

Ep. 033: An Introduction to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

There's no way to truly learn about teaching, about the effectiveness of various practices, or about how behaviors and attitudes of students shift as they learn, without a foundation of scholarship. Dr. Jennifer Friberg joins Jim to discuss her role as the Cross Endowed Chair in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, a position unique to Illinois State. Jen and Jim make the connection between scholarship, successful student learning, and the research-based professional development in teaching that links them. Find out how you can introduce SoTL scholarship into your own course as a way to enhance not only your discipline, but the profession of teaching as a whole.

Podcast: <https://prodev.illinoisstate.edu/podcast/2017/ep033.shtml>

Transcript

JIM: Hi there. I'm Jim.

JEN: And I'm Jen.

JIM: Let's Talk Teaching!

JIM: Welcome to Let's Talk Teaching, a podcast from the Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology here at Illinois State University. I'm Jim Gee. Joining me today is Dr. Jennifer Frieberg. Jen is the cross endowed chair in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning here at Illinois State. How're you doing? Jen?

JEN: I'm good. How are you?

JIM: I'm great. You actually, your academic appointment is in communication sciences and disorder.

JEN: Right, orders. I'm a speech pathologist by discipline.

JIM: Okay, so what got you into the scholarship side of teaching and learning?

JEN: Well, it's interesting. I actually came to my position here at Illinois State to teach. I, I've always been teaching primary as my my interest. And I took a workshop, maybe my first or second year here on campus as an assistant professor and Kathleen McKinney, at that point was the cross endowed chair. And I learned a little bit about the scholarship of teaching and learning, and it was sort of a lightbulb moment for me. You know, it was an aha, kind of realization that wow, you know, as I practiced as a clinician, I was using evidence-based practice, you know, I, I prescribe a particular kind of treatment for a patient based on the best available research to support that choice. And I thought, Gosh, it you know, it's really, really intuitive that there'd be similar research to make those kinds of choices in the classroom as a course instructor. And so my interest in SOTL, was born at that workshop that day.

JIM: So, what is the role of the cross endowed chair on our campus in particular? And my understanding is, it's pretty rare, like nationwide or even globally to have an endowed chair in this field.

JEN: That's correct. So, Illinois state i, to my knowledge is the only university that has an endowed chair in the scholarship of teaching and learning. And that came about because Kay Patricia cross, and those of you who are classroom assessment technique, users, you know, Angela and cross that's RK. Patricia cross.

JIM: Right, author of that book, talked about it often on this on this podcast.

JEN: Very good, very good. Well, her father was a physics professor here at Illinois State University. And so, she endowed the chair in his honor, because teaching was incredibly important to him and influenced her work. And she wanted to honor that. You're absolutely right, Jim, most, most universities that have an arm that deals with the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, and you may hear me call that SOTL. Yeah, that's fine. The acronym for that. But just to be very clear, we are we are university after all we are we do like our act, we like our acronyms. Most universities that have an arm for SOTL, roll that into the Teaching and Learning Center. And there's good reason for that, you know, from for those universities, because there is overlap between what the Teaching and Learning Center does and what someone who's interested in SOTL does. That's not the case here, we've kept the effort separate between the Teaching Learning Center and the Endowed Chair and SOTL. And I think that that has its positives. And I can talk about that a little later, maybe. But as I was saying, the traditional or predominant model is to roll SOTL in with the Teaching and Learning Center. And it kind of is then integrated with other programming and efforts that that your traditional teaching and learning centers may do. That said, there are a lot of universities that don't have a SOTL arm. And so, you know, I would consider SOTL to be a continually emerging and changing field. It is global, as a discipline, and it's increasing in its involvement or the level of involvement by faculty, particularly in the United States right now.

JIM: What interests interests me about SOTL is the idea that it is something that draws people from all of the disciplines. It's not like someone goes to school to become a SOTL. practitioner, or scholar or scholar, you know, per se. It is something that that develops out of like your own experience and interest in finding evidence based support for our teaching. So how do folks on our campus? How would they get involved with Sona? What would be some of the questions that maybe becoming involved with your office would would help them answer?

JEN: Sure? Well, to answer that, let me tell you a little bit about a continuum that we talk about in in SOTL. It actually was developed by Kathleen McKinney, she published it in 2007. And I lovingly refer to it as the the teaching continuum. I'm not sure what she called it originally, right. The ideas are hers; the name is mine. But she talked about the difference between good teaching scholarly teaching and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. The idea being that if you and I walk into our classrooms, we hope that we're good teachers that we have good intentions towards our students. We want the best for them. And we design courses that that have that sort of idea in mind that we

are well intentioned individuals. The next level up from that would be scholarly teaching. And the idea there is you're still good teacher, but you recognize that there is research on teaching and learning. And you go to that research, and you read it and you implement or apply the, the things that you learned from that research in your teaching. So you pick specific pedagogical strategies or assessment schemes, whatever the case may be, because it's been successful somewhere else. So, you're using evidence based educational practices. As a scholarly teacher, the next step from that then would be being a scholar, in teaching and learning. So, engaging in the scholarship of teaching and learning as someone who's actively researching, typically your own students, to better understand what's happening in the classroom, and hopefully improve your practice and your students learning down the line. Cool. So, you asked what people at ASU would do or what they might be curious about. I think it's the things that keep us up at night as teachers, you know, you you have that thing in the back of your head that just you're not sure if it's working in your classroom, you know, did that thing I did today have an impact? Did my test really get at what I wanted it to? Are my students learning during study abroad? What are they learning during study abroad? And so, you know, anything that happens surrounding the issue of our students learning could spur SOTL project, and because Soto's in our strategic plan, also very unique and wonderful here at ISU, right, because there's funding for this kind of research, we have workshops through my office, and it is considered meritorious in terms of tenure and promotion. You know, there is a real interest in SOTL, which I think is fantastic.

JIM: So, just so people have a better idea when we're talking about sort of what are some of the research projects that have been done on our campus in this in this light?

JEN: Sure. Let me tell you about a project that I did with three of my colleagues in CST, we would laugh as we talk anecdotally amongst ourselves that our our curriculum seemed siloed. And I don't know if that's a term everybody would understand. But when we talk about patients with communication disorders, we talk about them as having speech or language or fluency disorders. And what we found is because we taught those specific kinds of disorders and separate classes, our students were having a hard time integrating different disorders across the same client, even though multiple disorders can and often do, you know, result within the same patient. And so, we said, we're siloed, you know, and and our students were really showing that in the clinic and in some of the decisions they were making. And so, we decided to develop a series of integrated projects across our curriculum, and we studied the outcome of those projects to see if we did more integration across our curriculum, it might be effective for our students as learners, would they be more able to be effective clinicians? And we found across the board that yes, they would be. And so, we use the results from those SOTL studies to revamp our entire curriculum, which is now in its first year of completion.

JIM: So that's, that's fascinating to me, because it's kind of the opposite of the thing I propose originally, which is I have something I want to research, this is more of, I have a good idea, or I think it's a good idea. I want to measure to see if it actually works or not.

JEN: It could be you know, I talked to faculty about problems and wonderment and opportunities. And I think those are the places where soda projects are born. Problems don't have to be a bad thing. It can be a time constraint. It could be I teach a class at 630 at night, and it's a three-hour class and the students have been in the building since 8am. How can I engage my students? That's a problem, you know, an opportunity might be a study abroad, you know, I'm taking my students to Spain for 10 days. It's an opportunity to measure what is the impact in terms of learning during a short-term study abroad, which we know very little about. An A wonderment might be something like, gosh, I heard this thing could work. If I implement it, can I measure any kind of different learning that that maybe I wouldn't have thought to look at in another context? So, the problem, the wonderment the opportunity, I'll kind of lay the groundwork to say, hey, there's something here I can collect some data on and better understand my students.

JIM: And of course, you don't just assist with the design of the study. You help folks throughout the process through publication, right?

JEN: Absolutely. So, a lot of folks start their interest in soda with a workshop. So, they'll come to an intro to SOTL workshop. And during that process, an idea for a project is sparked. And they'll start to develop a process for their project and an idea or outline. We have grants through my office to support research on teaching and learning. There are individual consultations. I'm happy to help with IRB, you know, processes, procedures and completions. And all the way through I read drafts I help folks find journals that might be good homes for their work or other disseminate Shout out, let's because we certainly aren't limited to the traditional paper or conference presentation. We have faculty on campus who make documentaries with their social work. And we have faculty in the School of Fine Arts that have done theater productions based on what they've learned about their students teaching and learning. Excuse me.

JIM: And, of course, you also have a couple of let's call them Latter Day channels of communication. So, you have a there is guy eAssist, could you tell us a little bit about that?

JEN: Sure. Guy, he says, people are forever asking how it's spelled and how you say it. Yeah, guy uses. And there was actually a contest to name our internal to ISU SOTL journal. Because our motto is 'gladly we learn and teach', Guy uses means gladly in Latin, and it just happens to have the letters ISU in the middle. So, from a marketing standpoint, visual marketing, it's not so bad. But so, we do have guy uses that is edited by myself and some other folks who are interested in SOTL, we kind of offer that opportunity around campus. And that's published every spring. And generally, we feature four to six different papers or posters or other kinds of presentations, featuring our faculty and students research work and teaching and learning.

JIM: And then you also have the SOTL blog that you're doing. And you told me a very interesting fact before we started recording today about that.

JEN: Yes. So, we started the SOTL advocate blog in 2014. And it was one of those efforts where we were posting something new every week, we're trying to post resources or supports for social researchers across the spectrum of experience. So, we're doing some low level introduction to social advocacy and outreach all the way through some real theoretical applied mega level, multi institutional, you know, cross disciplinary kinds of SoTL. Information, just trying to be relevant to a lot of people, which seemed very unwieldy. And at the time, Kathleen, who was still the cross chair, and I, I was at that point of SoTL scholar, mentor, working with faculty on campus in a slightly more limited position that I am now. We decided, hey, let's, let's try a blog. And as we populated that blog, we had no idea if people were reading it, we really didn't understand what the impact might be of that blog. But we put our heads down, and we kept working. And I went to isodiol, which is the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning conference a couple years ago, and people started calling me the blog lady, they. They said, oh, you're the one who has that blog. And then the next year, it was more of an impact. And I've recently figured out that WordPress has metrics, you know, there you go, and started looking at the impact and, you know, reach of the blog, and it's been read in 46 countries, we get downloaded about or clicked on, I guess the terminology is 50 times a week, generally speaking, and I've had over 12,000 unique visitors to the site. So, it actually has been a really great tool to share what we're doing here at ISU, but then to understand what other folks are doing. I have invited blog contributors pretty frequently now.

JIM: Something for me to aspire to, I want to be known as the pod person.

JEN: The pod person. There you go. Yeah, you're a pod guy.

JIM: The pod guy. So, bringing it back to your own teaching. What have you learned from your SOTL experience that has made you a better teacher?

JEN: Good question. Um, okay, only one thing?

JIM: Oh, no, I mean, let's go, let's go over the list?

JEN: Well, I would say, you know, first of all, I can learn as much from my students as they can learn for me, and that's sort of always been my philosophy in the classroom. And so I really appreciate understanding their perspectives and, and learning more about their experience in my class so that I can continually improve what I do. So, you know, I think that's the entry level understanding is that there is a continuous improvement process that really has to happen in order to keep your teaching chops relevant and to you know, at least for me, be the teacher that I want to be I still, the heart of SoTL is in the classroom, and I love being in the classroom. And, and so so that's probably the first realization. And the second is that, even if I think something is wonderful, it isn't always true. And, you know, in my very first workshop that I attended as a new faculty member, I remember Kathleen, saying, you know, you're gonna do something in your class soon. And you're gonna say, wow, that went really well. But that's just your perception. And, you know, did your students actually learn or did they just like it? There's a difference. And so, you know, really having that realization that, you know, just because I like something doesn't mean my students have learned. And so just that

that loop of needing to constantly evaluate and assess how effective was that thing that I did? Is it worth my time? In a more I think, focused sort of way. I've learned a tremendous amount about what my students learn particularly outside of the classroom. So, I focused a lot of my work on out of class learning. So, things like stuff abroad service learning, you know, those kinds of contexts, you know, what are my students bringing to the table now that they might not have brought? Had they not had that out of class learning experience? So, it's really opened my eyes, in particular to some of their interpersonal learning, you know, how they're, they're learning about themselves, and where they fit in the big wide context of our profession or or that sort? Yeah.

JIM: Do you share your research or social research in general with your students? Is there a value to saying, hey, look, there's evidence to show that if you do X, you will gain Y.

JEN: 100%, you know, it's yes. So, generally speaking, I spend the first week of any new class teaching my students about what we know about teaching and learning, because so many times we expect that they know how to be good students. And that's not necessarily the case. I can say, gosh, how many of you underline when you read, how many of you knew that maybe that wasn't the best thing for you to do. And here's why. You know, if you have distributed practice, over time, researchers said, you're going to be a better learner, you're going to remember it better, and you'll have better connections. And so, they find it fascinating, especially if they can benefit from it. Sure. But I'll go back to my participant groups and say, hey, you remember how you guys let me use your data for this project? You know, you consented? And you you know, let me access your reflections or your work or whatever the case might be. This is what I learned from you guys. You know, because the benefits to your immediate participants aren't always evident in total, right? I'm going to study you so the next students can benefit right? And so, keeping the students in that information loop is, I think, really beneficial.

JIM: Jen, thank you for coming on the show.

JEN: Thanks for having me, Jim.

JIM: And that's all the time we have for this week's episode of Let's Talk Teaching. You can find out more about the Center for Teaching Learning and Technology and about the cross endowed chair in the scholarship of teaching and learning by going to our website CTLT.IllinoisState.edu. Or you can go to Jen's website, which is styl.IllinoisState.edu. And we'll link to everything that we talked about in today's episode. Until we talk again, Happy Teaching!