

## **Who is the “public” when you make teaching public? Conceptions of audience in the scholarship of teaching and learning**

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*Abstract: This article considers how SoTL practitioners have addressed three types of audiences: personal, administrative, and discipline-based. The analysis draws on narrative data from a collaborative SoTL project at a community college. The findings are discussed in relation to broader trends across institutions and disciplines. It is argued that investigators should take into account the audience’s epistemology of teaching. This approach helps investigators to enter into the professional discourse of that audience. Five strategies are offered to help SoTL practitioners communicate effectively with audiences outside of their professional area.*

*Keywords: public teaching, classroom audience, discourse, epistemology*

We educators face many demands on our time: heavy teaching loads, promotion and tenure, publishing requirements - to name a few. Consequently, when we take the time to conduct teaching-related inquiry, we must be careful to design studies that yield the most benefit for ourselves, our students, and our profession. In calculating potential benefit, we must consider not only the intended outcomes of our scholarly work, but also the audiences who will review and employ our findings. In some ways, the most expedient approach would be to conduct investigations that are solely for our own consumption. However this sort of inquiry lacks a mechanism for accountability and dissemination. Ultimately, scholarly teaching becomes stronger and more widely useful when the work is shared with others (Bowden, 2007).

Whom should we address when we make our teaching public? This might seem like an obvious question, but, I would argue, the issue deserves further consideration. The notion of audience is both familiar and under-discussed among those who study teaching and learning. As Lucaites explains, “To address an audience is . . . to create a message that accounts for the character of a specific group of people who are imagined as the receivers of that message” (1999, p. 327). Quite often we assume that we are addressing an audience of disciplinary peers when we open our teaching to public scrutiny. Presumably, we contribute to “our collective knowledge about effective teaching and learning practice through . . . critical peer review” (O’Brien 2008, p. 2). When we conduct “scholarship of discovery” (Boyer, 1990) in our subject area, we are professionally conditioned to submit our work for review by other experts in our discipline. This may very well be the same audience that reviews our teaching-related scholarship. But this is not necessarily so. While scholarship of discovery tends to fit within recognizable disciplinary bounds, scholarship of teaching and learning exists in a hybrid space “at the crossroads of [the] institution and [the] discipline” to use Shulman’s phrase (2000, p. 12). Consequently, it is difficult to keep scholarship of teaching and learning confined within a discipline because the findings very often have extra-disciplinary implications at the institutional level. Given this

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likelihood, one would be wise to plan out how best to address audiences beyond one's disciplinary peers.

The trickiness of targeting one's audience became apparent to me as I co-facilitated a professional learning community in which participants conducted SoTL projects. While the investigators in this learning community intended to keep their projects focused, they found it necessary to address multiple audiences, which complicated the task of dissemination. These audiences fell into three broad categories: personal, administrative, and discipline-based. Each of these audiences had a distinct set of expectations that diverged in some circumstances.

This article examines how SoTL practitioners address these three audiences. My analysis draws on narrative data from my professional learning community, along with a review of literature. Central to this discussion is this question: How can scholarly educators present their teaching in ways that are comprehensible to personal, administrative, or discipline-based audiences? This challenge requires educators to consider the communicative expectations of those who review their work. I would suggest that each audience has a particular *epistemology*<sup>2</sup> of teaching, a way of interpreting and valuing what happens in instructional settings. This epistemology, in turn, shapes what the audience considers to be appropriate conventions of scholarly *discourse*.<sup>3</sup> Discourse conventions and epistemologies are compared across audiences. A central goal is to identify strategies for spanning discursive and epistemological differences to help SoTL practitioners to address their choice of audience(s).

## I. Study Background and Methodology.

The narrative portions of this article are drawn from my documentation of SoTL projects conducted within a professional learning community at Everett Community College in Washington State. For two years, an EvCC faculty member and I co-facilitated the Teaching and Learning Inquiry Lab (referred to in this article as the Inquiry Lab). The purpose of this learning community was to create a space where professionals at a public community college and a comprehensive regional university could collaborate in investigating issues of teaching and learning. The Inquiry Lab began with 17 participants, including faculty, administrators, staff, and graduate students (see Table 1). In general, individuals joined the Inquiry Lab because they wanted to engage in scholarly dialogue about teaching and learning. We met on a biweekly basis for six quarters to design and implement SoTL projects concerning student learning, teaching outcomes, or faculty development at EvCC.

As co-facilitator of the Inquiry Lab, I set out to analyze how participants approached the scholarship of teaching and learning. Most had little or no prior training in educational research methods. My objective was to document, not only the steps that they took, but also their evolving perceptions of scholarly inquiry. To do this, I used a process of narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993). I kept an audio journal which I used to record my reflections after each two-hour meeting. Periodically, I conducted group interviews with participants and administered questionnaires. In

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<sup>2</sup> Epistemology is the study (or awareness of) how knowledge is created and disseminated in particular areas of inquiry (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2005. See also Feldman, 2003, Fumerton, 2006). The epistemological task for SoTL practitioners is to analyze how we come to know what we think we know about phenomena in the classroom. This is the essence of what Hutchings and Shulman (1999) describe as “going meta.”

<sup>3</sup> Bazerman (1994) points out that every research discipline codifies its knowledge through its use of language. Each discipline, in other words, has its own discourse. Gee defines discourse as an “association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group” (1989, p. 18).

addition, some meetings were audio-recorded and transcribed. Drafts of my notes and writings were shown to participants, who were encouraged to provide feedback. Using a multi-stage coding process, I sorted the narrative data into inductively derived categories defined by common themes (Miles and Huberman, 1984). To maintain the confidentiality of individual participants, I removed real names and, in some cases, listed the person's disciplinary affiliation, instead. The process of data analysis revealed frequent references to audience. Investigators in the Inquiry Lab grappled with how they would present their scholarly work, and this often depended on whom they intended to address. Their comments regarding audience generally fell into these categories: personal, administrative, or discipline-based. Once I identified these categories, I turned to the SoTL literature to see how other investigators addressed these audiences.

**Table 1. Inquiry Lab Participants.**

EvCC Faculty (8)	EvCC Administrators and Staff (5)	WWU Participants (4)
Admin. Justice (1) Biology (1) Chemistry (2) Math (1) Psychology (1) Reading and Study Skills (2)	Business (1) Facilities (1) Institutional Research (1) Instructional Tech. (2)	Faculty (1) Graduate Students (3)

## II. Personal Audiences.

### A. Existing Scholarship.

Presumably, those who study their own teaching do so to improve their pedagogical practice. Every teaching situation is unique; therefore, it is important for educators to determine what works best in their particular setting (Mettetal, 2001). This is the aim of scholarly teaching (as distinct from scholarship of teaching - see Bowden, 2007). Scholarly teachers make informed decisions by systematically assessing the outcomes of instructional practices. This is also the focus of self-study research, a term sometimes used as a generic synonym for SoTL (Louie, Drevdahl, Purdy, and Stackman 2003). One might argue that the audience for self-study is primarily intra-personal (i.e., directed to the person conducting the inquiry). The context-specific nature of self-study ensures that the resulting knowledge is relevant and applicable. However, the potential downside is that the knowledge may be idiosyncratic. In Bakhtin's terms (1982), the discourse of self-study is monologic (i.e., monologue directed to oneself). Self-study findings might be generalizable; however, efforts to glean broader significance are typically *post hoc*, which might limit the usefulness of the findings beyond the investigator's classroom. Louie et al. contend that these challenges "reflect an underlying epistemological question about whether researchers can create useful knowledge when they are their own research subjects" (2003, p. 157).

Proponents of SoTL argue convincingly that scholarly inquiry should not be limited to monologue. This argument underlies the discussion of scholarly teaching versus scholarship of teaching (Bowden, 2007, Shulman, 2000). One distinction has to do with the ultimate uses of scholarly knowledge. Scholarly teachers focus on generating findings for their own use, whereas

SoTL practitioners work on generating and disseminating findings. The added step of dissemination requires SoTL practitioners to frame their findings within some context (Kreber, 2001). Investigators must explain how conditions in a particular learning environment are situated in broader patterns, structures, or historical trends. While findings need not be generalizable, they must at least be comprehensible to audience members. Contextualized discussion creates a bridge between the specifics of one person's classroom and phenomena that are recognized by other educators. By contextualizing their analysis, SoTL practitioners move beyond what Louie et al. refer to as "emic knowledge" of scholarly teaching to create "a more widely shared etic idiom" (2003, p. 156). Etic knowledge, by definition, is shared understanding generated by outsiders (or in the case of SoTL inquiry, by the investigator in collaboration with outside observers). The discourse of SoTL is dialogic (see Bakhtin, 1982) in as much as practitioners are engaged in dialogue with one another. In this respect, audiences for scholarship of teaching are inter-personal, as well as intra-personal.

### *B. EvCC Inquiry Lab.*

Participants in the Inquiry Lab wanted to address both types of audiences (inter-personal and intra-personal). Initially, most had their own agendas to learn something that would benefit them in their individual classrooms. In general, faculty wanted to investigate effective teaching methods, as illustrated by a chemistry instructor's comment: "I want to gain greater insight into how what I do in the classroom either helps or hinders my students' learning processes. . . . I want to learn a [teaching] method that I can use for further exploration." Participants also wanted to learn about methods of scholarly investigation. As one instructor put it, "I wanted to see if I can conduct classroom research for my own consumption. How can I become a better instructor?" Whether they were interested in research or teaching methods, participants saw themselves as the producers and consumers of their own work. They saw scholarly investigation as a way to interrogate their beliefs and develop new skills. In this respect, the participants were engaged in their own intra-personal discourses.

This is not to say, however, that they wanted to work in isolation. On the contrary, the opportunity to collaborate with peers in other areas was a strong motivator for many. One faculty member put it succinctly: "I want to work with colleagues in a process of inquiry." Most saw this as a welcome opportunity to talk outside of regular departmental circles about issues of teaching and learning. In addition, many appreciated having collegial support as they waded into the unfamiliar waters of teaching-related scholarship. Participants were eager to engage in inter-personal dialogue. This was especially appealing to newer instructors, who appreciated "networking and meet[ing] new people." The interaction was not just for social purposes. Many saw inter-personal dialogue as a necessary component of scholarly inquiry. "I don't know how you can do research and expect to be able to do it in a vacuum," explained one participant. "It just seems to me that it is something that you automatically are going to share."

A central challenge for Inquiry Lab participants was to establish a "shared etic idiom" (Louie et al. 2003) to talk about scholarship and teaching. The term "research," for example, proved to be a highly contested term. Some felt that "research" referred only to analytical procedures that could be strictly controlled and replicated. In their view, the notion of social research was nearly an oxymoron. Others took a broader view, defining research as any sort of systematic inquiry. An instructor in the latter camp commented, "I never thought of anybody having trouble with the idea of measuring people." Working through these differences was

painstaking and, in some ways, frustrating for participants. At the same time, some saw benefits to the process, as evident in one administrator's comments:

We are always talking to others who share the same ways of knowing. So when we have a different view, someone says, "No, this word means 'X.' All of a sudden you go, "Oh well, I didn't realize I was inflexible in my understanding of my use of that word."

This example illustrates some benefits and shortcomings of dialogic exchange in a heterogeneous group. As one participant put it, intellectual "side trips" that spontaneously emerge from scholarly discussions quite often generate insights that are more profound than what one might achieve working in isolation. However, the process of repeatedly proposing, discussing, and revising one's scholarly work can be circuitous. This can be frustrating for educators who want to achieve a specific outcome such as refining an instructional technique. The process can be especially challenging when the conversation occurs among colleagues who don't share a common scholarly idiom. In some circumstances, an investigator might have to re-invent the wheel, justifying basic concepts that are commonly accepted in her or his professional area. It is important for SoTL practitioners to be patient with miscommunications and apparent missteps. These may be opportunities for serendipitous discovery.

### **III. Administrative Audiences.**

#### *A. Existing Scholarship.*

It is becoming increasingly common for colleges and universities to offer supports for the scholarly study of classroom practice. This has been a major area of emphasis for the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL). Among other things, CASTL promotes "teaching academies" to institutionalize and sustain teaching-related scholarship (Hutchings and Shulman, 1999). As administrators build supportive infrastructure, they become an increasingly important audience for SoTL work. Many recognize the potential for teaching-related scholarship to benefit classroom practice. At the same time, they see broader implications for documenting teaching and learning outcomes. These views are suggested by K. Patricia Cross (1996), who makes an epistemological distinction between "assessment for accountability" and "assessment for improvement."

To some extent, administrators are concerned with the documentation of teaching and learning outcomes for purposes of accountability. Cross (1996) traces this concern to the 1980s when *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and other reports prompted policy makers to call for the establishment of standards in public education, coupled with increased scrutiny of educational outcomes. Fortunately, postsecondary systems did not rush to adopt a top-down approach to enforcing educational standards, as was the case in K-12 education. However, the language of accountability and outcomes-based assessment filtered into the administrative discourse of higher education during the 1990s. This is evident in the ERIC database. Of all ERIC submissions using "accountability" and "postsecondary" as keywords, 75 documents were published between 1985 and 1989, compared to 128 published between 1990 and 1994 (a 70 percent increase). The literature suggests that postsecondary administrators are under some obligation to provide evidence of learning outcomes to outside

stakeholders, such as state government (Washington HECB, 2006), industry (Aragon, Woo, and Mavel, 2004) and parents (MacAllum and Johnson, 2002). At the same time, administrators recognize that faculty are typically less than eager to participate in externally mandated measures of accountability (Litterst and Tompkins, 2000). To promote faculty buy-in, some have suggested linking institutional assessment with scholarship of teaching and learning. Litterst and Tompkins (2000) argue that faculty should be rewarded for taking scholarly approaches to assessment, just as they should be rewarded for taking scholarly approaches to the study of teaching and learning. A case study by Goto and Davis (2009) suggests that some programs have used institutional assessment funds to sponsor learning communities engaged in teaching-related scholarship.

While administrators are concerned with accountability, they are also thinking about how the documentation of teaching and learning can ultimately lead to better instruction. Cross (1996) predicted that assessment for purposes of improvement would eventually subsume the goal of assessment for accountability. "I believe that the power to drive education will shift back onto the campus," observed Cross. "People will conclude that good strong education is run from the inside - not from outside the institution" (p. 403). Litterst and Tompkins similarly argue that instructional assessments should be used "not to punish teachers, but to aid their critical reflection" on teaching (2000, p. 8). These principles clearly align with the purposes of teaching-related scholarship as articulated by many advocates (e.g., Boyer, 1990, Hutchings and Shulman, 1999).

This is not to say, however, that a new age of scholarly assessment has supplanted the old. Huber reminds us that those who engage in teaching-related scholarship still face an uphill battle in trying to get their work recognized by their institutions: "[T]hese extraordinary efforts are not always rewarded when it is time for a tenure, promotion, or merit review. . . . Scholarship may be changing, but evaluation continues to reward most readily work that conforms to older norms" (2004, p. 2). Huber's comment raises an important point about potentially conflicting interests among administrative audiences for teaching-related scholarship. On one hand, many administrators would be inclined to reward faculty who use scholarly inquiry to identify and rectify challenges in their classrooms. At the same time, under traditional criteria for promotion and tenure, they might feel compelled to penalize faculty who document classroom problems.

### *B. EvCC Inquiry Lab.*

The Inquiry Lab caught the attention of administrators as well as faculty at EvCC. Of the thirteen original EvCC participants, five were administrators or staff (see Table 1). Several saw the Inquiry Lab as an "opportunity to interact with faculty" and a chance to "learn something about research." More broadly, some were curious about how this group would address the institutional mandate for outcomes assessment. The college encourages departments and individual instructors to implement assessments to determine if students are meeting the college's six "Core Learning Outcomes" (<http://www.everettcc.edu/programs/index.cfm?id=5548&linkFrom=Search>). According to one participant, it has been difficult to get instructors involved with the assessment of learning outcomes. The Inquiry Lab, in his view, was one way to foster sustained faculty involvement. "I think the purpose of the lab was to expand the college focus on outcomes assessment," he explained. "If regional creditors say we are not doing a good job of this, [the Inquiry Lab] is an illustration of something we are doing that supports assessment. That becomes an institutional evaluation issue."

The participating administrators had a distinct impact on the direction of Inquiry Lab projects. This was particularly evident in one project that examined students who were deemed “under-prepared” for regular college-level work. Originally, the participants wanted to examine students in their own classes. The agenda soon expanded, in part, through the urgings of one of the participating administrators. This individual suggested that the group add a college-wide survey of faculty and staff. The idea soon caught on with group members, who began to think of this project as service to the college. “We started looking at it as sharing the classroom research with those (on campus) here,” explained one developmental education instructor. “[We started to think] ‘That’s wonderful information. Why don’t we share that with administrators or with the institution?’”

As Inquiry Lab participants adapted their projects to address administrative audiences, they had to deal with expanding goals and expectations. Originally, the group studying under-prepared students planned to gather data in several classes taught by group members. The prospect of reporting to executive administrators led members to consider whether they should collect data from more classes to increase the study’s validity. They wondered whether it was necessary to make the sample more broadly representative of the entire student body. While no administrators demanded or expected this, group members began to see this project as a *de facto* institutional assessment. This prospect began to feel a bit daunting for some. As one group member put it, “Our eyes got bigger; the pie got bigger, and we couldn’t eat it all.”

Another challenge faced by Inquiry Lab participants had to do with confidentiality and data integrity. Two of the projects involved collecting data from fellow instructors. In both cases, the investigators felt they should take care in revealing personally identifying information, particularly because supervisors might review the findings. The investigators realized that maintaining anonymity would be difficult in a small college. For example, using job titles without real names (e.g., “an oceanography instructor”) might leave a study participant identifiable if she or he were the sole faculty member in an area. The investigators decided that, whenever possible, they would report findings in aggregate so as to minimize individual exposure. They were also concerned about how questions of confidentiality might affect the way peers provided information. One Inquiry Lab member who was studying faculty participation in his program noted that participants in his study would most likely realize that their “anonymous” survey responses would be identifiable because the sample size was small. Consequently, he surmised, participants would be likely to “tell [him] what they think [he] wants to hear.” To minimize this possibility, he made it clear to participants that their information would be reviewed by an outside investigator (not associated with EvCC), who would aggregate data and remove identifying information.

In some respects, the EvCC example does not typify concerns raised in the SoTL literature regarding administrative issues. Inquiry Lab participants were not subject to the kinds of scholarly expectations described by Huber (2004). As community college educators, they were not required to conduct traditional research as defined by universities. Their scholarly output was not scrutinized for purposes of promotion and tenure. In this setting, administrators were not concerned about using scholarship of teaching and learning for purposes of accountability. The administrative role, however limited, was to support and possibly collaborate in assessment for improvement, to use Cross’s term (1996).

While EvCC is not representative of all institutions, the Inquiry Lab does yield some useful insights for SoTL investigators who wish to address administrative audiences. This example illustrates that administrators can play constructive roles in promoting teaching-related

scholarship, either as consumers, facilitating agents, or co-investigators. However, once administrators take on these roles, the focus of scholarly inquiry may very well change, as it did in the project examining under-prepared students. Traditionally, SoTL investigations have focused on the classroom as the unit of analysis. In other words, the analysis and findings are typically self-contained within individual classes. Administrators who read or conduct teaching-related research are likely to look for a unit of analysis that extends beyond the individual classroom. Administrative interests typically focus on departments, divisions, or institutions. Enlarging the unit of analysis may require investigators to consider sampling methods and other methodological issues that influence the validity of findings across multiple classes.

Taken in this direction, teaching-related scholarship begins to look suspiciously like traditional institutional research. Investigators must decide whether this sort of work should be classified as scholarship of teaching and learning or whether this falls within another scholarly genre in Boyer's taxonomy (1990). Bowden explains:

With the focal point on developing scholarly activity, the approach has been to establish empirical processes, design assessment methods, develop models, and appraise them as scholarship. . . . Thus scholars have intentionally, or unintentionally, redefined teaching as the discovery domain. Teaching has, essentially, become another research product. (2007, p. 9)

It would be sadly ironic if, in the process of making SoTL appear more legitimate by traditional research criteria, investigators quietly abandoned principles that make scholarship of teaching distinct from scholarship of discovery.

#### **IV. Discipline-Based Audiences.**

##### *A. Existing Scholarship.*

Postsecondary teaching is deeply informed by the academic disciplines. Indeed, some observers argue that instructional knowledge is best interpreted through the lens of the academic field in which that knowledge is applied (Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin and Prosser, 2000, Bowden, 2007). As Prosser puts it, "The scholarship of teaching and learning should be about individuals and groups . . . within disciplines engaged collegially in working to improve student learning in the disciplines" (2008, p. 1). An underlying assumption is that teaching methods differ from one discipline to another because educators in each discipline embrace a distinct set of beliefs and values (i.e., an epistemology) regarding instruction. Not surprisingly, proponents of discipline-specific investigation tend to advocate disseminating one's scholarship in discipline-specific venues. These include scholarly meetings (Hutchings and Shulman, 1999), disciplinary journals (Louie et al., 2003), and academic conferences (Mettetal, 2001). In each of these venues, producers and consumers of scholarly work are brought together by a shared academic affiliation that may be national or global.

In this respect, disciplinary audiences tend to differ from inter-personal and administrative audiences. Personal audiences tend to be based in the investigator's institution (e.g., Sperling, 2003). The same is often true of administrative audiences (e.g., Litterst and Tompkins, 2000) even though administrators have their own national venues, such as the American Association for Higher Education and Accreditation. In addressing disciplinary

audiences, investigators assume that shared disciplinary knowledge will unify the scholarly discourse, whereas those who address personal or administrative audiences tend to rely more on shared institutional knowledge.

What happens if the discipline as a whole does not place a high priority on the scholarly study of teaching? This is an on-going challenge for those who address disciplinary audiences. Louie et al. (2003) note that faculty who are not in education departments are likely to face skepticism in trying to convince disciplinary peers that the study of one's own teaching is not a weak substitute for "real" research in one's subject area. Hutchings and Shulman (1999) similarly warn that scholarly educators are likely to face doubts about methods of investigation and rules of evidence that are not deemed credible in their discipline. Weimer puts it bluntly, "If the standards of the discipline are used to assess practitioner scholarship, it will never measure up" (2008, p. 3).

Some observers go further in critiquing discipline-based approaches to SoTL. A common argument is that disciplinary segregation unnecessarily balkanizes discussions of teaching and learning. While Kreber acknowledges the contribution of discipline-specific inquiry, she argues that "it is equally important that SoTL engage with broader agenda" (2001, p. 1). Weimer (2008) points out that broadly applicable instructional approaches and research methods will receive limited exposure if they stay within disciplinary venues. Furthermore, she argues, a restricted inflow of ideas can also hurt faculty in a disciplinary cloister. This can lead to "a good deal of wheel reinvention," as she puts it (p. 1).

There is an alternative (or perhaps a supplement) to the discipline-based model of scholarly dissemination. Scholarship of teaching and learning is emerging as a discipline in its own right. This is evident in the existence of multiple journals (e.g., *JoSoTL*, *IJ-SoTL*), professional conferences (e.g., ISSOTL, ICTR), and organizations (e.g., CASTL) in multiple countries. In these venues, educators are not obligated to justify the legitimacy of teaching-related scholarship. This has already been established as part of the shared epistemology of the field. It would be fair to say that participants have established an inter-disciplinary discourse of postsecondary teaching.

### *B. EvCC Inquiry Lab.*

The Inquiry Lab was inter-disciplinary by design. Faculty and staff from all areas of the college were invited to participate. Some participants had years of experience talking to colleagues in other disciplines about college teaching. Others were relatively new instructors who wanted to explore teaching from different perspectives. While participants were eager to work across disciplines, they came to the Inquiry Lab with different expectations of what the dialogue would produce. "It seemed like we were going down two different paths," observed one instructor. Some wanted the inter-disciplinary work to yield insights that would be useful across subject areas. Meanwhile, others wanted to tailor the work to their own disciplines. As one participant put it, the latter group was thinking, "How is this going to help us conduct or improve teaching in that particular area?" One instructor noted a tension between inter-disciplinary objectives and discipline-specific objectives. This, he observed, is a perennial challenge for any faculty group that attempts to work across subject areas: "If you narrowly define a topic (in a single discipline), people (outside of that discipline) self select out. If you define it generally to include a cross-disciplinary audience, then you have to reckon with the confusion that comes from people working at different levels."

The “two different paths” became apparent as participants discussed how they would disseminate findings. Some faculty wanted to conduct studies that they could present to their respective departments. In addition, there was some talk of publishing findings in academic journals. Either way, faculty were concerned about how peers in their discipline would view their scholarly work. This was particularly a concern among science instructors, who worried that findings from uncontrolled studies would have no validity in the eyes of other scientists. The best solution, in their view, was to design experimental studies that controlled out confounding variables. Meanwhile, other participants wanted to present findings to general audiences of college educators. Members of the latter camp felt that interdisciplinary audiences would focus more on the research findings rather than on the methodology. They surmised that experimental designs that focused narrowly on one independent variable would not appeal to a wide range of readers. Consequently, they opted for naturalistic designs that described learning broadly.

To some extent, this methodological split reflected epistemological differences between disciplines. A member of the naturalistic camp put it this way: “I think something that attracted me to social sciences was the messiness of human nature. We can analyze it, but it is really messy compared to trying to measure things in a vacuum the way hard scientists are used to.” However, this was not a strict division between hard scientists on one side and everyone else on the other. Chemistry and math instructors joined the inter-disciplinary group and eventually went along with a naturalistic methodology, in part, to support a scholarly project that would appeal to inter-disciplinary audiences.

This example gives reason for optimism that crossover can occur between discipline-based and inter-disciplinary scholarship. In this instance, the math and chemistry instructors never abandoned their intentions to bring useful knowledge back to their disciplinary colleagues. Rather, they deferred this goal as they collaborated with peers from other disciplines. In the process, they expanded their understanding of scholarly inquiry into teaching and learning. In effect, this example is a microcosm of what is happening at the SoTL field. Discipline-based scholars contribute to the inter-disciplinary body of knowledge, and they take this understanding back to their disciplinary areas. It may be that the choice between doing discipline-based scholarship or inter-disciplinary scholarship is an artificial dichotomy.

## **V. Strategies for Addressing Audiences.**

Carrying out a SoTL project is not an incidental task. It takes a certain investment of time and resources. Typically, the most efficient approaches involve addressing a singular audience in one’s institution or field. A considerable advantage is that the investigator is already fluent in the professional discourse of her immediate peer group. She does not have to invent a language, as it were, to explain commonly understood concepts regarding teaching and learning. Addressing an audience of immediate peers is not always desirable or possible, however. Given the effort invested in the project, one would be wise to consider addressing audiences beyond one’s immediate circle in order to achieve broader goals. Generated by Inquiry Lab members, the following recommendations will help investigators to approach new audiences successfully:

*Make a deliberate choice about which audience(s) will be addressed.*

In the initial planning stages of a SoTL project, investigators should contemplate, not only what they want to accomplish, but also who will review the work. Weigh the potential benefits against the effort needed to communicate with this/these audience(s). If

time and resources are limited, consider a modular approach in which you conduct a limited project for presentation to a limited audience and, some time in the future, you customize the presentation for other audiences. This is likely to be more efficient than starting with a one-size-fits-all presentation that goes to many audiences.

*Consider how each audience currently understands the subject matter.*

Initial reconnaissance is an integral step in choosing one's audience(s). This could be as simple as talking informally to one or more members of the audience. A more involved approach would be to review similar scholarship that is well-regarded by this audience. The purpose is to tease out assumptions and attitudes held by audience members. If the work is targeted to more than one audience, consider whether the views of those audiences are sufficiently similar that they can be addressed in the same presentation. If they are not, consider developing separate presentations that are tailored to each audience.

*Define terminology and assumptions.*

As you develop your documentation, be sure to explain the assumptions that underlie your analysis. What led you to focus on "X" rather than on "Y" or "Z"? Why did you choose this instructional approach or that research methodology? This is sort of explanation is familiar to anyone who does scholarship of discovery. What may be unfamiliar is the need to explain assumptions about teaching and learning that you assume are common knowledge. Keep in mind that your epistemology does not necessarily match that of your audience.

*Make the familiar unfamiliar.*

Systematic investigation forces us to step outside of our everyday routines, giving us a fresh vantage point from which we can scrutinize beliefs and actions that we normally take for granted. Valuable and surprising insights often emerge. It is difficult enough to convince ourselves that questioning the "obvious" is a worthwhile venture. It is even more difficult to convince a skeptical audience. In addressing your audience, provide a tactful rationale explaining why you are interrogating conventional knowledge.

*Create a space for mutual discovery.*

In traditional approaches to research, the investigator acts as a scholarly expert who addresses other scholarly experts. The investigator presents new knowledge to peers and those peers, in turn, judge the veracity of the claims. In the scholarship of teaching and learning, the process of making one's teaching public is similar but, perhaps, more nuanced. While it is common for educators to present their practice for others to consider, it is potentially awkward to proselytize directly, especially when addressing educators outside of one's area. A more fruitful approach may be to present findings and limitations (as in any research tradition) and then to invite audience members to respond, drawing on their subject-area expertise to further shape the ideas.

A member of the Inquiry Lab offered insightful commentary about the importance and the challenge of discussing college instruction with peers who are outside of one's immediate

professional circle. In his view, the need to address diverse audiences is often an unavoidable consequence of working in a teaching institution:

There is a symbiotic relationship between me and my program and this [institutional] place. . . . There is constant ebb and flow across those boundaries. There is constant code shifting going on. . . . There is confusion of language and meaning that creates institutional discourse. There are disagreements and arguments. We are talking across purposes. And . . . all of those dimensions are happening simultaneously.

While his description may sound daunting, this faculty member was optimistic. The confusion of language and meaning, he suggested, creates rich opportunities for professional growth. Educators must explain their beliefs and practices to peers who have differing perspectives. In the process, all parties might gain insight. This is a tantalizing promise in the broader practice of scholarship of teaching and learning.

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