

Plan for a SoTL Project

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Research Question

What are you curious about?

The long lasting impact of experiential learning.

What would you like to know about strategies that might hinder and/or help students to learn, in your course?

How can we evaluate the impact of experiential learning strategies on individual students' problem solving abilities during the school year and years after their graduation?

Do you want to know if an activity, assignment, or teaching strategy "works?"

Using experiential learning strategies gives students material or moments in class that they will remember, but for how long and do those experiences increase their problem solving/critical thinking ability in class and after they have entered the workforce?

Do you have a question about how to help your students learn a particular skill?

How can students better use and remember their experiences in order to increase their problem solving/critical thinking ability in a post diploma/degree setting?

Identify challenge/outcome related to learning that is related to your question.

Describe the learning in a way that suggests how you might measure it using either qualitative or quantitative methods.

Challenges:

- Students are not always given enough experiential learning strategies
- Students fail to remember recent concepts in class
- Students lack confidence in their ability to apply what they have learned
- Students have trouble focusing in class and appear less engaged during lecture style events/classes
- Faculty are not given enough PD on how to employ experiential learning opportunities in multiple class situations
- How do we measure experiences in a class - i.e. what makes an active learning experience?

Research Outcomes:

- Can students improve their test results if given ample experiences where there are multiple opportunities to experience what they are learning and apply the information/skill?
- Will students who have experiential learning opportunities make better real-world/employability skills connections than students only learning from formal lecture style classes and become more successful in their chosen career?

Describe the instructional activity, assignment, or teaching strategy that will promote student learning on the outcome you identified.

SoTL projects might investigate the impact of a modification to an existing strategy or assignment. Describe how the new approach differs from the old approach and why this modification might change student learning on this outcome.

Tests: for most of my students, tests are something that they dread or fear. They are an unknown that gives them a sense of anxiety. So by altering how I cover test preparation through an experiential method, I believe this can help give students the confidence they need to perform well during the test environment.

For example, test preparation is not solely about learning the content, but how to work through a test. I would consider bringing in a Student Advisor as a guest to a) given students a different experience than what they are used to, but b) give students a chance to learn multiple test-taking strategies. There would need to be additional experiential moments that offer students a chance to trial their skills, such as learning a test-taking strategy and then completing a moc exam to boost their confidence for the actual test.

Writing: While working with students in communications related courses, it is evident that many lack writing skills, but also lack the ability to learn out to improve their own writing, i.e. they forget either what was taught in class, or they miss out on applying themselves and problem solving on how to improve their own writing?

An adjustment that I would like to make to my teaching strategy, is to give students some

role playing exercises. I would scaffold student learning to understand the strategies/skills needed to overcome a specific challenge or barrier in their learning and I would prepare them for a role playing experience. After preparing them, I would set-up a series of scenarios in which students would be given the opportunity to role play academic/work-related situations. The goal is to have students learn and remember these experiences to help improve their memory of concepts learned, but also improve their ability to confidently apply what they have learned in a real-world scenario.

Describe the evidence that would persuade an external audience that the new or modified teaching strategy improves student learning on the targeted learning outcome.

Describe the evidence you would need to collect to answer questions about the impact or value of this teaching strategy. How would you convince others that this approach is better than other approaches? What comparisons should you make? Examine students' skill before and after the assignment? Compare students who complete the learning activity to another group of students – what comparisons would be meaningful?

Evidence: There are several pieces of information needed to evaluate the impact of the strategies mentioned above. Examining test results on a group of students who had the opportunity to engage with a student advisor and take the practice exam and compare test results to students who were not given the same opportunities. The evidence would need to be collected over time and demonstrated repeatedly -- not solely a one-off event or experiment.

The same would apply to the other strategy I mentioned above -- i.e. do students' writing skills improve when given the opportunity to participate in a role playing exercise that reinforces how to improve their skills? Examining a group of students who participate in a role playing exercise vs. students who do not use any role play exercises, and compare students' writing abilities by the end of the term.

In both cases, the result/evidence of experiential test taking and role playing writing exercises would need to be reviewed over a period of years to evaluate students' abilities to retain information and problem solve challenges, i.e. do students who participate in the experiential learning exercises better retain information and practical skills to improve their overall academic success by the end of their diploma/degree than students who do not have the same experiences?

How and where would you publish, present, or disseminate this work?

- I would start with anecdotal conversations with faculty about my research/practice

- Faculty learning communities offer an open forum where colleagues can learn and discuss new strategies and research based information that impacts their practice. This would make for a great spot to share related articles and information that supports my research project.
- Consider creating a Community of Practice that extends from the FLC. The community of practice would integrate the research I developed and give opportunity for faculty to develop their own experiential learning opportunities. This would look like a guided learning environment and integrate into their current practice.
- Apply to share examples of this work through various educational forums -- Ted Ed, Inside Higher Ed web resources (publish findings/or take a blog approach), presentations made a Focus on Teaching Conferences, etc.

Updated:

- After reviewing the example project from Simon Fraser University, I see how I might update my own dissemination plan.
- Add a series of presentations throughout my institution to share my research
- Create a set of slides that visually depict key data and specific examples of changes I made in the classroom.
- Collect evidence over time and share how the project evolved -- the research may be more convincing and stable when displaying a reliable process/method.

Ethical Considerations

This SoTL project will need to consider the following:

- Secondary analysis of analytical data that may already exist -- it is important to consider the implications of attempting to test one group of students over another. Intentionally providing one group of students over another with a possible unfair advantage would not work. Looking for data that already exists that could help with the project may assist and support this project's research.
- Observational research and collection of data are key to the project's results; however, a balance between the time commitment between teaching (student-focused work) and the role of researcher, must be measured and checked to ensure student learning is not compromised.
- Equitability is an important consideration with regards to access to the experiential learning opportunities: i.e. ensuring the guest lecturer/test preparation is accessible to learners online, students who are unable to attend class, students with learning exceptionalities who make need additional resources to meet the UDL approach and all AODA compliance rules.

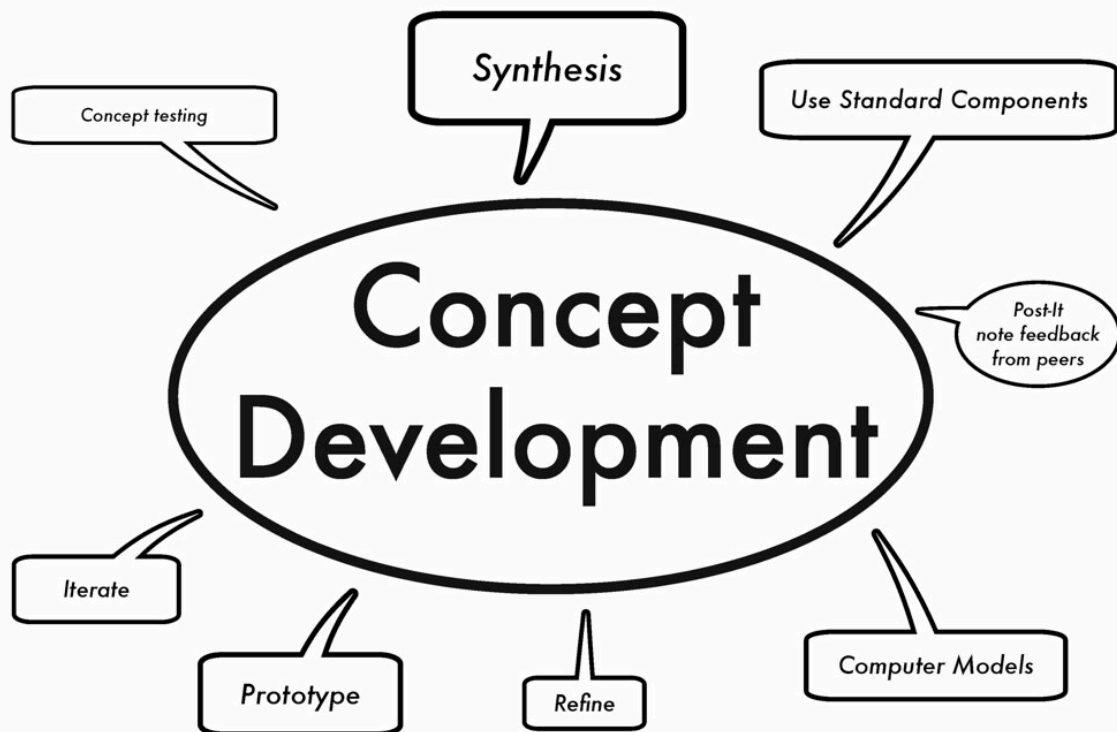
Reflection Describe your research questions, the prior research you will undertake to inform your research design, your plan of action, and a dissemination strategy.

The SoTL process was a challenge; it took more mental energy to reflect on what specific barriers I had in my teaching practice that could be developed into legitimate research.

From my perspective, my research question was too vague/broad or difficult to measure. I started with a question about experiential learning and whether it benefited students' ability to remember core concepts that helped them problem solve and critically think about academic and work related challenges. The prior research I needed to take revolved around existing data. From my understanding, there has been significant research garnered around experiential learning's impact on students' ability to remember -- but whether they have tied that research to show if it improves test scores or enhances students' job performance, is something I would have to investigate further.

My plan of action was simple -- I learned how I might improve my SoTL process by connecting with other faculty or learning where and how to comprise research within my institution (i.e. working with a department that specifically assists faculty with research projects). I have a more educated idea of how to develop my SoTL project in the future. And lastly, my plan for dissemination involved starting with small faculty learning communities/communities of practice, to larger scale presentations that shared core data and student accomplishments. Overall, the SoTL project helped me see the full loop - from inquiry, to answering the question, to reflecting on the process for improvement, and then dissemination.

Image



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Adapted from: C. J. Stanny, E. M. El-Sheikh, & H-M. Chung (2009) ***Getting Started with a SoTL Project***

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