

Book Review

Engaging in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: A guide to the process, and how to develop a project from start to finish

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Publisher Description: This is a book for anyone who has ever considered engaging in the scholarship of teaching and learning – known familiarly as SoTL – and needs a better understanding of what it is, and how to engage in it. The authors describe how to create a SoTL project, its implications for promotion and tenure, and how it fosters:

- Increased satisfaction and fulfillment in teaching
- Improved student learning
- Increased productivity of scholarly publication
- Collaboration with colleagues across disciplines
- Contributing to a growing and important body of literature

This guide provides prospective SoTL scholars with the necessary background information, foundational theory, tools, resources, and methodology to develop their own SoTL projects, taking the reader through the five stages of the process: Generating a research question; Designing the study; Collecting the data; Analyzing the data; and Presenting and publishing your SoTL project. Each stage is illustrated by examples of actual SoTL studies, and is accompanied by worksheets to help the reader refine ideas and map out his or her next steps. The process and worksheets are the fruit of the successful SoTL workshops the authors have offered at their institution for many years.

In *Engaging in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: A guide to the process, and how to develop a project from start to finish* Cathy Bishop-Clark and Beth Dietz-Uhler provide the academic “for dummies” equivalent of a “how to” book for conducting research in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). This is by no means a disparagement, but a compliment to a book that is brief, user friendly, and accessible to a range of teachers from pre-K through college in any discipline. The authors write with a teaching audience in mind who may be interested in but hesitant about conducting research on a more formal level. The audience is evident in the tone of the text, which is casual in a way that suggests the authors are sharing their insight and expertise with readers. Most especially, the book is helpful for teachers whose academic backgrounds do not include research training. The authors strive to show the value of this work and to set it apart from reflective teaching practices by providing some basic information in a step-by-step guide that shows how to elevate the research process to achieve

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SoTL quality work with the ultimate goal of presenting results in a public forum such as a peer-reviewed publication.

Chapters 1 and 2 lay the groundwork for the book's premise. In Chapter 1, the authors introduce themselves and share their individual stories relating how they became interested in the field of SoTL. They also provide a brief rationale as to the benefits of and need for SoTL. In Chapter 2, Bishop-Clark and Dietz-Uhler quickly sketch the history of SoTL and explore the various definitions of SoTL as well as its distinction from scholarly teaching. Specifically, they speak to newcomers of the field by articulating how SoTL is different: "The difference between what we do informally and what we do in SoTL rests on the formality of our reflections, observations, and sharing of our findings" (p. 9). This formality is the five-step research process described in the next several chapters.

Chapter 3 is an introduction to the five-step research process which, again, Bishop-Clark and Dietz-Uhler differentiate from less rigorous kinds of reflection and learning: "SoTL projects are well defined, carefully and systematically studied, and put in the context of others' research, and the results are shared with a broader community" (p. 18). These continued distinctions are helpful for new researchers to keep in mind as the chapters progress. The authors embed the explanation of the research process in several examples from their personal experiences and illustrate a variety of research designs. The illustrations are clear and jargon free, but the authors are careful to be explicit about the reciprocal nature of the research process, which can deter, distract, and detour new researchers.

Chapters 4 through 8 cover the five-step research process. Chapter 4 "Generating the Research Idea" provides two frameworks for categorizing the research question. Both are helpful given the myriad of questions readers could pose when beginning SoTL research in their classrooms. The chapter also gives several examples of research questions from a variety of disciplines. Additionally, the chapter introduces the concept of the literature review and discusses its importance to the research question and overall research process. This section, however, is extremely brief and may not provide sufficient information for engaging in the often complicated process of researching and writing a literature review. Chapter 5 "Designing the Study" introduces two general categories of research, quantitative and qualitative, as well as mixed-methods. Bishop-Clark and Dietz-Uhler outline the variety of forms these categories take such as experimental, quasi-experimental or descriptive and case study respectively. Again, several examples from their own work illustrate the methods, and they provide annotations for other resources to consult for further information. They also highlight the benefits of conducting a pilot study.

In Chapter 6 "Collecting the Data," Bishop-Clark and Dietz-Uhler discuss several key considerations when collecting the data including determining reliability and validity, defining and operationalizing variables, and choosing a preexisting instrument or creating one. They then break down the collection plan according to the methodological categories listed in the prior chapter such as experimental or case study. In addition, Chapter 6 discusses ethical considerations such as those designated by the local Institutional Review Board (IRB), but this information comes a bit late in the book as well as its consideration within the overall research process. Because IRBs protect participants, researchers, and institutions, are often required, and may significantly affect the research process, this information would be of more use if incorporated sooner. Ethical considerations addressed include informed consent, the right to privacy, the risk of harm, and debriefing. Bishop-Clark and Dietz-Uhler also list several IRB considerations.

Chapter 7 “Analyzing the Data” begins with a few paragraphs that argue why readers should know about data analysis, in other words, why systematic and rigorous quantitative or qualitative analysis is more convincing than experiential or anecdotal evidence. The authors explain how understanding and conducting data analysis is key to contributing to the field as consumers and, presumably after reading this book, as producers of SoTL knowledge. Chapter 7 is then broken into steps toward analyzing qualitative data and quantitative data. The qualitative data section is helpful in that it provides a five-step process, multiple tables with data transcription and qualitative analysis software resources, and two examples of qualitative data analysis: narrative and rubric (textual) analysis. The quantitative data section gives a brief primer in statistics—both descriptive and inferential and also provides a thorough table defining a variety of statistical terms and listing helpful resources for more information. Both sections show the reciprocal nature of data analysis and the research question.

Chapter 8 “Presenting and Publishing Your Results” discusses the importance of making research public and publishable for reasons including expanding the field, achieving a promotion or tenure, and bringing SoTL work full circle. The chapter gives helpful advice about the kind of forum scholars should seek and the medium in which to publish, but also highlight the value of sharing work in different stages to different audiences and in varied forums.

Finally, Chapter 9 “Challenges of and Solutions for Doing Research on Teaching and Learning” focuses largely on the college instructors conducting SoTL research and whether this will help or hinder their careers. This shift in audience is inconsistent with the rest of the book; nevertheless, the considerations are valid to college-level instructors.

A few other highlights of *Engaging* are the detailed appendices listing resources, SoTL conferences and journals. There are several completed worksheets accompanying each chapter that demonstrate the narrated examples. Additionally, blank worksheets throughout the chapters are available for readers’ own work. Many chapters include a section encouraging readers not to neglect the “student learning” aspect of SoTL and show how readers can incorporate students into their work. Also, several quotes from teachers engaged in SoTL in their own classrooms are embedded throughout the book. Though visually they break up the page, they are of little substance and a little self-congratulatory.

Engaging is a concise but complete introduction to the field of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and to the process of formally conducting research to contribute to this field.