objectives. Over the years, through external funding from various grants and projects, we have continued to expand our training offerings, support participation in national conferences, and provide developmental classroom observations and methodological consultations. After five years of further grassroots initiatives, in 2025 this team was transformed into the Academic Teaching and Learning Centre. The newly created Centre consists of the E-Learning Team, the Teaching Competency Development Team (composed of academic developers), and the Administrative Team. As a new organisational unit of the University, the Centre has been established to support the enhancement of teaching and learning processes, the professionalisation and continuous development of teaching competencies among academic staff, as well as the promotion and facilitation of the implementation of innovations in teaching.

Similarly, over time, we have watched the CEU Center for Teaching and Learning (CEU CTL) grow from a modest initiative into a sustained force for pedagogical innovation – driven by both vision and lived practice. Our journey began with the Teaching Certificate Programme for doctoral students, which provided a structured entry point into reflective teaching through foundations in pedagogy, co-teaching, peer observation, and the creation of online teaching portfolios. As we deepened

that work, we introduced the Online Mentoring Programme for the CEU Global Teaching Fellows, enabling doctoral candidates and early career faculty to teach in global partner institutions while receiving sustained, personalised support from us, mentors in teaching and learning. This model of support predated the pandemic and anticipated a more distributed, digitally mediated model of academic development.

Alongside these doctoral student-focused efforts, we established supports for faculty across CEU. We instituted teaching observation and feedback protocols that emphasized coaching and reflection instead of evaluation, creating a culture in which improvement is collective and dialogic. We also launched Teaching Development Grants, where faculty, often together with doctoral students and teaching assistants, could pilot inquiry-based teaching projects, share results, and begin to frame their work in SoTL terms. To cultivate community and cross-pollination, we organised events such as *Wine, Cheese, and Conversation*, inviting external academic developers and SoTL scholars to engage with our faculty in informal dialogue. The launch of the institutional CEU Teaching Excellence Award and the European Award for Excellence in Teaching in the Social Sciences and Humanities further elevated visibility for teaching excellence within and beyond CEU.

Importantly, we did not restrict our work to local initiatives. We committed ourselves to researching our own practices and engaging actively in the international community of scholars in academic development, teaching and learning, and SoTL. In doing so, the CEU CTL based in Budapest did not simply support pedagogical work – it positioned itself as a hub of innovation, distributed leadership, and ongoing inquiry into what meaningful teaching and academic citizenship can look like across borders.

### **Creating multidisciplinary alliances: institutional and national conferences and organizations – Our shared story**

In our experience, once courses and programmes in teaching and learning begin to spread the principles of scholarly teaching, the next step is to build alliances that cross disciplinary and institutional boundaries. Conferences and professional networks are crucial here. They allow faculty to connect, showcase innovations, and engage in evidence-informed conversations about teaching that often extend beyond local dynamics. Such encounters validate teaching-focused scholarship, foster communities of practice, and help shape a culture in which teaching is valued alongside research (Webb & Tierney, 2019).

In Poland, we have seen how a growing network of colleagues committed to teaching has been strengthened by conferences such as *Ars Docendi* (Jagiellonian

University), Ideatorium (Gdańsk University of Technology), and VIVA (University of Gdańsk). Events focused on digital learning further attract academic teachers eager to innovate. Many participants become ambassadors of scholarly teaching in their institutions, and some take on roles as academic developers, advancing SoTL nationally. Local initiatives, such as Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Days and the new eduSPACE event in Poznań (first edition in 2025), reinforce this trend and demonstrate how recognition, sharing, and collaboration can build momentum.

In Hungary, we too have witnessed the growth of institutional and inter-institutional platforms. At ELTE, the annual internal Teaching and Learning Conference, organized since 2022, provides space for faculty to present evidence-informed innovations and engage with peers. The Higher Education Pedagogy Conference at ELTE's Faculty of Education and Psychology combines a peer-reviewed academic track with professional development workshops, and serves as a national platform for interested colleagues. Most recently, the establishment of the Higher Education Pedagogy Subcommittee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2023 and the Hungarian Academic Developers' Forum in 2024 marked a milestone, signalling national recognition of scholarly teaching.

Across both contexts, we see how such initiatives gradually also consolidate SoTL communities – communities that not only support academic development but also create the conditions for organisational learning, institutional resilience, and distributed leadership in teaching and learning.

### **Conclusion: Leading SoTL from the Margins**

Looking back at our different journeys, we recognise that supporting SoTL in environments where teaching is undervalued requires persistence, creativity, and a belief that meaningful change often begins in small, local acts of leadership. In contexts where research prestige dominates and formal recognition for teaching is scarce, SoTL becomes a quiet but powerful form of agency. We learned that the most effective way to foster SoTL is not through mandates or top-down reform, but through building trust, relationships, and structures that allow colleagues to engage with teaching as inquiry.

Developing pedagogical training, teaching development programmes that introduce SoTL early, creating mentoring systems that bridge institutions and cultures, offering grants that encourage collaborative experimentation, and establishing spaces—formal or informal—for conversation and reflection all help to create conditions where teaching begins to matter. Through such efforts, we can show that SoTL is not separate from research but an extension of scholarly curiosity into

our own classrooms. Academic developers play a crucial role here: by modelling reflective practice, facilitating peer exchange, and creating psychologically safe spaces for experimentation, we make it possible for others to see teaching as both intellectually rigorous and institutionally significant.

Our experiences across Hungary and Poland have shown that even in research-intensive or policy-constrained environments, SoTL can thrive when we frame it as a collective process of learning and leadership. Supporting SoTL means cultivating networks, celebrating small wins, and connecting local practice with global conversations. Above all, it means keeping the focus on learning – our students’ and our own – and demonstrating, through our actions, that good teaching is not a distraction from scholarship but one of its most vital expressions.

What emerges from these experiences is that leadership in teaching and learning takes many forms, always shaped by context and opportunity. It can be distributed and collectively enacted; it can be simultaneously facilitative, embedded, and transformative. Rather than directing or prescribing, it creates structures, guidance, and space for faculty to experiment, reflect, and adjust their teaching approaches. Other times it takes shape in advocating for institutional support, or helping faculty develop as scholarly teachers, to build their own SoTL communities, and act as change agents. Whether horizontal, distributed, or embedded in practice, effective SoTL leadership responds to opportunities, encourages collaboration, and nurtures a culture of shared responsibility. As a result, across contexts, SoTL increases the visibility of teaching. Still, lasting change requires strong institutional leadership and genuine buy-in to see the shift in how teaching is more valued – on its journey to be equally valued as research.

## Endnotes

[1] Ordinance No. 87/2022 of the Rector of the Poznań University of Economics and Business, dated December 19, 2022, on the launch of the PUEB Pedagogical Course, 2022

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# SoTL Leadership in an International Context

In the previous section, we explored how institutional cultures shape the possibilities for SoTL leadership, highlighting how individuals and groups navigate, influence, and contribute to change within their own organisational contexts. While these contexts are locally grounded, they are also connected to broader academic and scholarly landscapes that extend beyond institutional and national boundaries.

This section extends that perspective by focusing on SoTL leadership in an international context. If earlier sections addressed questions of identity, relationships, and institutional conditions—“*Who am I becoming?*”, “*With whom do I work?*”, and “*Within what structures does this work take place?*”—this section asks: “*How does SoTL leadership unfold across diverse cultural, linguistic, and academic contexts?*”

Across the chapters, SoTL is presented as both locally situated and globally connected. Contributors show how teaching and learning practices are shaped by specific cultural and institutional contexts, while also being part of an international scholarly conversation. This creates both opportunities and tensions: ideas, frameworks, and practices do not always transfer easily across contexts, and what counts as SoTL—or as leadership—may differ significantly between regions and traditions.

The chapters approach these dynamics from complementary perspectives. Some examine the challenges of working across boundaries, including differences in language, access, recognition, and academic norms. Others highlight the possibilities that emerge through international collaboration, such as the sharing of diverse perspectives, the development of more inclusive forms of scholarship, and the creation of networks that extend beyond national or disciplinary borders.

While these contributions share a focus on global engagement, they differ in how they position leadership within this space. Some emphasise navigation and translation, illustrating how SoTL leaders interpret, adapt, and recontextualise ideas across settings. Others focus on connection and collaboration, showing how international partnerships can generate new forms of knowledge, practice, and scholarly community. Together, these perspectives highlight that SoTL leadership in

an international context involves both engaging with difference and working across it.

Taken together, the chapters demonstrate that international SoTL leadership is not simply about extending local practices to a wider audience, but about engaging critically and constructively with diversity. It requires sensitivity to context, openness to multiple ways of knowing, and a willingness to question assumptions about teaching, learning, and scholarship. In this way, the relational and institutional dimensions explored in earlier sections are extended into a broader global landscape, where leadership involves connecting perspectives across boundaries and contributing to shared learning.

This section invites you to reflect on your own position within the global SoTL landscape: the contexts you are part of, the perspectives you bring, and the opportunities you have to engage with others across boundaries. It also encourages you to consider how international engagement might inform and enrich your own SoTL leadership practice.

## Case Study: The Impact of Contextual and Institutional Difference on SoTL Collaboration

Gert Young

### Introduction to SoTL in the South African context

In 2025, the Department of Higher Education reported that South Africa had 26 public universities, 131 registered private higher education institutions, 50 technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges, 149 registered private colleges, and nine community education and training colleges (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2025, p. 2).

This diversity can also be understood in other ways. As far as universities are concerned, Essop (2020), for example, distinguished between Research Intensive Universities, Historically Black Universities, Universities of Technology, Distance Universities and Other Universities. Regardless of how we categorise South African universities, these distinctions reflect differences in institutional purpose as well as historical legacy. For example, staff at different universities have access to very different levels of resources. There are also significant differences in the students attracted by these institutions, with many top-performing school-leavers gravitating towards traditional research-intensive universities. The differences often overlap with South Africa's historic distinction between White and Black universities.

In this diverse context, it is, I think, natural to find different ways of thinking about the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). In South Africa, SoTL does not develop in a neutral space; it is shaped by national history, inequality, and ongoing debates about knowledge, power, transformation and immediate contextual needs. In a recent ISSOTL blog post, South African colleagues (Cupido, et al., 2023) made at least two arguments about SoTL in South Africa. First, our country's higher education sector has a history of deep engagement with SoTL. At the same time though, significant questions about SoTL remain unanswered in South Africa. These questions concern the meaning of the concept and the ways national and institutional contexts shape its understanding and application. In the inaugural editorial of *SoTL in the South*, Leibowitz (2017) argues that more work is needed to develop a shared understanding of SoTL in the global South and to challenge the conceptual hegemony of the global North in higher education practice. It is against this backdrop of national transformation and global North–South tensions that I reflect on my experience of cross-institutional SoTL collaboration in South Africa.

## Cross-institutional SoTL collaboration in South Africa

The biggest challenge I experienced in cross-institutional SoTL collaboration is the extent to which different national and institutional realities impact how people think about what SoTL is and why we engage in it. In terms of the former (how we think about SoTL), the conceptual diversity that characterizes SoTL in general has been acknowledged (Gansemer-Topf, McCloud & Braxton 2024; Mckinney 2013) and holds true for my context (Vorster 2020). In my experience there seems to be agreement that we need conceptual clarity (Leibowitz 2017). But the decisions we make about how to define and apply SoTL differ across institutions. In other words, we clarify the concept in ways that help address concrete challenges in a specific context.

And this brings me to the second way in which SoTL differences manifest – the factors that motivate us to engage in it. While there is general agreement that SoTL aims to enhance teaching and learning, this shared goal carries different nuances across institutions. Geertsema (2016) has explored some of these. Even within my institution I find expression of these nuances in at least three ways (to varying degrees). Some see SoTL as a form of professional development and link professional development to enhanced teaching and learning. Others see SoTL as an extension of teaching practice and thus see SoTL as a way of experimenting with teaching. Finally, there are those who see SoTL as a ‘simpler’ form of research and thus either discount it or employ it to satisfy the ever-increasing pressures for research outputs.

I became acutely aware of the impact of these conceptual and motivational differences when I joined colleagues from five other institutions to compare our teaching and learning policies. Our comparison showed that our institutions have different concerns regarding student success and, as a result, different SoTL goals and needs. The different concerns arise from various complex factors. These include differences in institutional organization, institutional culture and institutional history.

The institution I have been part of for more than 20 years describes itself as a research-intensive university and, as is the case with other South African universities that share this description, is historically privileged. In practice, this means the institution attracts some of the strongest secondary school performers in the country, as well as students with significant social capital—an important factor in student success (Pincine, 2020). Compared to many other institutions, it also has access to substantial teaching and learning resources. In short, this means that the institution remains among the top-performing institutions in the country in terms of student success. Some co-participants in this project were from institutions that are very different to mine in many respects. In comparing our teaching and learning

policies we found that for them student success often means improved performance while for us, given that we have some of the highest retention and graduation rates in the country, student success often means improved graduate attributes and holistic development. Where student performance is part of our thinking, it relates more to closing the performance gap between students of different backgrounds. As such SoTL for us is a strategy to enhance our teaching staff's ability to facilitate such achievement while for some of my colleagues in this project SoTL is a strategy to improve student performance. This distinction between SoTL as a professional development strategy and a student performance strategy has been explored by Geertsema (2016).

Engaging with the formulation of our different teaching and learning policies, we also found that SoTL for many academics in my institution is a way of developing a well-rounded career, something that is important in the pursuit of a career advancement. For my colleagues from the other institutions, SoTL is often a way of enhancing research outputs. As some of them work in institutions where staff have access to fewer research opportunities and resources, they sometimes turn to SoTL as an 'easy' way of producing more publications. Their goal is probably the same as the goals of staff in my institution – career advancement. But because of the constraints they encounter, they often need to find other ways of achieving their goals.

Finally, we found that most institutions frame SoTL in their teaching and learning policies primarily from the perspective of teachers, rather than academic or educational developers. My institution was the exception. While I only have anecdotal evidence for this, it does suggest to me that academic/educational development is differently positioned and has a different status in my institution. As such the relationships within which SoTL collaboration plays out in my institution can be different to those in the institutions of my colleagues. In my institution we need to think about the role of the academic/educational developer in SoTL while for my colleagues there is less of a focus on the collaborative relationship and more on the SoTL practices.

This experience illustrates that SoTL leadership cannot be separated from national context. What counts as “student success,” “professional development,” or even “research” is shaped by institutional history and resource distribution. International collaboration therefore requires not only shared goals, but shared understanding of context.

This reflection is based on only one collaborative experience, and the reality is likely far more complex. But reflecting on this collaboration highlighted for me some things that we need to be clear on when engaging in cross institutional SoTL collaboration. To me these are best expressed as a series of questions that we need to

answer before engaging in actual projects. They are: What, formally, is the purpose of SoTL in our institutions? What place does SoTL have in the culture of our institutions? What needs do we attempt to address with SoTL in our institutions?

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## SoTL, the Local, and the Global

Johan Geertsema

### Abstract

This theoretical chapter unpacks some of the complexities of SoTL in relation to leadership—both leadership *of* SoTL (leading SoTL initiatives) and leadership *through* SoTL (supporting and influencing others). These fundamentally involve a set of tensions between the local and the global, and thus issues pertaining to context. SoTL work, as a form of practitioner research, is firmly rooted in highly contextualized local inquiries by academics into their teaching and their students' learning, which raises questions of knowledge, expertise, rigour, and generalizability. On an institutional level, these complexities require careful strategic positioning of SoTL by leaders. One important question concerns how SoTL should be positioned institutionally. Should its purpose be to produce groundbreaking knowledge with the potential to change higher education through global sharing in the form of publications in prestigious journals? Or might its influence be positioned more locally, in relation to the practice of the academics engaging in SoTL work, their students, and their colleagues? Are these two ways of positioning mutually exclusive? On an epistemic level, for those of us located outside the historical mainstream of SoTL there are additional geopolitical dimensions to consider, given the origins of SoTL in North America and the location of its centre of gravity in the Global North. At the same time, the different perspectives brought about by an orientation toward the Global South can be beneficial for rethinking SoTL practice more broadly, by focusing on issues of equity, epistemic access, and student success.

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My point of departure in this chapter is that the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning—understood at the most basic level as inquiry by university teachers into their teaching that they share publicly (e.g. Chick, Felten, & Mårtensson, 2026)—has great potential for making a difference to students, universities, and society. If it is true that SoTL improves the quality of teaching, the professional development of teachers, and the recognition and appreciation of education (Meijerman et al., 2023), then this presents a strong rationale for university teachers to engage in it, but universities also need to provide guidance and support for teachers who wish to do so. [see endnote 1] This is because engaging in SoTL can be very challenging: while “[the] practice, use, and growth of SoTL is important

because of its potential to effect change within and beyond higher education” (Scharff et al., 2023, p. 16), university teachers, particularly when working in a research-intensive environment, can find it hard to make the transition towards the educational practice of SoTL (Meijerman et al., 2023). And equally, fostering a culture of collegiality in which SoTL thrives can be very challenging too: it is important to acknowledge that SoTL can be a “hard sell” (Boshier, 2009), given that in higher education teaching has for a long time been, and still is very often, considered a private matter (Shulman, 1993; Mårtensson, 2023; Mårtensson & Geertsema, forthcoming 2027).

Dealing with these challenges has certainly been hard in the specific context within which I work: that of a prestigious research-intensive university in Singapore, a city-state very much plugged into global flows (e.g. Yeoh & Chang, 2001), though located outside of the mainstream of SoTL (e.g. Chng & Looker, 2013). In this chapter I therefore consider how SoTL, as practice-based inquiry—that is, inquiry by university teachers into teaching and learning that they then make public—involves educational change; what aspects of context are important to consider when supporting university teachers in this work; and how important leadership is for such support. A key insight from existing scholarship is that “sustainable development of teaching and curricula depends not only on individual teachers or groups of teachers but also on *leadership*; a leadership that engages with, supports, and coordinates development in local collegial contexts” (Mårtensson & Roxå, 2016, p. 248; my emphasis). Such engagement is important at the local, departmental level of the university, positioned between university management and individual academics (Simmons, 2016; Simmons & Taylor, 2019; Simmons, 2020), as this ‘meso-level’ is where the leaders are located with whom individual university teachers interact concerning their teaching.

To make this argument, I will start by looking more closely at some of the key challenges of engaging in—and supporting—SoTL. I will then consider the complex interrelationship between *context*, *higher education*, and *change*, in particular the importance of the department as the locus of academic work. Finally, I will move to a closer consideration of *educational leadership in higher education* and how it has been defined in the literature in order to distinguish between leadership *of* and *through* SoTL. Where possible I will contextualize the points, I make with reference to my own location and what we can learn from perspectives from the Global South.

### **Challenges of engaging in and supporting SoTL**

In part, SoTL can be a ‘hard sell’ because it requires that as university teachers we ask questions about our teaching, something we are not used to in academic culture. Having a problem or question is the starting point for any inquiry, and university

teachers constantly pose research questions when it comes to their own respective disciplines. But when it comes to teaching those disciplines and interdisciplines, asking questions or identifying problems can seem like an accusation (Bass, 1999). This situation arises because of what Lee Shulman (1993) termed ‘pedagogical solitude’: the culture in higher education of treating teaching as private, while research is by definition something public that we share with a research community grounded in the discipline (Geertsema, forthcoming 2027). Even though both SoTL as inquiry into teaching and research as inquiry into the discipline involve asking questions, engaging in SoTL can therefore be experienced as being very different to engaging in (disciplinary) research. Another reason why SoTL can be a hard sell is that it involves a research approach to teaching, so there is ambiguity whether it counts as research or as teaching (Cruz et al., 2024). It can further be hard for academics to engage in SoTL as they are experts in their discipline, not the discipline of education (Geertsema, 2016) and there are long-standing controversies relating to how, and even whether, SoTL differs from educational research (Larsson et al., 2020).

Many authors have identified multiple challenges for the transition towards SoTL, ranging from university teachers’ location within discipline-based research paradigms to lack of institutional recognition for this work. Webb and Tierney (2020), reporting on two studies in different contexts, found several threshold concepts that constitute barriers in engaging in SoTL and noted such foundational issues as the language and discourse of SoTL, as well as the need for recognition of teaching as a “public, researchable act” (2020, p.618). They identify several threshold concepts that constitute barriers to engagement in SoTL:

- Scholarship as a threshold concept. Reading and producing scholarship in a field other than one’s own is hard—in this case, that new field would be that of inquiring into teaching and learning one’s discipline, rather than researching that discipline—particularly if the research methodology, methods, data collection, analysis, and what is accepted as evidence are different and new.
- Novice identity in SoTL. Even though one already has deep knowledge and extensive experience in one’s own discipline, it can be very hard to be an expert in one’s discipline, while being a novice in SoTL work.
- Developing a new scholarly identity. Forming a new identity is challenging and university teachers engaging in SoTL need support epistemologically, in relation to engaging with educational theory and pedagogic literature, as well as scholarship relating to curriculum and assessment.
- Reflection as scholarly practice. To many university teachers, it can be hard to recognize the importance of *reflection* on their own teaching and

their students' learning, and the practice of reflection can also be very difficult for people not used to such an orientation toward their teaching.

Given these kinds of complexities, it is important to recognize the reality that university teachers “are situated within a complex network of personal, professional, and financial tensions” (Webb & Tierney, 2020, p. 620) and need context-sensitive support by leaders if they are to engage in, not to mention transition, into SoTL as a means of effecting “change within and beyond higher education” (Scharff et al., 2023, p. 16).

But what do we mean by such change? What might such context-sensitive support look like, and who could offer it? And is it really the case that those of us who want to engage in SoTL work need to transition to a new identity, away from one grounded in our own discipline and into that of being a scholar of teaching and learning?

A key aspect of the complexities highlighted above is that there always seems to be a tension, in the case of engagement in SoTL, between the local and the global. On the one hand, SoTL work is *local* in character as it involves highly contextualised investigation into teaching and learning and is therefore necessarily practice-based, drawing on personal and local knowledge.

On the other hand, SoTL also has a *global* character since engaging in it involves sharing one's work by making it public and can involve having it validated as research. SoTL work has a global dimension in the sense that it moves beyond the purely personal towards the collegial level and potentially beyond, when it is presented at conferences or published in peer-reviewed venues such as journals or books. Indeed, it is precisely if one makes one's investigations of teaching practice public that those investigations can influence the practice of others, be it as an investigation to contribute to local knowledge building, or at a more expansive global level that contributes to public knowledge as research. But precisely because of the highly contextualised character of investigations into local practices, tensions arise when the local practices are presented more widely and in broader contexts—often with their own scientific standards of validation and verification.

Given these kinds of complexities, when it comes to the development of teaching there are strong arguments to be made that “investigation of practice (*but not necessarily research*) is an essential component of professional activity” (Ashwin & Trigwell, 2004, p. 118; my emphasis). For SoTL leaders, what this suggests is that when university teachers engage in investigating teaching, we might best focus on supporting them to develop local knowledge for local change or improvement. But the price to be paid for such a more local orientation is lack of recognition for this work. By its nature, as practice-based research, SoTL work tends to be locally

produced and disseminated, making it hard to consider its wider impact, if any: “an inherent problem with the scholarship of teaching and learning is that ... most research remains (true to the original intention) small-scale, short-term and local in orientation” (Tight, 2018, p. 72).

One important implication of this challenging situation—given the multiple complexities discussed above—is that leadership support is essential: for SoTL to meet its potential, university teachers should not only be provided with relevant and context-specific guidance that can address these challenges, but institutional leaders—among them, heads of department, programme directors, and deans—need to support and encourage this work. Before turning to leadership more directly, it is important to consider how contextual factors shape educational change in higher education.

### Context, Higher Education, and Change

“Context matters”: the theme of the 2023 ISSOTL conference, held at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, brought together people from across the globe to share their local, practice-based inquiries more broadly. The organisers of that conference identified four different contexts that are critical for engagement in SoTL:

1. Teaching and learning context
2. Disciplinary context
3. Institutional context
4. Geographical, language and political context

These multiple contexts are hard to disentangle from one another, and it is important to problematize what we understand by ‘context’ (Roxå et al., 2025) as educational change is often difficult to achieve because of the complex interconnection of these elements. Much SoTL work focuses almost exclusively on what has been termed the ‘didactic’ domain—what works in teaching and learning (Booth & Woollacott, 2018, p. 541). In doing so, disciplinary, professional, cultural, and political contexts are sometimes overlooked. This is significant, given that effecting educational change is a key purpose of SoTL as a particular orientation to educational scholarship. Leading educational change as a purpose of SoTL is implicit in the widely accepted understanding that it “is at its core systematic inquiry into teaching and learning made public” (Ciccone, 2018, p.15), and that such inquiry is focused on “the process in which students experience changes in their ways of thinking and being through our courses” (Ciccone, 2018, p.21; see also p.23). Though the point may seem obvious, it is worth emphasising, as Ciccone’s statement does,

that when students take our courses and engage in educational experiences, they “experience changes”—or they should: learning in principle involves changes in students. The notion that students (should) experience change is implicit in the very concept ‘education’, since the idea of change led by a teacher is built into the word: ‘*educere*’ in Latin literally means the teacher *leads* (‘*ducere*’) the student *out or from* (‘*e*’) something *into* something else. And SoTL, as practice-based inquiry into student learning and our educational role as teachers, is interested in developing a better understanding of that process of change that students experience and that teachers lead: what happens to enable this change, how it happens, what else might be possible to improve learning, and potentially what new conceptual frameworks for shaping thinking about practice we might develop from the process (Hutchings, 2000, p.5; see Chick et al., 2026, p.80).

As we saw earlier, the sharing of this inquiry into change disseminates practice from the individual context of the university teacher to others, be they local colleagues in the department or faculty, at the broader university or beyond, thereby potentially serving as inspiration for doing things differently by developing the intellectual work of teaching. Bolander Laksov (2023; see also Simmons, 2016) rightly argues that the department is an important locus of educational change when it comes to teaching; too often, educational developers and other university leaders focus on centralized, generic provision of support for faculty to develop their teaching. Instead, based on her research, Bolander Laksov suggests that local departmental contexts and cultures, informed by the individual academic’s discipline, are crucial for advancing this work. Accordingly, educational developers and those of us who care about educational change should work with heads of department to create partnerships with individual teachers to engage in educational projects that are strategically important to the department. Doing so has a good chance of leading to sustainable educational change initiatives: to “projects that contribute to development over time not only of the individual ... but of a broader community of academics” (2023, p.399), as individual projects gain influence and can help to make change when they are strategically important to heads and matter to colleagues in the department. In that way, as *educational scholarship* gains influence in being strategically rooted in local departmental concerns, it thereby becomes *educational leadership*.

But at the same time, local departmental cultures can create conditions that make sustainable educational development hard. This is in part because while most academics are, as researchers—a crucial aspect of our identity—automatically “members of active communities” (Shulman, 1993, p.6), as *teachers* we “close the classroom door and experience pedagogical solitude”. While ‘going public’ is an essential part of what academics do as researchers, the same is not true of teaching, since teaching is by and large considered in the academy to be a private and local affair. How often do academics talk to one another about teaching with anything

approaching the frequency and scholarly orientation that is habitual in talking about research (Bass, 1999)? How often do we as university teachers treat our teaching as a “scholarly inquiry into learning” (Bernstein, 2013, p.36)?

Intellectual communities devoted to “significant conversations” about university teaching are rare, whether in the department or beyond, and have to be intentionally created. Roxå and Mårtensson’s research found academics engage a “limited number of conversational partners [in] serious discussions about teaching” (2009, p.550), with the majority having no more than 10 such conversational partners. But as Roxå and Mårtensson also found, significant conversations about teaching with a few trusted colleagues can happen both within *and* beyond academic departments, including with international colleagues outside the institution, thereby revealing a ‘cosmopolitan’ dimension of SoTL (Bernstein, 2013). This happens when university teachers inquire into student learning and their own teaching and share the results of those inquiries within, but also potentially beyond, their departments, faculties, and universities. This global and cosmopolitan dimension has been especially pertinent for some of us from the Global South, in geographical contexts removed from the mainstream of SoTL work, where there is significant attention paid to the transformative potential of higher education. With its focus on students and inquiry into their learning, SoTL has the potential to enhance and perhaps transform higher education, which itself should be a transformative experience for our students that helps them to succeed. Indeed, one of the key purposes of engaging in SoTL is to act “in the important interests of students, and by contributing to the betterment of teaching and learning ... by extension, to a fairer, more compassionate and sustainable world” (Kreber, 2013, p. 98). As university teachers, we need to ask whether the work we do in higher education is transformative—whether it truly makes a difference to students’ lives; engaging in SoTL and sharing our results to build communities of care is a key way of answering this question.

Of course, however, as discussed in the previous section, it can be challenging for university teachers to engage in—and to lead—through SoTL. This is why we now need to turn to a more detailed discussion of leadership *of* and *through* SoTL.

## Leadership in Higher Education

In a study of local-level leaders—that is, leaders on the ‘meso-level’ of the university as organization: the level of departments and collegial teams of specialists in academic disciplines—Mårtensson and Roxå (2016, p. 258) identify four challenges for not just engaging in SoTL, but specifically for leading through supporting scholarly inquiry into teaching:

1. Handling the relation between themselves as leaders and the people they

- lead;
2. Getting a group of academics to work together;
  3. Defining and clarifying leadership role/s; and
  4. Balancing discrepancies between formal organisation and local teaching culture.

In their study, Mårtensson and Roxå (2016, p. 247) describe an educational leadership development programme in a research-intensive university. In this programme, leaders conducted scholarly projects focused on contextualised educational development and leadership, and they reported the projects in writing while peer-reviewing one another's reports within the programme. What is important for us here is that though the leaders in this study were all formally appointed—and people in formally appointed leadership positions are critically important for guiding and supporting others in SoTL—in *addition* they also enact informal local-level leadership. The leaders in this study are leaders not only by virtue of being formally appointed to leadership positions, but also because they engaged in SoTL projects and shared the results of their inquiries locally, within the teaching team or department. This sharing itself constitutes (informal) leadership as a form of 'going public' because by sharing, they exert influence through the force and power of their scholarly work, thereby gaining trust and credibility within the local departmental context.

By identifying some of the key challenges for local-level leadership, it is possible to follow Mårtensson and Roxå in constructing a framework that can be helpful for thinking about SoTL leadership. What is especially striking about this framework is its emphasis on relationships (#1, #2), language and definitions (#3), and the tension between the 'local' and the 'global' (#4). The research indicates that it is crucially important for leaders to build *relationships* between themselves and the people they lead, which is essential for getting groups of academics to work together. For SoTL leaders, an implication is that it is important to define leadership clearly, and to use language to spell out what is meant by it. This requires carefully designed support for leaders themselves, in their leadership roles, to help them to reflect upon leadership (and 'followership'—what it means to be a leader, what it means to be a follower). In this way, SoTL leaders can develop a more complex, nuanced understanding of leadership and what it entails.

This nuanced understanding is especially important because, as Mårtensson and Roxå (2016) argue, local-level leaders always need to balance tensions (or "discrepancies") between an 'external mandate' and an 'internal mandate'. In brief, this means that leaders in education, in particular when it comes to SoTL at the local (meso-) level, need to balance expectations. There are *external* expectations from the university, given their assignment of a leadership position, for example

mandates relating to curriculum or metrics of success. But there are also *internal* expectations from those local-level leaders, which require trust, collaboration, and goodwill, suggesting that leaders draw on strategies that have been shown to be helpful in developing teaching through fostering collaboration, motivation, and integration (Geertsema & Mårtensson, forthcoming 2027) In short, educational leaders, including SoTL leaders, need to be aware of the tension between local and global expectations as they engage in the work of local-level leadership.

Once again, it is important to emphasize that leadership goes beyond formal positions. There is a need for those of us who are academics in higher education, as well as for our institutions, to question our assumptions about leadership. Universities are highly complex organizations in which there are multiple conceptions of leadership—the meaning of leadership is contested. For example, a study of how academics in Aotearoa / New Zealand experience and make sense of leadership, and how these relate to institutional, sociocultural, and political contexts, found four overarching meanings (Juntrasook, 2014):

- Leadership as position
- Leadership as performance
- Leadership as practice
- Leadership as professional role model for others

Given these different meanings, there is a need for developing more inclusive and broader theories of leadership that can inform both leadership practices and policies, for example relating to promotion and tenure. As discussed above, leadership need not be limited to a formal position, but can be understood in terms of an academic's performance at work and demonstrated competency as well as accomplishments in professional contexts (Juntrasook, 2014, p. 24). If an academic achieves highly, then this person is considered a leader in that field. Importantly, leadership can also be understood as professional practice in everyday contexts—as 'distributed' among practitioners rather than concentrated in a limited number of formal positions. And finally, leadership can be understood in terms of academics being role models for others, in the sense of leading exemplary lives that others can follow.

A recent substantial review of the literature on leadership of higher education found three main perspectives: the 'traditionalist', which focuses on the cultural context and argues neoliberal business practices have undermined academic self-governance; the 'reformist' perspective is grounded in values of social justice and argues for a more democratic and inclusive, distributed approach to leadership; and the 'pragmatist' perspective is more functionally oriented on identifying the competences and skills needed for effective leadership in universities (Macfarlane et al., 2024). The authors argue that leadership development programmes should

draw on insights from all three perspectives, as each provides important insights relating to how cultural context influences leadership ('traditionalist' perspective), how values and purpose shape leadership ('reformist' perspective), and what skills and competences leaders need ('pragmatist' perspective) (pp. 1392-1393).

While these reviews are potentially very helpful in unpacking the nature of leadership in higher education, and especially that it need not be formal or positional, it is striking that they do not appear to recognize that engaging in SoTL itself involves a form of leadership. Returning to Mårtensson and Roxå's study (2016, p. 259), as they note the project reports they studied themselves "constitute scholarly artefacts that can be used for the benefit of other leaders in similar roles within and outside the organisation. These artefacts [thereby] demonstrate leadership in theory as well as leadership in practice from different local academic contexts". What this means is that the project reports, in which local-level leaders investigated their scholarly practice as leaders including the challenges they faced as leaders within their local contexts, themselves constitute leadership. By documenting, peer reviewing, and disseminating their project reports, the authors of the reports enacted leadership in the act of sharing: they are leaders not only of, but *through* SoTL. For SoTL leaders, what this underscores is that it is important to take a wider, more holistic view of leadership.

### **Concluding Thoughts: Going Global?**

In this chapter, we have discussed key challenges of engaging in SoTL and highlighted the importance of leadership in supporting this work. We then focused on untangling the complex interrelationship between context and change in higher education, noting that in principle, as university teachers who educate our students, we should see this work as involving leadership. For this reason, we devoted time to looking more closely at what recent scholarship can tell us about educational leadership, in order to derive greater conceptual clarity concerning leadership. The purpose of this final section is to return to the tension between the local and global when it comes to SoTL. What is the appropriate level of sharing of scholarly inquiry in the case of SoTL projects?

While the local context and the meso-level are crucial for the cultural work of educational development through SoTL (Stensaker, 2018), this ought not to be the sole focus of such work. As mentioned earlier, an important part of my own complex context is that of a research-intensive university in Singapore, a highly cosmopolitan, outward-looking city-state located in Southeast Asia. The student population is diverse; while my colleagues are from across the world, all of them have in common that they highly value research rooted in their disciplinary identity. In that context, a key realization—a "critical moment of practice" (Chick, 2018)

in my engagement with SoTL as an university teacher and developer—was that (of course!) not all academics are trained as social scientists in the discipline of education. Different and equally valid, depending on context, conceptions of research exist, including of methodology and what counts as evidence (Poole, 2013), which are strongly connected to academics’ disciplines. A second realization was that though cosmopolitan, Singapore is located “on the margins of SoTL discourse” (Chng & Looker, 2013), given that we are remote from the metropolitan centre from where SoTL originated and where it still arguably is strongest: North / Euro-America (Chng, Mårtensson, & Leibowitz, 2020). And so I have found it important to honour both of these sides—to, as it were, deconstruct the binary between the local and the international.

On the one hand, the department provides the lifeblood of an academic’s existence and engaging in the practice-based work of SoTL in that context can lead to iterative improvement of personal practice and collective development of departmental culture, where—as academics—we seek to integrate specialised disciplinary research identities with day-to-day teaching, something like Shulman’s (1987) ‘pedagogical content knowledge’. Yet at the same time, international conversations and connections can provide a broader perspective, and as “critical moments of practice” they helped to change how I understand teaching “as intellectual work distinct from scholarship of discovery in education” (Bernstein & Poole, 2020): that academics’ identities by-and-large are *not* the identities of educational researchers (Mårtensson, Roxå, & Olsson, 2011, p.60).

Through international university networks and conferences like ISSOTL and ICED, and involvement in journals like *Teaching and Learning Inquiry* and the *International Journal for Academic Development*, I met leaders in SoTL and started reading the work they had published. A visit to Lund in 2015 completely changed my perspective on teaching and SoTL, helping me to see the importance for SoTL of ‘didactic’ inquiry into ‘what works’ (Hutchings, 2000, p.5), with the crucial purpose of developing it in the *local* teaching and learning context. However, other significant conversations that resonated with other aspects of my context (as someone from the Global South who witnessed and unwittingly benefited from racial oppression in apartheid South Africa) revealed that SoTL *also* has the potential to address the urgent and enduring challenges facing the world (Felten & Geertsema, 2023). In this regard, those of us who as university teachers engage in SoTL can learn from work emanating in the Global South relating to decolonizing the curriculum (e.g. Behari-Leak & Mokou, 2019) and the importance of questioning assumptions relating to the coloniality of knowledge, being, and power.

A main learning point, when we look at some of this important work from the Global South, relates to the need to broaden our understanding of the potential of SoTL to make a difference to the important interests of students mentioned

earlier. Work from outside the ‘mainstream’ of SoTL has convincingly argued that to foster student success we need to deepen our understanding of students’ contexts. Regardless of whether our students come from the same country as ours or from elsewhere in the world, “there is ample evidence that students are largely understood in ways that are decontextualised from their histories and socio-economic realities” (Boughey & McKenna, 2021, p.56; see also Looker, 2011). Being attentive to the unique histories and specific socio-economic realities of students matters immensely because as contexts differ, students have been influenced by different realities and different conceptions grounded in diverse cultural practices, including what the purpose of higher education is and how students relate to their learning environment, for example in terms of motivation (Looker, 2011, p. 30). Supporting students to succeed—transforming their lives, which as we saw is a key purpose of SoTL—and thereby offering them opportunities to make a difference within society, requires that we approach students in ways that provide them with ‘epistemic access’ (Young & Muller, 2016), which goes beyond a narrow, psychologized approach to learning. Not all students are the same; who they are and where they come from should make a substantial difference to how as university teachers we design, teach, and assess our courses as we transform research into curriculum and pedagogy (Bernstein, 2000). For this reason, it’s important to focus on developing a “situational ethos” (Behari-Leak, 2022, p.33) that attends to these contextual matters. We should be asking not only ‘what works?’, but ‘what works where?’ and ‘what works for what purposes?’. This situational ethos further requires “a more expansive view of learning to inquire seriously into ‘what works’ for enabling student well-being, metacognition, belonging, engagement with difference, and more” (Felten & Geertsema, 2023, p.1107).

Through international exchanges—and by looking beyond one’s immediate local context — it becomes possible to see that “institutions ... might better improve the learning of our students by making the faculty’s intellectual work in teaching visible for discussion and collaboration than by inviting our colleagues to discover new frontiers in educational practice or theory” (Bernstein, 2010, p.5). In this way, globalizing the local can be not only incredibly enriching for us in our own specific locations, but can make a difference locally and more widely, beyond this crucially important local context. These ideas have also been influential in my home institution, as we revised the university’s education-focused promotion pathway, in that it seeks to honour academics as first and foremost experts in their chosen discipline (or interdiscipline), and understands educational leadership as non-positional: as involving the sharing and peer review of inquiry that is informed by scholarly literature on teaching relevant to, and integrated with the academic’s discipline.

Engagement in SoTL, while necessarily focused on local contexts, can at the same time transcend those contexts and become “cosmopolitan” through international

connections. We can and should be local-level leaders, whether formally appointed to positions where we can make change, or through sharing our inquiries into ways in which to support diverse students to succeed. By sharing this highly contextualized work more widely too, we can enact ways of rethinking leadership that can make a wider difference in the world.

### Endnote

[1] I use the term ‘university teachers’ in this chapter. Note that there is some variation in designating those who teach in higher education, and in some contexts, we are also known as ‘academic teachers’, ‘academic staff’, or simply as ‘academics’ or ‘faculty’.

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## Dipping your Toe in the Water: Building Confidence, Community, and Capacity

Kelly Schrum; Karin T. Watson; and David X. Lemmons

### Abstract

This chapter provides practical guidance for SoTL leaders seeking to build confidence, visibility, and scholarly community through engagement with the international SoTL literature, publications, and conferences. With particular attention to underrepresented regions and contexts where institutional recognition for SoTL may be limited, it outlines accessible pathways for engaging in SoTL as both a scholarly and leadership practice. Using the metaphors of ‘dipping a toe’, ‘wading in’, and deeper immersion, the chapter maps a developmental trajectory that includes identifying relevant literature, engaging with feeder publications, participating in professional networks, and sharing work through conferences and journals. It highlights relational and community-building practices—such as mentoring, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing—as important forms of SoTL leadership that extend beyond local institutional boundaries. The chapter also explores how institutional and regional supports, including libraries, teaching and learning centres, and professional associations, can be leveraged to sustain engagement with SoTL. Overall, it positions participation in the global SoTL ecosystem as a strategic leadership practice that builds capacity, amplifies diverse voices, and strengthens international SoTL communities.

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Engaging in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) can be intellectually, pedagogically, and professionally rewarding. Getting started, however, can be a challenge, especially for emerging SoTL leaders trying to foster or expand SoTL on their campuses. In this chapter, we suggest strategies for encouraging newcomers to dip a toe into the metaphorical SoTL waters. By starting small, those new to SoTL will have the chance to meet others and experience the welcoming nature of the field. This chapter introduces ways to help those in your discipline, institution, or country find SoTL literature (dip in a few toes), create a SoTL community (wade into the water), and eventually dive in by conducting and going public with their own SoTL research (Felten, 2013; Miller-Young & Chick, 2024).

Academics are experts in their own disciplines and are often deeply embedded in their terminology and methods. SoTL — by its very nature — is cross-disciplinary

(Bunnell & McGowan, 2024; Cruz et al., 2024) and requires scholars to venture beyond their areas of expertise. It requires them to become novice learners once again. This might include engaging with new communities and audiences, adapting to unknown language and theories, and accepting research methodologies that differ – or in some cases contradict – their own. It is not uncommon for academics to feel uncomfortable or experience imposter syndrome when first engaging with SoTL (Abbot, 2024; Miller-Young & Chick, 2024).

Building SoTL confidence, community, and capacity does not happen in isolation; it requires intentional and iterative effort to cultivate a culture of trust (Moore et al., 2025). For SoTL leaders at any level, then, a central challenge is designing inclusive initial SoTL experiences. New researchers may worry about what “counts” as SoTL and feel pressure to engage in a full-length SoTL study to establish credibility. This chapter outlines strategies for leaders looking to introduce SoTL as a resource, a field of research, and an academic community and to help others get started. Throughout the chapter, we frame these activities not only as individual entry points into SoTL, but as leadership practices through which scholars and institutions cultivate capacity, visibility, and connection across diverse geographic contexts.

## **Dipping a Toe**

An important first step into SoTL is to build confidence by engaging with existing scholarship. Burke (1941) likened this experience to entering a parlor after others have already arrived. The people standing in the parlor are engaged deeply in conversation and discussing unfamiliar issues such that it can feel challenging to enter — especially for academics who are used to having a voice in these spaces. As in this Burkean parlor, entering the scholarly conversation begins with listening to the conversations already happening.

Extending this metaphor, imagine for a moment that as a SoTL leader you are already participating in this parlor. You notice a colleague who has recently arrived and seems lost or uncomfortable. You can proactively invite them into the conversation and introduce them to other attendees, including those who share similar interests or are asking related questions. This is an important task for SoTL leaders — helping make the transition into SoTL welcoming and supporting new scholars in joining the conversation. This relational work—inviting, connecting, and orienting others—is a foundational form of SoTL leadership, particularly in contexts where formal structures or recognition may be limited.

Connecting new scholars with librarians is also a crucial step. Librarians can help your colleagues explore available materials and craft an effective action plan. A new SoTL scholar may feel confident searching within their own disciplinary

environment, but searching in SoTL is different. Library databases, for example, typically divide work into disciplinary sections and subject headings, but SoTL exists within, outside, and between those spaces (Healey & Healey, 2023; MacMillan, 2018). Librarians will know the locally available resources and can assist in the search process. These resources can help you begin that process.

## Searching for SoTL

Google Scholar is a useful place to start. This freely available search engine casts a wide net (Google Scholar, n.d.; Paperpile, 2025), searching across disciplinary silos which is essential for finding interdisciplinary SoTL work. Subscription-based databases, if offered through an institution's library, can help bypass paywalls and locate resources more quickly. Interdisciplinary tools, such as Academic Search Complete, as well as education-focused databases, such as ERIC, also include SoTL literature. Google Scholar and other free databases, such as JSTOR and Academia.edu, provide a useful interface for searching and will return open-access content immediately. They do not, however, provide direct access to materials requiring a subscription.

Unlike other disciplines, there is no single location or set of keywords for finding all SoTL literature (MacMillan, 2018). Using keywords such as SoTL, DBER (discipline-based education research), and teaching and higher education, however, will help researchers limit their results to work within the SoTL context. Users should also experiment with keywords and databases to find SoTL resources relevant to their own teaching context, pedagogical questions, or SoTL journey. Keywords, for example, might focus on a specific type of intervention or strategy (e.g., game-based learning or pedagogical partnership) or a specific learning environment (e.g., library instruction or experiential learning). See Table 1 for techniques to help narrow the focus.

### **Table 1.**

#### *Refining your search*

Strategy	Description	Examples
Using AND, OR, and NOT (Boolean operators)	<p>Using AND, OR, or NOT between keywords helps the database determine what you are looking for, especially in a subscription-based database.</p> <p>AND = find both/all keywords</p> <p>OR = find either/any keyword</p> <p>NOT = exclude this keyword</p>	<p>Games AND learning</p> <p>This returns articles that contain both “games” and “learning” as keywords.</p> <p>SoTL OR DBER</p> <p>This returns articles that include at least one of these keywords.</p> <p>games NOT gamification</p> <p>This returns articles that contain the keyword “games” while excluding those that contain the keyword “gamification.”</p>
Placing quotation marks around a phrase	<p>Quotation marks are used to find an exact phrase when searching. In this case, the database will not interpret a phrase as a set of separate keywords. It also turns off searching for closely related keywords and synonyms.</p>	<p>“scholarship of teaching and learning”</p> <p>This returns articles that contain all of these words in this exact order.</p>
Using wildcard characters such as “*” and “?”	<p>Wildcards are used to replace single letters or portions of words. Each database uses wildcards slightly differently, but most feature a “help” screen where specific wildcards and other proprietary search strategies are featured.</p>	<p>teach*</p> <p>The asterisk replaces the ending of a word. This will return any keywords that start with “teach,” including teach, teacher, teaches, and teaching.</p> <p>wom?n</p> <p>The question mark replaces a single character anywhere within a word. This search returns both “woman” and “women.”</p>

Putting parts of a search in parentheses.	This “nests” parts of a larger search, similar to a mathematical equation. This is most useful for very in-depth searching.	(“scholarship of teaching and learning” OR sotl) AND gam*  This returns resources that include either the full phrase or the abbreviation and also feature a keyword beginning with “gam.” This could be used to locate research about learning games in a SoTL context.
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Another useful strategy when starting out is to browse SoTL journals. Many of these, such as *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, the *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, and *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the South*, are diamond open access, meaning that there are no fees to publish in or read these journals (Bosman et al., 2021; cOAlition S, n.d.; Deakin, n.d.). This work often includes a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International license meaning that the work can be freely reproduced and distributed for non-commercial purposes with proper acknowledgement. These journals are often supported by institutions or scholarly organizations. The International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL), for example, is committed to the belief that “making research freely available to the public supports a greater global exchange of knowledge” (TLI, n.d.). Browse articles in the latest volumes or search within each journal for topics in your area of interest, such as feminist methods or science identity and sense of belonging.

## Citation Mining

Citation mining (also called citation chaining) can help you engage more deeply once you locate relevant research. This involves using one article, sometimes called the *seed article*, as a starting point or central resource for identifying additional related works. Researchers can move forward and backward in time, depending on their interests and needs.

Backward citation mining starts with examining the footnotes or references in the seed article. What works are these authors referring to, quoting, or in conversation with? Examine the in-text citations or footnotes as well as the references. You can also move backward in time to find what works inspired the article. Backward citation mining is especially powerful for locating high-impact literature that influenced the current conversation, sometimes called *seminal works*.

Forward citation mining similarly uses the seed article as a starting point and moves ahead in time to search for articles that have cited it after publication. This is especially useful when an article is at least two years old, as it takes time to be cited in scholarly literature. Figure 1 shows where you can begin citation mining in Google Scholar. Web of Science, a subscription-based database, also includes citation mining options.

### Figure 1.

#### *Citation mining in Google Scholar*

**Principles of good practice in SoTL**  
 P. Felten - Teaching and learning inquiry, 2013 - JSTOR  
 ... Taken together, these five **principles** can be guideposts for developing and refining ... SoTL inquiries and larger SoTL initiatives. These **principles** also can clarify and demystify SoTL to ...  
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Another strategy combines these two approaches. Identify a relevant seed article, look up the work that has impacted or shaped it, and then use these seminal works as the starting point for additional forward citation mining. This helps you locate articles that have cited a foundational work since its publication, showing how the concepts have been used and adapted. This will likely result in a wide range of articles, some of which will be at least partially related to your topic of interest. You can then read quickly through the titles and abstracts to narrow down the list and focus on a close reading of articles that are most relevant to your research.

Here is one final note on citation mining. Unlike other disciplines, SoTL research does not always cite the same foundational articles (Healey & Healey, 2023). Therefore, citation mining is a useful, but imperfect, strategy for finding and immersing yourself in SoTL literature.

### Reading Broadly

Becoming familiar with the Burkean parlor is a great way to begin a SoTL journey and build confidence. By reading broadly within SoTL, you may find new ideas for addressing a learning problem you are facing, discover a new word for something you are already doing in the classroom, or locate scholars who share similar interests. Together, intentional searching and citation mining provide effective starting points for locating SoTL work which is especially useful as you help others begin their SoTL exploration.

## Wading in the Water

In his chapter, Geertsema (2026) wrote that academics, by virtue of their disciplinary identity, are part of a larger research community and familiar with the public nature of those interactions and collaborations. By contrast, the teaching component of an academic career is mostly performed in solitude within a local context and behind closed classroom doors (virtual or physical). While the last section offered concrete suggestions for dipping your toe in the water and helping others do the same, this section explores strategies for moving beyond this initial stage and building community. These include institutional-level efforts to develop your SoTL leadership, create mentorship and peer learning opportunities, foster safe spaces to learn and practice, and support other academics throughout their SoTL journeys. They also encourage you to look beyond your own context, and develop networks and collaborative opportunities — both nationally and internationally — with other SoTL leaders and initiatives. For SoTL leaders working in international or under-resourced contexts, these community-building strategies can be especially powerful forms of leadership, enabling participation beyond local institutional boundaries.

## Professional Development Activities

As a SoTL leader, you can play a key role in building SoTL communities and facilitating engagement for academics and third space professionals (Thorpe & Partridge, 2024). This can include introductory activities, such as presentations, reflective practice, and evaluation surveys, as well as guidance on ethics requirements, new technologies, and discipline-specific pedagogical strategies. There are many free resources you can use as a guide or encourage others to access, including Hopscotch 4 SoTL (Kennesaw State University, n.d.), Teaching Connections (National University of Singapore), Center for University Teaching and Learning (University of Helsinki), and Utrecht University Roadmap for SoTL (Meijerman, Kirschner, & Wijsman, 2025). Materials are typically modular (as opposed to sequential) allowing you, or other academics, the flexibility to engage in a specific topic, and at a time, of your choosing. You could also develop workshops or webinars that can be held online (synchronously or asynchronously), or serve as open educational resources (OERs), allowing you to expand your reach and impact as a leader nationally and internationally.

## Journal Clubs

Building on the book club model, you can design journal clubs that provide structured opportunities for bringing colleagues together and fostering informal

discussions centered on key ideas or emerging literature in the field of teaching and learning. These typically involve reading and discussing new publications and research or exploring innovative practices. Journal clubs provide opportunities for academics to engage with colleagues across disciplines, practice new pedagogical language, and gain exposure to diverse theories, methodologies, authors, and processes. This process is not dissimilar to classroom-based discussions which can offer a familiar entry point.

It is important to remember that journal clubs benefit from a learner-centric approach and should be based on the principles of adult learning (Eusuf & Shelton, 2022). You can encourage engagement through scaffolded guidelines, such as prompt questions (Miller-Young & Chick, 2024) or pre-determined key questions (University of York, n.d.). As a leader, you should ensure that expectations and conduct are clearly outlined ahead of time (Eusuf & Shelton, 2022), including shared responsibilities, such as voting on questions and selected readings or rotating presentations and meeting formats. Scheduling regular meeting dates well in advance allows participants to plan ahead and allocate time accordingly. You can schedule journal clubs in-person or online, although be mindful that online meetings may require experienced facilitation to maximize engagement.

Digital resources from existing journal clubs around the world can provide inspiration for getting started. See, for example, the University of South Australia Journal Club or the TU Delft Journal Club.

## Conferences

Attending SoTL conferences, symposiums, and seminars — locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally — can provide an excellent pathway to develop and enact SoTL leadership and build networks. These conferences bring together SoTL scholars from different institutions and professional backgrounds to discuss and share ideas centered on improving teaching and learning. Conferences often host social programs to welcome newcomers, such as First-Timer Breakfasts or Buddy Programs. Volunteering to serve as a peer reviewer for conference submissions is an excellent way to learn about the process and how conference proposals are constructed. Encouraging colleagues to get involved as a group can further build SoTL capacity and community at your institution.

As a SoTL leader, facilitate conversations around exploring a conference program to seek out attendees from your own institution and connect ahead of time to expand your network. Many SoTL practitioners, including leading scholars, are committed to making the field as welcoming as possible and think seriously about the ways in which new researchers can engage with those more established in the field (Bunnell

& McGowan, 2024; Cruz et al., 2023). As Geertsema (2026) writes, meeting these leaders in the field can be foundational to forming a SoTL identity.

You could consider hosting a teaching and learning conference at your own institution, such as the University of Rhode Island Innovative Education Conference, the University of Stellenbosch SoTL conference, and the University of Warwick Education Conference. These local conferences can be a very effective (and affordable) way to engage with SoTL at home which can foster collaborations grounded in a specific institutional context. Similarly, Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTLs) in your geographic area can also provide a good starting point for identifying local options. To explore beyond your own context, attend or encourage those at your institution to attend regionally specific conferences, such as EuroSoTL and Latin SoTL, or global conferences such as the ISSOTL events that intentionally rotate locations annually to expand access.

As a transdisciplinary field, SoTL may or may not feel similar to home academic disciplines (Abbot, 2024; Bunnell & McGowan, 2024; Cruz et al., 2024). Some SoTL conferences focus on teaching and learning within disciplinary spaces, such as psychology or English. Attending this kind of conference can lower barriers to participating in SoTL because they align more closely with disciplinary norms. The number of national and international conferences has grown over the past decade, so helping academics at your institution identify and attend can provide a good starting point.

Some conferences offer virtual options, including SoTL Summit, an affordable annual SoTL conference that is fully online. Alternatively, you can refer colleagues to curated lists of SoTL conferences, such as Kennesaw University's Teaching Conferences, and the University of Connecticut's list of SoTL Associations and Conferences to identify conferences relevant to your context and interests.

## Peer Review of Journals

The above professional development activities and journal clubs are excellent ways for you to develop your own SoTL leadership and networks beyond your own institution, and to build capacity in others. Moving to the next step, from consuming SoTL to producing it, however, can still feel daunting and often results in inaction or academically productive procrastination (Westgate et al., 2018), particularly for newcomers. As a leader, you can address this at your institution by participating in, setting up, or leading mentoring programs that are structured, scaffolded, and intentionally focus on skill-building. This allows academics who are new to SoTL to progress toward research through incremental steps in a supported, inclusive environment.

The peer review process is one of the foundations of academic publishing (Goodin, 2024) and provides an important area for mentorship and developing SoTL capability. Becoming a peer reviewer allows emerging SoTL scholars to improve the quality of research and scholarly publishing, contribute to the development of the field, and build your own networks. The skills needed to review manuscripts effectively, however, are seldom explicitly taught and often rely on the disciplinary knowledge of reviewers. This skills gap is amplified in the cross-disciplinary field of SoTL, where few researchers feel confident that they have the necessary expertise to adapt their disciplinary knowledge. While most journals provide reviewer guidelines, these can be generic with limited opportunity to practice or receive feedback on one's competence as a reviewer. Enrolling in peer review or editing courses offered by publishers, such as OAPA or Elsevier Research Academy, is one useful way to learn skills, but these often involve registration costs.

Establishing an in-house mentoring program within your institution, possibly in collaboration with a SoTL publication, is another option. The Peer Review of Journals Mentor Program <<https://www.education.unsw.edu.au/news-events/news/building-sotl-skills>> (University of New South Wales), for example, run in collaboration with *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* intentionally adopted a proactive approach. In this model, participants are guided through the process by a peer review mentor as they work progressively in small collaborative groups on real manuscripts provided by the journal. Recognizing that academics can improve their own work and skills by reviewing the work of others (Rosenbaum 2005) and drawing on Dewey's (1938) learning by doing theory, the year-long model provides a safe, authentic environment to learn and, perhaps most importantly, to practice. After a series of introductory workshops conducted in small, cross-disciplinary groups, participants shadow more experienced mentors through the peer review process with real articles. They then graduate to writing and submitting their own reviews, often in pairs, with a mentor's supervision.

Participants reported the benefits (Goodin, 2025) of seeing a manuscript as submitted to the journal and witnessing the developmental approach to constructive feedback, as well as participating in the entire editorial process, including revisions, resubmission, and a second round of review. Importantly, participants appreciated the scaffolded and supportive process as well as the sense of collegiality they found when working in cross-disciplinary groups. Those who completed the program now review for journals individually and serve as mentors. In addition, several have begun publishing their own SoTL work in blogs, conference proceedings, and journals.

## Structured Collaboration

Collaborative Writing Groups (CWGs) provide a semi-structured environment and valuable opportunity for developing, mentoring, exchanging ideas, and collaborating with other academics from diverse countries, disciplines, and experience levels (Healy et al., 2013). Many groups explore non-traditional academic outlets, including podcasts, blogs, posters, and infographics (Huijser et al., 2024). They encourage participants to look across disciplinary, institutional, and national boundaries to find common ground and are often associated with professional conferences. Examples include EuroSoTL Collaborative Writing Groups and ISSOTL Collaborative Writing Groups.

Similarly, Communities of Practice (CoP) and Special Interest Groups (SiGs) provide small communities, usually cross-disciplinary, that are built around common themes. Many, although not all, engage deeply with SoTL and include educators with diverse levels of experience, seniority, and knowledge. Because of their size and collaborative nature, they can provide opportunities for less experienced academics to engage in SoTL as co-authors. Some institutions, such as Utrecht University and TU Delft, limit participation in CoPs or SIGs to their own campuses while others include external members, such as the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and SoTL Collaboratory. Introducing academics to these opportunities or creating something similar on your campus can help build SoTL capacity in tangible and measurable ways.

## Diving In

In the companion chapter, Geertsema (2026) discusses the importance of local and international contexts in SoTL. This chapter has discussed multiple paths for expanding SoTL at your institution while keeping these contexts in mind, including finding and reading relevant SoTL literature from around the world, forming local groups to share ideas and learn together, and attending local, regional, national, and international conferences. The next step is to build capacity by diving in and encouraging academics to start their own SoTL projects, either alone or with colleagues!

Diving in can still encompass a diverse range of activities with a shared goal, as Geertsema (2026) noted, of promoting “sustainable educational change initiatives”. Many journeys into SoTL begin with a question or a problem (Bass, 1999; Bass, 2020). These might include asking what students are learning, what motivates them to work hard, or what students retain after a course ends. Faculty can ask if their strategies for facilitating new ways of thinking, questioning, and imagining — not

just content acquisition — were effective or pose questions around helping students develop transferable skills.

Thoughtful teachers ponder these kinds of questions that often originate in a positive or negative experience in an individual classroom or emerge from conversations with colleagues about student learning objectives or curriculum reform. These lines of inquiry, however, do not live in one discipline or way of thinking, in a single methodology or location. They exist in an interdisciplinary space where individuals are encouraged to talk with and learn from scholars across departments, campuses, countries, and continents. SoTL is a welcoming community, in part because people join from different places and at all career stages. It is also self-perpetuating — most SoTL scholars remember their own journey to SoTL. They vividly recall the joy of meeting others with shared interests and a passion for improving teaching and student learning. They often pay this kindness back by mentoring those new to the field.

Depending on disciplinary background, past exposure to SoTL literature and research, and career stage, some faculty may be ready to dive in at this point, while others might need more scaffolding and support. Possible next steps include forming a faculty learning community (FLC) (Cornejo Happel & Song, 2020; Meijerman et al., 2023), including those described above, joining an ongoing SoTL research project, or developing a pilot study. Useful starting points include asking: What are the central research questions? How does this research fit with existing literature and contribute new knowledge? What are the proposed research methods? Who are the participants? What data will be collected? At what stage? How will it be analyzed? What are the potential implications of this work? Novice SoTL scholars can practice collecting and analyzing data, talk with colleagues about what can be learned from the data, and think through how it might be applied to other contexts. They can then reflect on the lessons learned and design a larger study.

## Sharing SoTL

The next step is “going public” (Chick, 2018; Chick & Friberg, 2022; Felten 2013). This is an important way to become part of the SoTL community and, equally important, to contribute to the scholarly conversation around teaching and learning. It allows others to learn, adapt, and apply the work in their own contexts and perhaps to begin contributing as well. As a SoTL leader, you can raise awareness of these potential options for going public and encourage participation through incentives and rewards, including recognition.

## Conferences

As noted above, SoTL conferences are a great way to discover and build your own capacity. This can start locally or regionally which is often more affordable and accessible. Conferences also provide an excellent opportunity for presenting SoTL research, receiving feedback, engaging in conversation, and identifying collaborators. Institutions can offer targeted writing support workshops (e.g., UNSW) and peer-guided drop-in sessions for colleagues that align with abstract submission deadlines.

In addition, disciplinary conferences increasingly offer opportunities to present on teaching and learning which can provide a way to connect SoTL work with existing professional activities. If these opportunities do not yet exist, encourage emerging SoTL scholars to volunteer to serve on a conference organizing committee and suggest a focus on teaching and learning within the discipline. This can be another way to build connections with others in a discipline who are interested in teaching and learning in higher education. Presenting posters or lightning talks are excellent ways to participate that may be more welcoming to newcomers. These types of presentations are often well-suited to works in progress and offer the opportunity to invite the SoTL community to shape research projects while they are ongoing.

## Publishing

Low-stakes and feeder publications play a critical leadership role in the SoTL ecosystem by creating accessible entry points, particularly for scholars in underrepresented regions or institutions. There are a number of incremental, low-stakes ways to get started while building the skills to contribute longer pieces in traditionally rigorous outlets. In Australia, for example, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) highlights peer-reviewed scholarly publications as well as “contributions to professional bodies/communities of practice, activities of scholarly academic societies, peer review, teaching practice engaging the latest ideas, debates and issues” (n.d.). Academics can refer to equivalent education quality agencies specific to their own national and institutional contexts.

Writing a blog post can provide an excellent way to expand SoTL capacity. Blogs tend to have less stringent requirements, are shorter in length, are published more quickly, and can be easily linked to social media. Some are peer-reviewed while others are not. Many institutions have their own blogs or in-house publications, providing a familiar place to start before working towards national or international outlets for increased impact and reputation building.

<b>Institutional SoTL Blog Examples</b>	<b>National/International SoTL Blog Examples</b>
Education Blogs (UNSW)	ISSOTL Blog
Institute for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Press (University of British Columbia)	ASCILITE TELall Blog Advance HE Blogs
LITE Blogs (Leeds University)	The Teaching Professor
Network of Quality Teaching and Learning (Aga Khan University)	HERDSA Connect Blog SoTL in the South Reflections
Teach, Explore, Apply (TEA) (Manchester University)	EuroSoTL Community Posts

### Journals

Journals provide a range of opportunities for publishing SoTL research. There are a number of strategies you can share as a SoTL leader to help build awareness and engagement. A good starting point is to think carefully and critically about the audience: Where might your research have the greatest impact? Who do you most want to engage in conversation? If you teach an introductory history survey course to undergraduate non-majors, do you want to communicate with others teaching similar classes? Or are you most interested in communicating with faculty across disciplines who are experimenting with active learning or integrating new digital tools into the classroom?

Develop a list of your top three publications and spend time looking at the most recent volumes. Does your work fit with the overall topics you see in the journal? Does it contribute something new? Next, examine the journal description, focus and scope, and submission guidelines. Is there a word limit? Is there a prescribed structure, such as IMRAD (introduction, methods, results, and discussion), or preference for specific methodological approaches? Some journals prefer quantitative research versus qualitative or arts-based approaches, but others, such as *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* embrace methodological pluralism. Some journals require a theoretical framework while others, following disciplinary norms, encourage each author to determine what is essential for their project.

Within the journals you identify, select two or three relevant articles and read them carefully: How do they introduce the research question(s)? Frame an argument? Present data and findings? Pay close attention to formatting and citation requirements. Following these steps will increase the likelihood that journal editors

will send the work out for review, return valuable feedback, and potentially accept the submission for publication.

Some journals that publish SoTL work are geographically focused, such as the *Asian Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, *Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, *SoTL in the South*, and *SoTL Africa*. Others center on specific disciplines, such as *The History Teacher*, *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, and the *Journal of Engineering Education*, or pedagogical approaches, such as *Active Learning in Higher Education*. Some are designed for specific audiences, such as the *International Journal for Academic Development* or *To Improve the Academy: A Journal of Educational Development*, while others draw together readers with shared interests, such as pedagogical partnerships (*International Journal for Students as Partners*) or digital pedagogy (*Australasian Journal of Educational Technology* or *British Journal of Educational Technology*).

Some journals are designed to mentor authors new to SoTL, such as *Advancing Scholarship and Research in Higher Education* (n.d.), which describes its ethos as “grounded in a relational approach that values empowering researcher development . . . in a spirit of generosity and kindness” (ASRHE, n.d.). A valuable resource for selecting journals is the Kennesaw Teaching Journals Directory that allows filtering by discipline and pedagogical interest.

Institutions, scholarly organizations, and journals also provide multimodal content that can be valuable for those exploring SoTL. There are a growing number of SoTL podcasts, including a series at the *Center for Engaged Learning* at Elon University, the *Teaching in Higher Ed Podcast*, and *Three Questions About Teaching and Learning* at the University of Calgary (Kupatadze & Abbot, 2021; Thompson & McSweeney, 2025). *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* expanded its Going Public section to include reviews of books, websites, podcasts, blogs, and open educational resources (OERs) with the goal of highlighting and expanding “the various forms SoTL can take” (TLI, n.d.). It also publishes shorter submissions, called SoTL in Process, designed to share reflections on SoTL, generate conversation, or present ideas in development as well as posters presented at the annual ISSOTL conference that can be submitted for peer review and potential publication. Highlighting and valuing these journals is itself a leadership act, helping to broaden whose knowledge counts in the global SoTL conversation.

## Conclusion

Halpern (2023) recently called on SoTL scholars to expand the “narrative possibilities” with the goal of “problematizing rather than easily solving” the

difficult and complex teaching and learning challenges facing higher education today (p. 1). We can begin to meet this challenge by encouraging faculty to dive into SoTL. None of us became experts in our disciplinary spaces overnight, and as a SoTL leader you can support and help build capability in those who are new to the field. Learning to SoTL requires patience and persistence, but it can be incredibly rewarding for both teachers and students.

In this chapter, we have described strategies for locating SoTL and building confidence followed by ways to create SoTL community, capacity, and networks at the local, national, and international levels. We suggested how academics can maximize their engagement with SoTL, and how institutions and leaders can facilitate and support academics in improving teaching and learning in higher education. Importantly, we have put forward suggestions for how academics new to SoTL might navigate their own journeys to consume and produce scholarship around the world, and how those already confident in SoTL can develop and expand their leadership and networks in this field.

SoTL scholars come from all disciplines, every type of institution, and every continent. Dipping in a toe can be the first step in discovering a whole new world of scholars and scholarship centered around systematic inquiry into improving teaching and learning in higher education (Felten, 2013). Getting started can be daunting, but these strategies can help you lead others—and your institution—to begin and sustain meaningful SoTL journeys, regardless of geographical location.

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# Contextualising SoTL: Local Practices and Global Leadership

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## Abstract

This chapter explores issues related to the positionality of SoTL practice and leadership at both local and global levels. We argue that, beyond contextual factors, it is important to consider the barriers and risks associated with going ‘international’—particularly if we are committed to preserving the ‘I’ in an international society such as ISSOTL. We contend that developing a shared understanding and language between local and global communities is essential, and that this process should evolve organically rather than being imposed on any group. We propose three key strategies to ensure a balance between maintaining the ‘I’ and embracing diverse perspectives: fostering a mindset shift, enhancing accessibility, and pursuing intentional outreach through a networked community model. In summary, we believe that achieving a balance between locally relevant practices and inclusive global connections is integral to realising the vision of what is possible.

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## Prologue

*Engagement in SoTL, while necessarily focused on local contexts, can at the same time transcend those contexts and become ‘cosmopolitan’ through international connections.* (Geertsema, this volume)

We speak of two levels of local and global contexts in this paper.

1. Institutional teaching and learning: teaching as local practice; teaching support as global practice

The Geertsema chapter, *SoTL, the Local, and the Global*, notes the various tensions that characterise teaching practice in institutions of higher learning; that on the one hand, teaching is local, down to the department and even the individual instructor (Laksov & Sim, 2023). Geertsema further observes that in fact, “local departmental cultures can create conditions that make sustainable educational development hard” (Geertsema, this volume) as compared with Shulman’s “pedagogical solitude”

(1993, p. 6-7). On the other hand, institutions have the tendency to homogenise practice and centralise resources to support teaching through the establishment of teaching and learning centres (Geertsema, this volume), preferring to provide institutional-level support instead of devoting resources to individual units.

## 2. SoTL leadership: departmental/institutional SoTL practice and culture; regional/international SoTL practice and leadership

The second kind of local-global contexts pertain to SoTL practices and SoTL leadership. At local levels, SoTL as “didactic inquiry” of classroom practices is contrasted in Geertsema and Felten’s paper with SoTL’s potential to address the urgent and enduring challenges facing the world (Felten & Geertsema, 2023). Context matters even more here. Not only must SoTL as pedagogical inquiry be sensitive to specific classroom practices within and beyond particular geographical locations, but the movement of SoTL practices across borders also requires careful attention. At the level of leadership, this includes fostering cross-border learning, collaboration, mentoring, and the exchange of ideas and policy in ways that take cultural sensitivities within specific domains into account. In short, context matters at all levels of SoTL practice and leadership.

As Geertsema puts it, educators as disciplinary experts are encouraged to share their work and exert influence both locally and globally. Such work should be subject to peer critique, be evidence- and literature-informed, and while such practices need to be understood in context, such engagement “can at the same time transcend those contexts and become ‘cosmopolitan’ through international connections” (Geertsema, this book).

This paper aims to discuss issues relating to the positionality of SoTL practice and leadership at both the local and global levels. We argue that in addition to contextual considerations, we need to be mindful about barriers and risks of going ‘international’ especially if we are invested in maintaining the ‘I’ in an international society like ISSOTL. We will suggest a number of key strategies that ensure a balance between maintaining the ‘I’ and yet not losing sight of divergent perspectives. In short, we believe that the fine balance between maintaining locally relevant practice and promoting inclusive global connections is a key part of the vision of the possible. As a SoTL leader, you may recognise these tensions in your own efforts to balance local relevance with global engagement.

### **Practising SoTL in context**

We recognise that context is crucial, not just in teaching and learning but across all aspects of scholarship. Even in seemingly homogeneous classrooms, diversity exists in terms of background, experience, thinking, attitude, motivation, mindsets,

and aspirations of both students and instructors. Similarly, we acknowledge that the interactions and relationships between students and instructors, as well as the interpretation of educational materials and assessment tasks, are distinctive to each classroom and cannot be easily replicated elsewhere.

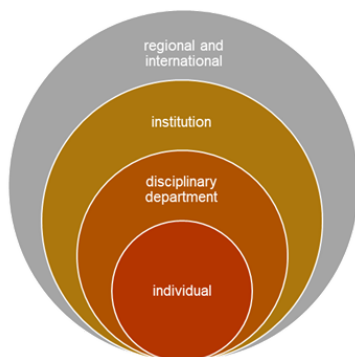
Nonetheless, while these elements are rooted in local contexts and practices, sharing them involves considering their place within the broader framework of the institution, the local community, and the global context. This process of internationalisation is intriguing and requires a deep understanding of what can be effectively expanded to benefit the global teaching and learning community as a whole, and what should remain as an individual's unique signature pedagogy (Shulman, 2005).

A straightforward way to address the local-global conundrum is to view classroom teaching and learning as local, while considering the literature that informs our pedagogies and approaches as global. Alternatively, we can look for commonalities that resonate with the global community. However, we contend that this process is more complex than it seems. Our view is that it is essential to develop a common understanding and language between the local and global communities, which should evolve organically rather than being imposed on any of the respective groups.

Figure 1 illustrates our conceptual representation of the local-global relationship. We consider individual instructors as the central focus. Their actions at the ground level have the most significant impact on student experience and learning. At the immediate outer circle is the department. As instructors associated with various disciplinary departments, our thoughts and approaches to teaching and learning may be shaped by the perspectives of our specific domains, as well as by our own educational experiences and philosophies. Chng and Looker (2013), referencing Poole's quip on accents, remind us that everyone has an accent. This highlights the need for the international SoTL community to acknowledge the power dynamics involved, especially if internationalisation is viewed as a hierarchy instead of a two-way communication. Beyond the department at the outer circle is the institution. Instructors are influenced by institutional values, cultures, structures, practices, and norms. Because the influence exerted by the institution may be significant, we argue that a didactic approach might be preferred over a top-down approach. Similarly, at the outermost circle, at the regional and international levels where interactions with other stakeholders transcend hierarchical boundaries, a shift is crucial. It is especially important for those in this circle to recognise contextual differences and take the lead in engaging in dialogues with others to achieve harmonisation. This approach ensures there is enough common ground for effective conversations to occur while still maintaining the particularities of local practices.

**Figure 1.**

### *Conceptual representation of local-global connection*



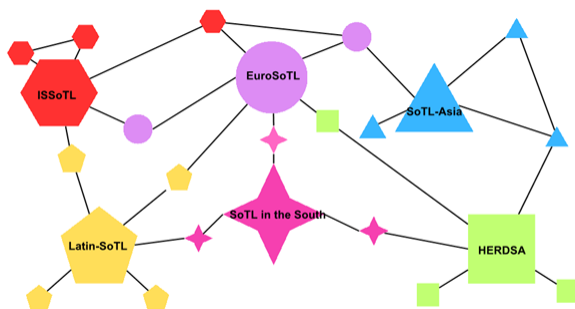
In the interest of diversity and inclusion in any internationalisation effort, we propose a shift away from the “orders of influence” depicted in Figure 1 to a flatter, *networked community model*. We aim to present strategies for gaining recognition of local practices by the global community while avoiding homogenisation but instead to appreciate and value distinct norms of practice across different contexts.

### **From orders of influence to a networked community model**

What then is the shift we are envisioning here that can help to achieve a balance and an appreciation of distinct norms even as we internationalise? Figure 2 below captures what we are proposing as a vision of a possible future where local practices from all over the world form the points of this global network map, with each point having an equal voice in contributing to the global conversation on teaching, learning and scholarship.

### **Figure 2.**

#### *Networked community model*



This networked community model expresses a flat structure that admits equal knowledge points or centres of influence. For purely illustrative purposes, each big circle, square, pentagon, triangle etc. represents the different geographical, cultural, and ideological sources of local practices, such as (clockwise from top left) ISSOTL (red hexagon), EuroSoTL (purple circle), SoTL-Asia (blue triangle), HERDSA (green square), SoTL in the South (pink star), and Latin-SoTL (yellow pentagon). Each of these are linked to other networks that are geographically closest to them and for which they, relatively speaking, may have much more intense interactions than with others due to the proximity. For example, SoTL-Asia has much more direct links to the local practices in parts of Asia like Japan (small blue triangle on top right) and Malaysia (small blue triangle on lower right). Similarly, ISSOTL has much more direct connections with Canadian SoTL (small red pentagon on the top left) and other organisations in the US, like POD (red pentagon on the top right). All these in turn are also connected to other practices, such as SoTL-Asia's connection to Australian organisations like HERDSA (small blue triangle on far right). This form of mapping expresses the vision that no one point of influence is a dominant centre and no other points of influence are margins, thus avoiding a mindset that there are points in the network that are somehow more important than others, and also captures the different accents (and hence different local practices) across the globe. This global connectivity outlook then enables the possibility of partnerships and collaborations, and multi-directional knowledge flows based on mutual respect, that the concentric inner-outer circle mapping does not currently allow. We believe that once we have a networked community model in mind, we are all better placed to envision the international in the way we look beyond our shores, towards others in the global landscape, in developing our own expertise even as we contribute to enrich others. This model invites SoTL leaders to see themselves not as representatives of centres or margins, but as participants with equal responsibility for sustaining respectful, multi-directional knowledge exchange.

In the following section, we discuss a number of strategies that we hope will enable the shift from a concentric, orders of influence model to this networked global community model that embodies principles of collaboration and mutual respect.

## **Maintaining the 'I': Strategies for respecting local practices and promoting global Leadership**

### Mindset change

Before instituting change in any organization, it is crucial that the core team/ISSOTL Board should take the time to critically evaluate and review its vision and mission. It is important to ask 'why' – in this case, why do we want to have an international perspective, to maintain the 'I' in ISSOTL? It is helpful for the

ISSOTL Board (and the membership) to be persuaded that going global will be consistent with its purpose and aspirations as an organization. Assuming that there is strong agreement that maintaining the “I” is consonant with its purpose, developing strategies to walk the “I” talk becomes a natural next step.

To adopt a global perspective means a commitment to an open-minded, inclusion policy that welcomes perspectives ‘not like ours’. One strategy to combat exclusions and to promote inclusivity is for all parties to critically undertake an honest review not just about what inclusion means but also to understand what inclusion really takes. Defining inclusion is oftentimes a lot easier said than done – it is all too easy to say we embrace everyone and to signal our commitment by creating partnerships with others outside our geographical and/or cultural and/or ideological frames. It is not as easy to practise and maintain the relationship on an equal footing as a matter of routine, because the three key barriers of geography, culture and ideology (Chng & Looker, 2013) remain hard barriers that require intentional effort to overcome.

As SoTL leaders, the questions we need to ask include: Why do you/we want to join or include others on a global platform? What do you/we want to learn from people beyond your/our shores? How can you/we congregate as equals, with mutual respect? While this suggestion to review at the level of vision and purpose may sound abstract, we believe that until each of us confronts what inclusion means, what it is really for and about, the ‘I’ in ‘International’ may remain an attractive feel-good theory rather than meaningful practice.

Apart from this frank review of vision and mission, a concrete step to take is to commit to countering any homogenizing tendencies by actively valuing difference and developing knowledge of distinct norms. Chng and Looker (2013) have iterated exclusionary practices that resulted from geographical distance between networks, methodological variations (i.e., views about what counts as valid methodologies), and ideological differences that have posed challenges to maintaining the ‘I’ in ‘international’. There are obvious merits and motivations for all practitioners sited at the centres and in far-flung locations to gather as one international community. For the centres, marginal communities are “unexplored audiences” (introduced by Nancy Chick and Gary Poole, cited in Chng & Looker, 2013, p. 137). We prefer “unexplored participants” (Chng & Looker, 2013: p. 137) as such communities not only possess great potential in terms of quantity, as knowledge takers/learners for the expansion of community networks, but they, as knowledge givers/educators also can be expected to bring with them quality practices that can enrich the global community in multivariate ways. At the same time, those situated at the ‘margins of SoTL discourse’, away from the predefined knowledge centres of influence, desire to be a part of global memberships not just for prestige and knowledge exchange but also to have their practice and leadership be recognised and validated through being associated with the pre-established centres of dominance. However, while becoming

connected as a fee-paying, card-carrying member may be easy enough for some (i.e., the paywall barrier blocking access for some), there remains a troublesome feeling that one may be valued as a membership token count (i.e., margins enhance the ‘diversity’ profile of international associations) but not for their ideas as thought leaders in the field. There is sad to say, a homogenising tendency that raises its head in the relation between centres and margins that greatly dilutes the aspirations of a truly inclusive community. But if all of us were to adopt the networked community model proposed here, we stand a better chance of changing our own mindset; and re-orienting the way we view the different locations and sources of knowledge, not as centres and margins but as different and valued, as equals. The SoTL leaders located within the networked community mapped out in Figure 2 can and must take the lead in infusing this global mindset of give and take; and infuse this culture into their mission and vision plans, as well as think and talk from our specific locations with the wider world in view. We must speak the language and walk the talk of inclusion if we want to be global in outlook. Inclusion starts with each of us, especially those of us who lead.

One way in which we can actively avoid homogenising different practices that can result in unintentional exclusion is for key members in organizations like ISSOTL to engage in unconscious bias training, through intentional exposure to a wider range of different practices. We elaborate on this strategy in the segments below when we discuss how each of us could improve access and step up on outreach efforts. To summarise, what this section has tried to underscore is a simple call for key players in any organization that aspires to be “international” to broaden their own intellectual horizon and to intentionally embrace a truly inclusive mindset.

### Improving accessibility

When the late Brenda Leibowitz founded the *Journal of SoTL in the South* in 2017, she compellingly argued that although “the geopolitics of knowledge is being opened up for questioning, there is continual deference to the globally renowned, and scant attention is given to institutional contexts and what these contexts mean for scholarship and for teaching and learning” (2017, p. 1). Even as South African universities were responding to students’ demands for the decolonization of higher education (Simpson & Looker, 2018), Leibowitz astutely raised a crucial issue concerning the accessibility of SoTL in both global and local contexts.

To cultivate an inclusive mindset, we think the first important step that all of us need to take is to understand that exclusion and lack of access are not just a matter of physical distance. Accessibility encompasses not only geographical and technological privileges and limitations but also cultural and ideological congruences and differences. Even if certain issues are more prominent in some

local contexts (e.g., uneven wifi access and relatively lower device ownership in developing parts of Asia), fostering dialogues and discussions for members of both global and local communities can make it possible for the issue to be more broadly shared and deliberated, and that such an issue is not of low importance among identified SoTL ‘grand challenges’ or is (unintentionally) seen as bracketed within certain geographical zones. Student learning and support is after all a global concern for all of us as educators and SoTL practitioners. It is therefore imperative that platforms created for an enriched SoTL discourse allow for mutual exchanges of ideas and experiences, as well as diverse voices to be heard and recognised.

So how do we enhance accessibility? We suggest three concrete strategies.

The first strategy involves redistributing power within globally established and mature SoTL networks, such as ISSOTL, SoTL Canada, and HERDSA, to include those on the ‘margins,’ like China SoTL, SoTL Asia, EuroSoTL, Latin SoTL, and the Middle East and the Global South. This can be achieved through intentional outreach efforts and the establishment of more financially accessible and flexible membership options. Additionally, regular dialogues and sharing sessions can be organized for members of these communities to connect, exchange good practices, and discuss challenges within local contexts – SoTL Asia free zoom talk series led and hosted by the SoTL leaders at the National University of Singapore in recent years is a case in point. Furthermore, there could be more intentional conversations on how these local experiences and insights can be contextualized and made relatable and transferable to an international community.

While conceptually, this may appear straightforward, it is important to be mindful of Granovetter’s (1973) caution that the connection between micro and macro structures of organisations does not occur naturally; neither is it inherently linear. Granovetter (1973) argues that despite attempts to examine what happens at and between macro and micro levels, the connection between them and the evolution of smaller interaction networks into larger ones remain largely ambiguous. This relates to Roxå & Mårtensson’s (2014) contention that identifying the meso level is crucial to effectively connect the macro and micro levels in the context of an institution. However, we do not mean for the macro, meso, and micro structure to be hierarchical. Instead, it is an illustration of the relationship between and among these levels which underscores the importance of connection and accessibility. Consequently, this highlights the need for intentional and careful cultivation of trusting relationships within and among global and local SoTL and T&L communities.

In line with this is the following second strategy: Conferences can serve as an effective means to facilitate and enhance rapport-building community development. Traditionally, international SoTL conferences have predominantly been held in

North America and English-speaking, Anglo-dominant countries. For instance, throughout its 20-year history, ISSOTL has consistently hosted its conferences in English-speaking, Anglo locations. Even when ISSOTL conferences have taken place outside North America, they have still been held in Anglo regions. While this trend does not necessarily indicate exclusivity on the part of ISSOTL as there are often real challenges in landing a host, it does highlight a pattern that could foster the perception, even if unwarranted, that established SoTL communities continue to reinforce their stature and validity, and perpetuating the continued marginalization of other communities. We propose either actively inviting scholars from less established communities to global gatherings as keynote speakers and featured panellists, both of which we are happy to acknowledge, have been more actively attempted and accomplished in recent years or hosting such conferences in locations outside the North American continent by more intentionally pursuing these as longer-term goals. Hosting an international conference is daunting for those of us located outside the centres of discourse – we suggest that enlightened SoTL leaders seeking inclusion as an explicit policy be prepared to appoint individual members as ‘conference mentors’ to guide and support such ‘non-traditional’ hosts just as we as educators are prepared to support students and faculty who are in need of additional support. We believe these gestures could encourage the development of newer, emerging networks and further enhance existing but lesser known ones. As noted by Granovetter (1973), there is strength in weak ties if they are carefully and actively nurtured.

Our third strategy focuses on developing a shared vocabulary and discourse that we argue must evolve through a dynamic process of continuous co-creation, rather than a top-down approach. Chng et al. (2020) have highlighted the challenges of embracing a truly international scholarship of teaching and learning, with a fundamental issue being vocabulary and discourse. Differences in linguistic habits, institutional cultures, and ideologies can lead to difficulties in understanding the language used within dominant SoTL communities. The concept of ‘scholarship’ central to SoTL, may not be inherently clear to every member of the global community (cf. the meaning of scholarship in Swedish SoTL communities, for example). Although there is explicit acknowledgment and tolerance of differences, there has not been any proposal to nuance the ‘S’ in SoTL. For instance, Felten’s (2013) five principles of SoTL practice are often used as the starting point for ‘doing SoTL’. It is important to remember that these principles, while accepted as the “SoTL canon” (similar to the SoTL Primer being considered essential starting points), have originated from the dominant SoTL community that has traditionally defined SoTL discourse and practice. What each of us can do is to actively make known through our talks and writing the ‘local’ vocabularies that define local practices and to explain to an international audience what our terms mean and how they relate to the global discourse. For example, in Singapore, we refer to our researchers and educators as “academic staff” (as opposed to administrative staff).

But when we converse or write in a global setting, we are asked to or automatically default to terms like ‘faculty’ or ‘faculty members’, thus aligning ourselves to the dominant discourse without making effort to acculturate the global audience. We believe that by actively stating what we mean and being allowed by others to use terms that define local work and life are intentional acts that can evolve into a default practice that will enrich the SoTL vocabulary and discourse, and the community in myriad ways. Change, like inclusion, is intentional and starts with us.

Our critical stance on this issue should not be viewed as criticism. Rather, we aim to highlight the unintentional exclusions that arise when any community seeks to characterize its good work and form its identity, especially when striving for global reach. Despite being unintentional, such exclusions often result in outcomes contrary to what maintaining and sustaining an ‘I’ in an international context requires. If you are like us (i.e., the authors of this chapter) situated at the SoTL margins, the experience of having to accommodate norms not defined by ourselves, and to be subject to a form of translation is all too common as to have become ‘unremarkable’. Our aim in surfacing these critiques and suggestions is simply to help to redefine what being global/international entails. In short, deliberate efforts and shared intentions are necessary from both dominant communities and those on the margins to improve accessibility to SoTL. In the next section, we will expand on strategies for outreach efforts that aim to strengthen engagement, networking and global community development.

### Connect, partner and collaborate: Intentional engagement and networking

With the advent of teleconferencing tools, especially post-COVID-19 pandemic, the geographical separation between SoTL colleagues has narrowed. The community has grown to be adept at using technology, such as recordings and webinars, to engage colleagues across continents and time zones. The challenge that needs to be addressed resides instead in the underlying cultural and knowledge barriers among SoTL practitioners of different backgrounds. Rather than allowing these pockets at the margins to spin off to “lead from different shores” (Chng et al., 2020), if we want to maintain a global community, we will need to be intentional in how we seek to redefine our terms and practice.

A key strategy is to place a renewed emphasis on creating inclusive and connected SoTL communities. SoTL leaders can achieve this by designating ambassadors in each of our communities to put time and work into crossing borders into less familiar or emerging SoTL communities. Such communities hold immense potential for the international T&L and SoTL movement. The ‘global South’, for example, has presented many important works which include the very important work of Brenda Leibowitz and her South African colleagues who front the journal SoTL

in the South and Swedish colleagues like Katarina Mårtensson who started the Euro-SoTL conference series that bind the European community in its specific SoTL practices and leadership. Even informal communities that have been formed, including SoTL-Asia and emerging communities like Latin SoTL, all spoke to the richness of the global South movement. On one hand, these communities seek to find their own voice in the SoTL world; on the other, they are actively attempting to expand their expertise and connect with established SoTL leadership circles. The internationalisation of SoTL will largely entail active engagement with these developing pockets of SoTL activities.

Yet, these communities remain at the margins and it speaks of the way reality – locational, cultural, ideological – keeps us in our places. It also underscores the work the Centres have to do to admit such leadership from the South as legitimate in its own right. Among well-meaning colleagues and like-minded practitioners, there is indeed acceptance, even admiration. There have been good outreach efforts in recent years and some attempts at exchange and collaborations, with the capacity building effort via the hosting of collaborative writing groups as a means to build SoTL capacity and cross-borders collaborations (Marquis et al., 2017; Marquis et al., 2014) and the inclusion of Latin SoTL for instance in ISSOTL 2024. We do see a level of crossings that have materialised in terms of the diversity of keynote speakers at ISSOTL conferences (including Oscar Jerez at ISSOTL 2024-Indiana, Kasturi Behari-Leak at ISSOTL 2019-Atlanta, and Huang Hoon Chng at ISSOTL 2015-Melbourne) that have given voice to those situated in ‘the South’. Such engagements bring about a greater understanding of differing contexts and promote subsequent collaborations (e.g., Huang Hoon Chng joined ISSOTL Board as Vice President-Asia Pacific from 2017 and the Presidential team from 2019-2022 due in no small way to the exposure she got at ISSOTL 2015-Melbourne). However, collaborations are often sporadic and remain an individual effort as ‘the usual suspects’ team up with ‘the usual suspects’ within the primary networks of choice, much like the way people often collaborate and cite their nearest professional friends (Chick et al., 2021). The fact remains that the inequalities that come with differential resources in terms of funds, and importantly, the respect at the level of culture, practice, voice and partnerships; and improved visibility still require a lot of work.

Furthermore, as SoTL networks proliferate and diversify, we suggest that these organisations connect and engage with each other. Establishing a constellation of networks as depicted in Figure 2 above allows resources and information to be shared and partnerships to be forged organically across members in different networks. Such ‘networks of networks’ enable efficient use of resources by minimising overlaps and providing opportunities for collaborative work within and across networks. At the local scale, organisations can tap into their networks to develop their faculty (Garland & Alestalo, 2020). Globally, it facilitates international and cross-cultural collaboration in research and development, such as

that offered by the World Education Research Association's International Research Networks (WERA, 2024). SoTL and T&L journal platforms are particularly promising platforms for enriching such networked communities. For example, journals like IJAD have been known to explicitly pitch their special volume calls to scholars from outside the North American continent to add their voice to the knowledge exchange (e.g., the International Journal for Academic Development for a list; a good example is Volume 26, Issue 4, 2021, a special issue edited by Singapore colleagues Johan Geertsema and Mark Gan on "Strategic Academic Development in Asia" featuring scholars from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Vietnam). Connecting these networks allows members to gain insights into the local context, which is critical in building a collaborative and inclusive SoTL environment. Unlike normative approaches that focus on connecting individuals, fostering engagement between networks promotes sustained partnership between organisations, especially after leadership renewals when representatives step down or leave the network. We strongly encourage the leadership teams in SoTL networks to prioritise engagement with other networks and explore avenues to create meaningful engagement with each other. For that matter, we urge every SoTL practitioner to look abroad to forge new ties and seek new avenues for ideas exchange (e.g., through visiting appointments or actively citing relevant works from further afield), so that at both the individual and leadership levels, the inclusion agenda is exhibited as a central tenet of SoTL scholarship.

Fundamentally, we are advocating for SoTL communities to go beyond merely connecting with others. We need to be more intentional in learning from and collaborating with each other to enrich our knowledge and practice of SoTL across cultures. Such an endeavour requires an open mind, a growth mindset, a sense of adventure, and intentional cultivation of relationships between networks, so that communities can make empathetic connections and provide mutual support. The dream of seeing an ISSOTL conference itself, hosted in Asia (not just Asia-Pacific) for example will require more intense work in persuasion, support, mentorship, and in acceptance from all parties.

## Epilogue

We began this paper with Geertsema's point that SoTL practice must necessarily consider its own context without fear of losing its potential for connecting with international practice. We iterated what we see is a hierarchical knowledge landscape that delineates a unilateral flow of expertise from pre-established centres to margins that underscores a form of practice that Bloch-Schulman (2012) has termed "transfer unfriendly" due to the neglect of contextual considerations. We advocated for a networked community model that we believe will open up a much broader range of possibilities for connection and collaboration, guided by principles

of diversity, inclusion and respect. In short, we are calling for a way to position individual SoTL practices vis-à-vis the practices of others in the networked community in a manner that is contextual, collegial and collaborative.

The strategies of mindset shift, improving accessibility and intentional outreach can go a long way towards reviewing our ‘why’ as an international organisation; overcoming both the physical and psychological barriers we may experience; and the stance we may choose to adopt towards the expanded international community we are eager to work with. Going and maintaining the “I” in an international society as we have said at the start, requires an investment from all of us – in terms of time, energy, and political will. The balance we seek between holding on to local sensitivities and reaching out to enact a truly global community is admittedly not an easy task. But if we are committed to a shared vision, we have reason to believe and hope that such a vision of the possible can be achieved if we walk the talk of fostering an inclusive community of international scholars.

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## Closing

### What Routes to Choose?

Andrea S. Webb and Irma Meijerman

After the chapters you've read and the reflections you've encountered, one theme should now feel unmistakable: leadership in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning rarely arrives with a title, a mandate, or a neat beginning. It appears first as attentiveness, then as initiative, and only later—as language catches up—as leadership. Much of what you may already be doing fits this pattern:

- You respond to a colleague's idea and help it travel a little further.
- You are asked what “counts” as SoTL and your answer shapes someone's next step.
- You convene people or hold a space where inquiry can be shared.
- You notice connections across projects that others haven't yet seen.
- You join a committee “because of how you think about teaching,” and that perspective changes the conversation.

None of this comes with a job title. All of it changes what becomes possible.

In this book, we traced how such work accumulates and becomes consequential—how engagement becomes leadership, how leadership is recognised (or not), and how it creates real, durable change in teaching and learning. Across diverse contexts, chapters, and perspectives, we have examined how this form of leadership takes shape at different levels—within individuals, across communities, and through institutional and international structures. We now return to the guiding questions that opened this book: When does engagement become leadership? Who decides what counts as leadership in SoTL—and on what grounds? And how can SoTL leadership create meaningful change across teaching, learning, and institutions?

### Looking Back on Our Route

#### Academic and SoTL leadership identities

Across the section, SoTL leadership emerges as a relational, developmental, and

boundary-crossing practice. In their case study, Rahul Pandit and Bo van Leeuwen offer reflective accounts from Utrecht University, describing their entry into SoTL through grants, mentorship, and communities of practice. Their narratives underscore the motivational power of recognition, role models, and collaborative inquiry, as well as the persistence required to balance SoTL with teaching demands and career precarity. Janice Miller-Young conceptualizes SoTL leadership within a complex “landscape of practice,” emphasizing that leadership is enacted through processes rather than positions. She highlights the importance of convening across disciplinary and cultural boundaries, fostering shared purpose, and using boundary objects to support collective learning and change. Key dispositions—such as openness, humility, and knowledgeability—support sustained collaboration, reflexivity, and attention to power, helping scholars formulate innovative questions and methodologies while developing hybrid identities as teacher-researcher-leaders. Tanya Lawlis presents a complementary narrative from the perspective of an Education-Focused (EF) academic navigating structural barriers such as heavy teaching loads, unclear expectations, and institutional undervaluation of SoTL. She outlines a set of targeted supports: a professional development calendar, grant programs, awards, and an EF Community of Practice. Together, these initiatives guide colleagues’ development as scholars by strengthening their theoretical understanding, building methodological capacity, and supporting the growth of scholarly identity. These initiatives have strengthened engagement, improved proposal quality, and expanded leadership capacity within the EF cohort. A complementary perspective is offered by van Houwelingen and colleagues, who shift attention from individual development towards collective and institutionally supported forms of SoTL engagement. Drawing on an interfaculty programme, the authors illustrate how educators take on advocate roles that support others in engaging with SoTL, acting as catalysts and community builders within their faculties. The chapter highlights key conditions for developing SoTL engagement—such as shared language, structured support, and the interplay between bottom-up and top-down approaches. In doing so, it positions SoTL leadership as a relational practice that connects people, ideas, and institutional levels, and shows how distributed roles can create pathways for participation and contribute to the gradual embedding of SoTL in institutional contexts.

Across the section, SoTL leadership emerges through practices that connect people, ideas, and practices across boundaries in order to improve teaching and learning. Miller-Young frames SoTL as a complex and adaptive landscape. Here, leadership does not depend on position, but on connecting practices, bringing people together, and creating boundary objects that support shared work. Learning is both the means and the result of this process. Lawlis operationalizes this vision institutionally: she tackles EF role challenges by designing structures (PD calendar, grants, awards, EF CoP) that cultivate methodological rigor and a scaffolded continuum from scholarly teaching to SoTL leadership. Her strategy shows how enabling conditions

and sustained communities translate integration into changed culture, practice, and confidence. Van Leeuwen and Pandit, together with van Houwelingen and colleagues, ground the theme in lived experience: entry points (small grants, SIGs, advocate roles), community formation, and iterative projects demonstrate how recognition, mentorship, and re-designed CoPs can overcome skepticism and workload pressures. Their narratives illustrate how integrative practices and identities take shape “from the middle,” reinforcing leadership as distributed and developmental. Together, these works argue for boundary-crossing, inclusive, and rigorous SoTL—anchored in communities, scaffolded pathways, and integrative leadership that elevates both individual growth and systemic change.

Throughout these chapters, leadership becomes visible not through formal designation, but through participation in relationships and communities that enable inquiry, collaboration, and change.

### Networks and communities in SoTL

The section frames SoTL leadership as a relational and collective practice that emerges through engagement in networks and communities. The chapters by Tierney, Thomson and colleagues, Lord, and McSweeney each illustrate how networks and communities create the conditions in which SoTL can develop, be sustained, and extend beyond individual practice. Tierney’s reflective narrative further demonstrates how transformative professional networks can be. Through personal stories of faculty learning communities, AdvanceHE (Higher Education Academy) networks, and educational development programmes, she shows how engaging with scholarly communities shaped her identity, expanded her understanding of teaching, and fostered long-term collegial relationships. Thomson and colleagues provide a complementary perspective by focusing on networks as spaces for informal learning, trust, and collaborative problem-solving within complex educational settings. Drawing on experiences in health professions education, they show how collegial relationships and cross-disciplinary collaboration help SoTL leaders navigate institutional complexity, sustain innovation, and support one another in everyday academic practice. McSweeney extends this discussion by positioning SoTL leadership itself as community work. Lord’s chapter offers a practical, research-informed guide to building and sustaining SoTL networks, distinguishing among formal networks, informal networks, and Communities of Practice (CoPs). Her focus is primarily on understanding how different kinds of networks function and what conditions support their effectiveness. She emphasises collaboration, shared goals, and institutional support as essential conditions for effective and lasting SoTL communities. Using the Community of Scholars (CoS) model, McSweeney argues more explicitly for the intentional cultivation of scholarly communities, highlighting how that SoTL leaders must

intentionally build, grow, and sustain communities that nurture belonging, mentorship, interdisciplinary collaboration, and scholarly identity development. All three authors emphasize that SoTL thrives through relationships: supportive networks expand individual capacity, enrich practice, and contribute to institutional and disciplinary change. Together, the chapters highlight how community-building—far from peripheral—is central to engaging meaningfully in SoTL.

A clear, unifying theme across the three chapters is that *SoTL is inherently relational work*. Whether framed as networks (Lord), communities (Tierney), or leadership structures (McSweeney), each author argues that meaningful engagement in SoTL depends on cultivating human connections that support inquiry, reflection, and growth. These communities provide emotional support, intellectual stimulation, and professional identity development—especially important in contexts where SoTL remains undervalued or poorly supported institutionally. The authors also stress that communities are not accidental: they require intentional design, collaborative goal-setting, inclusive communication practices, and shared ownership. Lord emphasises structural considerations for forming networks, while McSweeney articulates how leaders sustain communities through relational ethics, psychological safety, and responsiveness to members' evolving needs. Tierney's narrative demonstrates the lived impact of such communities, showing how they foster belonging and creativity even when formal institutional structures fall short. Together, the chapters suggest that SoTL communities are sites of possibility—places where educators imagine new pedagogical futures, bridge disciplinary borders, and collectively advance teaching and learning. Ultimately, the theme that emerges is one of *boundary-crossing connection*: SoTL flourishes when educators come together across roles, contexts, and identities to build collaborative, caring, and sustainable networks of practice. In this way, SoTL leadership emerges not primarily through formal roles, but through the intentional work of convening people, cultivating trust, and sustaining the relationships that allow scholarly communities to flourish.

### Institutional cultures and SoTL leadership

This section explores how institutional cultures shape, constrain, and enable SoTL. Kluijtmans' case study from Utrecht University traces a longer institutional journey toward valuing educational scholarship. Her narrative highlights the importance of infrastructure—centres for teaching and learning, professional development programs, grants, and recognition systems—in building a sustainable culture of evidence-informed teaching. She emphasizes how leadership grounded in scholarship can transform both formal structures and informal norms. Mårtensson & Roxå provide the theoretical backbone for this discussion. They argue that universities contain multiple micro-cultures and “local teaching and learning regimes,” which means that effective SoTL leadership works through frontstage and

backstage conversations, network effects, and persistent, locally anchored efforts to “go public” and gradually shift norms. Their chapter positions SoTL as cultural, developmental, and leadership-oriented, and offers meso-level tactics for aligning structures, incentives, and dialogue so that scholarly teaching becomes an institutional expectation rather than an individual exception. Briseño-Garzón and colleagues describe UBC’s SoTL Seed Program as a strategic response to two persistent barriers: faculty’s limited methodological preparation and the pressures of workload. Their program pairs faculty with trained graduate “SoTL Specialists,” creating a scaffolded, relational model of SoTL support that builds capacity, nurtures agency, and strengthens institutional culture. Dorner and colleagues focus on European contexts where SoTL often lacks formal recognition. They highlight grassroots leadership, mentoring programs, teaching certificates, and developmental observation models as strategies for creating opportunities in environments where teaching is undervalued. Their stories show that SoTL leadership frequently emerges from local, relational, and practice-based initiatives that gradually reshape institutional priorities.

Taken together, these chapters illustrate a shared theme: institutional culture —not funding alone— is the decisive factor in whether SoTL thrives, survives, or struggles at the margins. Despite varying national systems and institutional histories, all chapters show that SoTL gains traction when structures, people, and values are intentionally aligned. Formal support—centres for teaching and learning, competency frameworks, grants, recognition systems, and professional development programs—provides necessary infrastructure, but they are not sufficient alone. Equally essential is relational leadership, enacted through mentoring, partnerships, communities of practice, and cross-disciplinary alliances. These interpersonal forms of support cultivate trust, agency, and shared responsibility. The chapters collectively show that SoTL often begins in small, localized actions—pairing faculty with graduate researchers, designing a teaching certificate, creating a peer-feedback forum—but these acts accumulate into cultural change when consistently nurtured. The University of British Columbia operationalizes this by coupling money with relational capacity (student–faculty partnerships, iterative evaluation, dissemination venues), translating support into habit-forming scholarly conversations and project momentum. Utrecht University demonstrates how senior, evidence-informed leadership can embed SoTL through integrated centres, career pathways, and recognition and rewards, signalling its value in both formal and informal arenas. Where recognition is limited, distributed forms of leadership — through mentoring, teaching certificates, developmental peer observation, and cross-institutional networks—can still grow pockets of excellence that gradually re-norm local practice. Mårtensson and Roxå’s chapter on organizational cultures helps explain why these strategies work. Universities are systems of semi-autonomous micro-cultures; change is negotiated through trusted networks, frontstage/backstage talk, and repeated opportunities to “go public” locally so that

new artifacts (portfolios, seminars, repositories) and routines take root. A second unifying insight is that SoTL bridges research and teaching by inviting practitioners to study their own educational environments. When institutions value this work—through recognition, workload structures, and leadership modelling—faculty are empowered to approach teaching with scholarly curiosity rather than compliance. Ultimately, the theme across all the chapters is that transforming teaching culture requires both institutional commitment and distributed, evidence-informed leadership that makes teaching visible, valued, and intellectually vibrant.

The through-line is a both/and: building infrastructure and recognition while cultivating relationships and routines. Effective SoTL leadership, therefore, aligns structures, time, and status with everyday scholarly dialogue, making teaching visible, discussable, and intellectually consequential—until the cultural default is that teaching itself is a site of scholarship. At the same time, these institutional efforts do not develop in isolation, but are increasingly shaped through international networks, collaborations, and conversations about teaching and learning.

### SoTL leadership in an international context

These international perspectives further illustrate that SoTL leadership is shaped by place, context, relationships, and shared interests, while also revealing the broader conversations and collaborations through which the field and region continues to evolve. This section extends the discussion of SoTL leadership beyond institutional contexts to the international dimensions of SoTL practice. The chapters collectively highlight how SoTL leadership is shaped by cultural, linguistic, geopolitical, and institutional differences, and how engaging across these differences requires reflexivity, collaboration, and contextual awareness. Together, the contributions show that international SoTL leadership is not simply about expanding networks globally, but also about navigating different understandings of teaching, learning, scholarship, and academic identity. Young's case study foregrounds the importance of national and institutional context through reflections on cross-institutional SoTL collaboration in South Africa. Drawing attention to inequalities in resources, institutional histories, and differing understandings of student success and professional development, he illustrates how SoTL leadership must remain attentive to local realities and contextual differences. The chapter highlights the importance of dialogue and shared understanding when collaborating across institutions and educational systems. Geertsema offers a more theoretical exploration of the tensions between the local and the global in SoTL. His chapter examines how SoTL is shaped by disciplinary traditions, institutional cultures, and geopolitical dynamics, particularly for scholars working outside the historical centres of SoTL in the Global North. By distinguishing between leadership *of* SoTL and leadership *through* SoTL,

he argues for broader and more inclusive understandings of educational leadership that recognise relational, distributed, and practice-based forms of influence. The chapter also emphasises the importance of context-sensitive support, collegiality, and international dialogue in sustaining SoTL work. Schrum and colleagues focus on practical pathways into international SoTL engagement, particularly for emerging scholars and contexts where regional and institutional support and recognition for SoTL may still be developing. Using the metaphor of “dipping a toe in the water,” the chapter presents SoTL leadership as a process of building confidence, scholarly identity, and community through accessible forms of participation such as reading, networking, mentoring, conference participation, and publication. Their contribution highlights how relational support and intentional inclusion can help broaden participation in international SoTL communities. Chng and colleagues further challenge us to consider the challenges and possibilities of genuinely international SoTL communities. Focusing on issues of language, participation, and inclusion, the chapter highlights how international SoTL spaces are often shaped by implicit norms and assumptions that may privilege particular academic traditions and forms of communication. They argue for more inclusive and dialogic approaches to international collaboration that create space for diverse voices, perspectives, and ways of engaging in SoTL.

Taken together, these chapters position SoTL leadership as both contextual and connective. They show that leadership in SoTL requires sensitivity to local realities while also engaging in broader conversations that cross institutional, disciplinary, linguistic, and national boundaries. In doing so, the section reinforces one of the central themes of this book: that SoTL leadership emerges through relationships, shared inquiry, and the collective work of creating more inclusive and contextually responsive cultures of teaching and learning. Together, these chapters further show that SoTL leadership is shaped by context, relationships, and shared inquiry, while also highlighting the importance of international conversations and collaborations in the ongoing development of the field. These international perspectives therefore not only extend the discussion of SoTL leadership, but also bring into sharper focus many of the themes that have emerged throughout this book.

### **So, what have we learned about SoTL Leadership?**

Leadership in SoTL emerges from repeated, situated acts: asking better questions about learning, inquiring into one’s teaching, inviting others into that inquiry, and sharing what is learned. Across the chapters, we saw that this is not a switch that flips but a practice that deepens. Credibility grows from curiosity; influence follows from contribution; leadership takes shape through relationships that hold and move ideas. The chapters also show that there is no single route into SoTL leadership: leadership can emerge through teaching practice, mentoring, advocacy, curriculum

work, research, community-building, or simply by creating spaces where others can learn and connect.

Rather than a positional authority, SoTL leadership is relational work—work that translates, brokers, and mobilises across contexts, communities, and continents. SoTL Leaders connect people and projects; they make knowledge travel; they help disparate efforts cohere into shared purpose. When leaders encounter constraints, the most effective responses we saw were coalitional: small groups making coordinated moves—creating micro-infrastructures (e.g., cross-course inquiry cycles, shared rubrics, brown-bag series), documenting outcomes, and using evidence to invite allies and decision-makers into the conversation. Whether convening communities of practice and scholarship, aligning curriculum renewal with SoTL findings, or linking local inquiries to institutional priorities, SoTL Leaders create routes through which scholarship—and scholars—can move. And few leaders stay in one place. Most move fluidly across various networks, translating insights from one to another and helping people see how their local work connects to wider change.

Across the chapters, leadership appears more often as distributed than concentrated—more influential than formally acknowledged. Many contributors describe relational work that emerges in response to institutional priorities or directives. This creates both tensions and opportunities. Distributed leadership can be resilient, creative, and inclusive. At the same time, it requires coordination, advocacy, and forms of stewardship that support people, relationships, and communities over time.

### Patterns, Principles, and Practices of SoTL Leaders

The cases, theories, and practices described throughout the book converge on a set of commitments that make SoTL Leadership both effective and humane. We name them here as principles for practice—not a prescriptive model, but a set of anchors to return to as contexts and roles shift.

1. Lead with authenticity. Bring your values to the surface. Be transparent about what you know, what you're learning, and where you're unsure. Authenticity builds trust, and trust changes what groups can attempt together. SoTL Leadership is not only about direction—it is also about stewardship. Protect the people you work with, the time you commit, and build structures that support the next generation of SoTL Leaders.
2. Cultivate networks, not just projects. Projects end; networks persist. Invest in relationships and shared infrastructures that enable ongoing collaboration and learning.
3. Broker across boundaries. Work the edges—between disciplines, units,

roles, and geographies. Mobilise insights from one space to another; make invisible alignments visible; translate language across communities. Ask, “How does this micro insight matter at meso, macro, and mega levels?” and “What mega-level conversations should inform our micro decisions?”

4. Make the work legible. Name the leadership you (and others) are doing. Document impacts on learners, programmes, and policy. Make pathways for recognition.

These principles are not sequential; they are mutually reinforcing. They describe SoTL leadership as an ecology of practice in which inquiry, connection, and care produce enduring change.

### **An Invitation to your next adventure**

This book has argued that SoTL leadership is not exclusive terrain. It is a set of evolving practices available to all who care deeply about learning and are willing to work with others to improve it. If you recognise yourself in the cases and chapters — good. You are already on the path.

To carry this work forward, consider these closing prompts:

- Where is your most compelling “why” right now? What SoTL need or opportunity draws your attention?
- Who are your natural co-travellers? Which people could you invite into a next inquiry?
- What boundary could you broker? Between which groups or contexts would a small bridge make a big difference? What one step would convert your ideas into movement?
- How will you make your work visible? What’s your plan to share insights and invite others to adapt them?

The questions that opened this book do not lead to singular answers. Across the chapters, the responses have been plural, situated, and deeply relational. Engagement becomes leadership when it connects people and ideas into shared purpose and movement. What comes to count as leadership is shaped, in part, by how we name, document, recognise, and sustain this work. Meaningful change emerges when inquiry, connection, and care are sustained across the micro, meso, macro, and mega levels.

SoTL leadership creates connections across borders: between disciplines and roles,

between projects and policy, between institutions and the wider scholarly community. It is undertaken by people like you—curious, committed, and collaborative—who make routes where none existed, and widen them so others can travel. For many readers, SoTL leadership may already be present in the work they do every day, even if they have not yet named it as such. May the practices and possibilities in these pages help you locate yourself on the map, take your next step, and, in doing so, help the rest of us move, too.

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With appreciation,  
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Bo van Leeuwen has worked as a junior teacher in anatomy and physiology at Utrecht University's Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in the Netherlands since 2019. Alongside this role, he has been a PhD student since 2023. His research focuses on teaching and learning in anatomy education, with a particular interest in spatial knowledge acquisition and the use of technologies, such as augmented reality, to enhance instructional methods and improve students' anatomical comprehension.

**David X. Lemmons**, George Mason University, United States of America

David X. Lemmons is an academic librarian and a PhD candidate in higher education at George Mason University. They serve as Instruction Coordinator in University Libraries, where their work centers on information literacy in the undergraduate writing classroom and on supporting the teaching development of library instructors. Their dissertation research examines how academic librarians build and sustain communities of practice through peer-to-peer connection, partnerships with faculty, and engagement with SoTL as a scholarly community. David is a co-author of the recent book *Instructional Design for Teaching Information Literacy Online: A Student-Centered Approach*, which applies instructional design principles to online library instruction.

**Janet Lord**, Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom

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Professor Janet Lord is deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education and for the faculty of Health and Education at Manchester Metropolitan University, and Professor of Digitally Enhanced Education. She holds firm beliefs about the importance of education and health being the cornerstones of a civilised society, and her work is always values driven. Janet worked as a teacher for many years, specialising in the social sciences and subsequently completed her doctorate in education at the University of Manchester. Janet has considerable experience in leadership, in schools, in Higher Education Institutions and in other sectors. Janet's writing and research concern educational disadvantage, teacher identity and agency, communities of practice, and digital pedagogies.

**Katarina Mårtensson**, Lund University, Sweden

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Katarina Mårtensson is professor of higher education and academic developer at Lund University in Sweden. Her work includes supporting academic and organisational development through leading programmes on teaching and learning

in higher education, scholarship of teaching and learning, and leadership. Her research focuses on the role of social networks, academics' professional development, academic microcultures, and educational leadership. Katarina is a founding member of the EuroSoTL Network, past Co-President of the International Society for Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, and previously a co-editor of its journal *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*. She was also a recipient of the 2025 Spirit of ICED Award, in recognition of her leadership in educational development internationally.

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Dr. Jill McSweeney is an Assistant Director at the Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, and an Assistant Professor of Wellness in the Dr. Jo Watts Williams School of Education at Elon University. Jill has been working in the field of academic development for over a decade, holding multiple leadership positions in SoTL networks. She actively publishes in the area of the scholarship of educational development and the scholarship of teaching and learning. She is currently an Associate Editor for *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*.

**Irma Meijerman**, Irma Meijerman Consultancy & Training

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Irma Meijerman is an independent consultant and trainer in higher education, working with educators, teams and organisations on curriculum design, SoTL, and professional development. She has been running her own practice since November 2025, supporting evidence-informed approaches to improving learning and teaching in ways that lead to lasting change in everyday practice.

She is a former Principal Fellow at the Centre for Academic Teaching and Learning (CAT) at Utrecht University, where she focused on the development and institutional embedding of SoTL. As associate professor in Pharmaceutical Sciences, she contributed to curriculum innovation, honours education, and the professional development of university teachers. With a background in toxicology and biomedical research, she brings an insider perspective on academic practice, combined with extensive experience in designing and improving higher education.

Irma is Chair of the EuroSoTL Network and former Vice-President Europe of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) and has been actively involved in building SoTL communities and practices across Europe.

**Janice Miller-Young**, University of Alberta, Canada

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Janice is a Professor in Mechanical Engineering and the current Director, Engineering Experiential Learning in her faculty. She has served as a Director of a Centre for Teaching and Learning and an Institute for SoTL, and has engaged in SoTL since 2009.

**Gorana Mistic**, University of Glasgow, Scotland

Gorana Mistic is an Academic Developer at Adam Smith Business School at the University of Glasgow where she leads the Teaching Development Programme for Graduate Teaching Assistants. Previously, she worked at the Central European University in Budapest as a Postdoctoral Fellow in Academic Development, and at Bard College Berlin as Education Manager of OLIVE-UP (university preparatory programme for refugees).

**Sarah Nash**, University of Sydney, Australia

Sarah is an Associate Lecturer and Certified Practising Speech Pathologist whose teaching focuses on practice education and professional learning. She is the Health Professions Education for Speech Pathology at the University of Sydney and is developing her Scholarship of Teaching and Learning identity through postgraduate study and research in reflective practice, and the student placement experience. Her involvement in cross-disciplinary SoTL communities and Work Integrated Learning networks strengthens her belief that supportive partnerships encourage educators to be more effective reflective practitioners. She is currently exploring students' perspectives on learning how to critically reflect during placements and looks forward to sharing this work.

**Rahul Pandit**, Utrecht University, the Netherlands

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Rahul Pandit is Assistant Professor at University Medical Center Utrecht and Medical Fellow at University College Utrecht in the Netherlands. With a disciplinary background in pharmacology, his work focuses on integrating biomedical sciences with patient perspectives, community engagement, and societal dimensions of health in medical and biomedical education. He contributes to curriculum development and educational leadership across multiple undergraduate programs. His scholarship in teaching and learning focuses on authentic learning, community-engaged education, inclusive pedagogies, and innovative approaches

to pharmacology teaching. Rahul has received multiple educational grants and teaching awards in recognition of his contributions to medical education.

**Natasha Pestonji-Dixon**, University of British Columbia, Canada

Natasha is an evaluation and research consultant at the University of British Columbia. She supports the design, implementation, analysis, and dissemination of teaching and learning research and evaluation projects. She is also part of the Institute for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning leadership team, and helps manage the fantastic team of SoTL Specialists, including professional development support, mentorship, and resource development. She has a PhD in Cognitive Psychology from the University of British Columbia, where she studied decision-making.

**Torgny Roxå**, Lund University, Sweden

Torgny Roxå, is a professor at Lund University Faculty of Engineering (Sweden) and has 37 years of experience in academic development. Research focuses on strategic change in teaching cultures within academic organisations, significant networks, microcultures, and student evaluations of teaching. He has organized and taught several professional development activities for Academic Developers in Sweden and internationally. Together with Katarina Mårtensson, he received the award for Article of the Year, 2017, by the International Journal for Academic Development. In 2022 he received the Spirit of ICED Award for “outstanding contributions to” educational development in higher education globally.

**Kelly Schrum**, George Mason University, United States of America

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Dr. Kelly Schrum is Assistant Provost for Graduate Academic Affairs and a professor of higher education at George Mason University. In this role, she works closely with faculty and staff across all colleges to strengthen graduate programs, support student success, and advance Mason’s standing as a leader in graduate education. A historian by training, her research and teaching focus on graduate education, the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), digital pedagogy, and digital humanities. She is the recipient of George Mason University’s David J. King Teaching Award, Teaching Excellence Award, and Distance Education Award. She is a former co-editor for Teaching & Learning Inquiry (International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning) and currently serves on the editorial boards for Teaching & Learning Inquiry and To Improve the Academy (POD Network).

**Veronique Schutjens**, Utrecht University, the Netherlands

Veronique Schutjens is Professor of Experiential Education in Geography within the Geosciences Faculty at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. Her research focuses on the learning processes of students in outdoor educational activities in Geography, such as exchange programs, internships, field trips, and field work. Her work includes supporting and stimulating colleagues and academics in Educational Scholarship and Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. She is an advocate of educational innovations based on evidence and research informed research in co-creation with colleagues and students. Veronique is co-chair of the Youth Education & Life Skills community of the Utrecht University Dynamics of Youth strategic research theme, Principal Fellow of the Centre for Academic Teaching and Learning (CAT) at Utrecht University, and SoTL Ambassador at her Faculty.

**Kate E. Thomson**, University of Sydney, Australia

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Kate is an Associate Professor at the Sydney School of Health Sciences, Faculty of Medicine and Health, the University of Sydney. Kate's research expertise is in professional learning. She has made a significant contribution to the evidence-base for facilitating collaborative learning and is leading a new research area within her field, informal professional learning. Primarily, her work has centred on the professional development of university teachers (i.e., clinical educators and academics). She also researches how to effectively develop future professionals through enhancing students' informal learning before, during, and after their placement experiences.

**Anne Tierney**, Heriot-Watt University, Scotland

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Anne Tierney is currently an Associate Professor in the Learning & Teaching Academy at Heriot-Watt University. Her areas of expertise are Threshold Concepts in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, the impact of SoTL on academic career paths and supporting and fostering scholarly approaches to teaching and learning. She is the co-chair of the Scottish Tertiary Micro-Credentials Network and President of Improving University Teaching. Away from work, Anne's passion is travel, experiencing different cultures and environments.

**T.C. Toh**, National University of Singapore, Singapore

Tai Chong Toh teaches conservation and sustainability at the College of Alice & Peter Tan (CAPT), National University of Singapore. His disciplinary research focuses on marine conservation and his education research interests include integrative learning and Students-As-Partners. As part of his contribution to the

community, he supports educational institutions, academies, and non-profit organisations in ocean sustainability and environmental education.

**Trish Varao-Sousa**, University of British Columbia, Canada

Trish Varao-Sousa is an evaluation and research consultant at the University of British Columbia. Her work includes supporting research and evaluation of teaching and learning activities (including SoTL) through consultations, project design and implementation, and analyses. She also helps to facilitate workshops and create documentation on topics such as: best practices in survey design, introduction to SoTL and data visualization. Trish is part of the Institute for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning leadership team, who implement and support the resources and services of the institute (including the SoTL Seed Program!)

**Anna Wach**, Poznań University of Economics and Business, Poland

Anna Wach is an Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Education and Personnel Development at the Poznań University of Economics and Business, Poland. She also serves as Director of the Academic Teaching and Learning Centre. In addition, she is a certified coach and an accredited tutor. She obtained her PhD and habilitation in pedagogy. Her research focuses on teaching and learning in higher education, as well as academic development. She has also participated in numerous international research and educational projects.

**Karin T. Watson**, University of New South Wales, Australia

Karin Thiele Watson is Director, Educational Excellence (portfolio of the Pro Vice Chancellor Education) at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Sydney, Australia, and an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture. Her work focuses on educational leadership and capability building within research intensive university contexts. She designs and leads institutional programs and initiatives that recognize and reward excellent teaching, build capability and confidence in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), and support sustainable academic career pathways, particularly for Education Focused academics. Her leadership emphasizes community building, cross disciplinary networks, and scalable, values driven mentorship models. She is a UNSW Scientia Education Academy Fellow, a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (UK), and has received multiple national and international awards and fellowships for teaching and education excellence.

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Dr. Andrea Webb spent a decade as a classroom teacher and department head before returning to higher education as a teacher educator. Her research interests lie in teaching and learning in higher education and she is involved in research projects related to Threshold Concepts, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), and Social Studies Teacher Education. Currently, Andrea is the Director of the Institute for SoTL at UBC.

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Gert Young is a Senior Advisor: Higher Education at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. His PhD (Political Science) included an investigation in the application of Social Identity Theory to complex social problems. He carried this interest in social psychological theories of identity over to his work in academic development and now focuses on social identities in teaching and learning contexts. As a co-editor for the International Journal for Academic Development (IJAD) he also continues to explore research methodologies for the scholarship of teaching and learning as well as the scholarship of academic development.