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Leading Change from Different Shores: The Challenges of Contextualizing the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

ABSTRACT

This article offers narratives of individual journeys through the scholarship of leading in three different contexts—Asia, Europe, and Africa. Together, these narratives argue for the need to make explicit the diversity of practices of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), with each practice inextricably tied to specific geographical, sociocultural, and political contexts. In offering these contextual specificities, we call on all who engage in SoTL to exercise reflexivity in thought, language, and action—to actively foreground our mental models and assumptions about SoTL and what it looks like for ourselves and for others; to sensitively engage scholars who do not share our context; and to strive toward an inclusive mindset and practice that will situate all of us within the “international” of an international organization. We highlight the problems of language, meaning, and translation; and the challenge scholars from “different shores” face in engaging with “other” shores.

KEYWORDS

scholarship of teaching and learning, context, diversity, inclusivity, voices

[I]instead of looking for grand ideas that can be applied without scrutiny there is a need for the localization of ideas.

—Erik Blair (2014, p. 335)

SoTL AND THE PROBLEMATICS OF LOCATION

The field of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) originated in the United States, due mainly to the seminal work of Ernest Boyer, *Scholarship reconsidered* (1990). In this work, Boyer states, “the time has come to move beyond the tired old “teaching versus research” debate and give the familiar and honorable term “scholarship” a broader, more capacious meaning, one that brings legitimacy to the full scope of academic work” (1990, p. 16). This simple statement launched an entire field and a complex discourse that seeks to view teaching and research as an integrated academic enterprise, with “scholarship” binding both activities. Thirty years later, this discourse is still in need of discussion in many quarters. It is our hope that this article, emanating from three different national contexts outside SoTL’s North American birthplace, can contribute to that discussion.

Shortly after Boyer’s *Scholarship reconsidered* was published, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching initiated the influential Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning program to define and build capacity for this new focus of scholarship. In this context, the

International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) was founded. Building on ISSOTL's annual conferences, the society founded a journal, *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* in 2012, focusing—as it appears, successfully—on cultivating SoTL's work internationally. Slowly and steadily, the movement has also grown in other national and institutional contexts, some of which have their own long-standing tradition of pedagogical scholarship, as “a vehicle to enhance and promote teaching” (Fanghanel, Pritchard, Potter, & Wisker, 2016, p. 28).

The conversation relating to SoTL has been progressing steadily, with innumerable works already published about what SoTL is, what it means, its methods of inquiry, and the challenges of introducing the field of SoTL and its practices in institutions (see, for example, Bass, 1999; Chick, 2018, 2013; Felten, 2013; Hutchings, Huber, & Ciccone, 2011; Miller-Young & Yeo, 2015; Poole, 2013 to name just a few key works—and, we note, all from the North American perspective). Still, the scholarly debates, especially in contexts where SoTL is emerging, rage on. In a recent publication from a Swedish and South African perspective, Booth & Woollacott (2017) declare, “[a]ttempts to define SoTL flounder when faced with its diversity,” and they ask for “a better understanding of the diversity evident in SoTL work” (p. 2).

Views about the purpose and nature of the scholarship of teaching have been varied, with debates centering on how far one takes the possible meanings of *scholarship* and scholarship's relation to research. One working definition of SoTL delineates it as “the systematic study of teaching and learning, using established or validated criteria of scholarship, to understand how teaching (beliefs, behaviours, attitudes, and values) can maximize learning, and/or develop a more accurate understanding of learning, resulting in products that are publicly shared for critique and use by an appropriate community” (Potter & Kustra, 2011, p. 2). While this definition works for many in English-speaking contexts—although not without challenges—its broader usefulness is limited, even problematic. For instance, in most European contexts, the English concept of scholarship does not lend itself well to translation into the majority of European languages, where it basically means “monetary stipend.” This difference in meaning and the predicament in usage is just one challenge that those of us situated outside the North American SoTL context face when we seek to develop our own SoTL practices.

The three case narratives we provide here stem from our experience initiating SoTL in our respective institutional and regional contexts: Singapore, Sweden, and South Africa. We offer these personal reflections as an argument for the need to make explicit and public the international diversity and varieties of SoTL practices and the ways that each set of practices are inextricably tied to a particular context—geographical, social, cultural, and political. We also share some of the key challenges in the need for contextualizing SoTL practices. Our work is inspired by Blair's (2014) work on Trinidad and Tobago: “Identity is defined both locally and trans-locally (Olwig, 1999) and, by embracing the trans-local, scholars may discover that *developing SoTL is concurrent with developing the context itself* and with supporting the development of an education system that is of the people and by the people, yet is able to position itself within a global context” (Blair, 2014, p. 337, italics added).

The meanings of the SoTL practices in each geopolitical location are conceived and engendered through the particular narrative or praxis that is constituted in those particular contexts. Our different locations and contexts have infused distinct meanings and implications in practice that characterize what SoTL means for us and how we must “do SoTL” by paying particular attention to local priorities and needs. However, we acknowledge that any attempt at characterizing and capturing the meanings of SoTL from a regional perspective in a way that suggests homogeneity, as undifferentiated regional or

continental whole will inherently be problematic, and this is true, we hasten to add, of Anglophone/North American-based SoTL, too. In fact, we believe such a characterization to be an impossible task because regions are almost always complex in language, ethnicity, culture, communities, and other ways. In short, each characterization is by its nature too specific and narrow in scope and must be fully contextualized within the specificities of place, people, and practices. We offer our narratives from three continents as a way to explicitly share three particular, diverse contexts and their SoTL engagement.

SINGAPORE, SWEDEN, AND SOUTH AFRICA AS EMERGING SoTL CONTEXTS

Case 1: Singapore and SoTL-Asia

Having established itself as a research-intensive university, the National University of Singapore has intensified its effort to build an institutional culture of teaching excellence through, among other initiatives, elaborating on its Educator Track Policy that is crucially linked to a more scholarly approach to teaching (that is, SoTL). This is the institutional context that provided the impetus for the initiative called SoTL-Asia that is established and led by co-author Chng Huang Hoon and her colleagues in Asia.

As a former director for teaching and learning and now an associate provost for undergraduate education, Chng Huang Hoon's experience and leadership appointments have provided opportunity for her to shape the SoTL initiative in her institution. The decision to go beyond the institution to create a Singapore-based regional network is fueled by a critical understanding that for greater impact and opportunity, SoTL-Asia is a more viable option that will benefit from the expertise and support of wider, regional communities. This need for a broader distributed leadership and learning experience defines the nature of the network and potentially distinguishes it from other SoTL networks that do not necessarily share this motivation in harnessing and fueling both institutional and regional growth.

Established in 2016, SoTL-Asia emerged in part as a response to the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL). ISSOTL is an established network that includes members mainly from Asia-Pacific, North American, and Europe. The Asia-Pacific membership is currently dominated more by "Pacific" than "Asia" scholars, the latter being relatively newer arrivals to the SoTL scene. In considering "what works" (Hutchings, 2000), it has been argued that it is critically important to actively consider the matter of context, or "what works *where*" (Chng, 2015; Chng & Looker, 2013). Classrooms and students in Asia are just as heterogeneous as classrooms and students anywhere in the world, if not even more diverse given the ethnic and cultural complexities in the Asia landscape. Asia is, after all, home to almost 4.5 billion people whose communities are in varying stages of economic and social development, and its people speak a total of at least 2,300 languages among them. Consequently, classrooms and students in Asia do not necessarily share—either among themselves or with others outside the region—the same starting points, assumptions, or purpose in their pursuit of (higher) education. For these reasons—the relative lack of visibility of Asia in ISSOTL and the differences that underpin student learning and practices in Asia—there is a need to develop a network in Asia that addresses the priorities and needs of Asia scholars as a whole, even as we recognize the internal diversity. In short, like ISSOTL members elsewhere, Asia scholars share a desire for scholarly teaching and learning. However, it would not serve Asia members well if we uncritically adopt, wholesale, the "grand ideas" (Blair, 2014, p. 335) from other SoTL contexts. *This* then is the motivation to develop SoTL-Asia's community—so that we can infuse SoTL with Asia-defined meanings that answer best to

local and regional needs. If doing so opens up a conversation about what SoTL-in-context means for various contexts in Asia and beyond, that would be a very healthy and much-desired dialogue indeed.

SoTL-Asia consists of a network of learners located in Asia, who for various reasons wish to embark on their own SoTL journey. What began as a small group of early adopters within the National University of Singapore in 2014 soon grew to include colleagues in other institutions in Singapore and colleagues in the Asia region, including Hong Kong, Japan, and Malaysia. Currently, SoTL-Asia has about 200 members, and the activities that define SoTL-Asia are centered mainly on special interest groups, a journal, the *Asian Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, and reading and project groups (<http://nus.edu.sg/sotl-asia/>).

Due largely to its geographical spread across Asia, SoTL-Asia operates mostly online— through email/listserv, regular email updates, information sharing in smaller groups, and the occasional online meetings among members. At one point, a Google Plus+ discussion platform, and a designated webpage were added as features of membership engagement. In addition, a library resource list featuring SoTL works and journals was provided to enrich members' knowledge base. In 2016, key leaders felt that the network was ready for a first major event, and the first SoTL-Asia symposium was held in September 2017 at the National University of Singapore, providing members with the opportunity to learn from invited speakers and for members to meet. A second symposium followed in 2019, hosted by Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. The themes of the symposia were, respectively, perspectives from Asia and America and supporting SoTL development in our own contexts, with about 80 people participating each time. Interestingly, due perhaps to the smallness of our teaching and learning teams in Asia, faculty colleagues from different disciplines have greater visibility at these SoTL-Asia events. In these ways, the initiators of SoTL-Asia have tried to engage the network and provide some starting points for those who wish to “go SoTL.”

Establishing an initiative is easy; sustaining one is the challenge. Below we discuss the various issues that complicate the SoTL-Asia initiative.

Critical mass, SoTL scholarship, and reward systems

As noted, the current membership strength of SoTL-Asia is about 200, from eight geographical locations. While there is no lack of interest in getting people to join SoTL-Asia, it has been challenging to get all members to participate actively in online discussions and other activities. Many members cite time constraint as a reason for low participation level. Having initiated several other equally challenging institutional initiatives in the past, we know that promoting SoTL is challenging because people at all levels of institutions do not yet understand what SoTL can mean for individual and institutional development and for student learning, due to the newness of a culture that is only beginning to view teaching as a scholarly activity.

Another reason for members' inertia has to do with the question of definition: what does “going SoTL” entail? Is SoTL *real* scholarship? Among the key SoTL principles (Felten 2013, p.122) is that of going “appropriately public.” This notion of making *public* one's work and Boyer's original exhortation that we embrace *scholarship* were taken widely to mean “research and publication,” and this is particularly true in a research-intensive university context. The reflex to equate scholarship with published research and the misunderstanding around what “going public” means has generated opposing reactions from various camps. On the one hand, there is much panic in the teaching-focused community, who find the prospect of publishing in a new domain daunting; and on the other, among

disciplinary researchers, there is skepticism, with questions raised about SoTL masquerading as “research,” and not being sufficiently rigorous to be taken seriously. An urgent task for new networks like SoTL-Asia involves communicating with all colleagues the many possible meanings of scholarship circulating in the SoTL literature, and developing our own meaning(s) of scholarship and SoTL. What each institution has to do is to negotiate its own comfort level for what SoTL means within its own context, or as Fanghanel, Pritchard, Potter, and Wisker (2016, p. 10) highlight, what SoTL can do: “Increasingly the implications for institutionalisation, capacity-building, and the development of new curricula to address global issues, have been examined as legitimate terrain for SoTL.” These authors are thus sidestepping the definitional complexities and at the same time, respecting the different practices across contexts.

Boyer hit at a crucial concern with the following observation:

At the very heart of the current debate—the single concern around which all others pivot—is the issue of faculty time. What’s really being called into question is the reward system and the key issue is this: what activities of the professoriate are most highly prized? After all, it’s futile to talk about improving the quality of teaching if, in the end, faculty are not given recognition for the time they spend with students. (1990, p. xi)

At the National University of Singapore, we have since 2017 begun to site scholarly teaching within the university’s policy for appointments and promotion. To this end, we have begun to recognize SoTL inquiry as being primarily about evidence-based, informed, and impactful practice that is shared with peers. In this policy, we emphasize that publication is just one possible avenue for making public one’s practice in teaching and student learning, and that we recognize other forms of going “appropriately public” (Chick, 2014; Huber & Hutchings, 2005).

Discourses, voices, and isolation

The dominant discourse that circulates in research-intensive universities defines what value to place on what type of scholarship and creates points of resistance to an identity formation centered in SoTL. In addition, voices that question the rigor of SoTL inquiry are often the same voices that accept SoTL as a possible way to enrich the institutional teaching culture—though they seldom go so far as to recognize and reward this effort. The challenges for SoTL-Asia are amplified given the entrenched mindset of a research-intensive institution that makes explicit demands of the academic mindshare in relation to the high stakes it places on disciplinary research outcomes, often at the expense of other scholarly activity. SoTL practitioners in Asia (and elsewhere) experience a loneliness in the institution because SoTL work tends to stay at the level of individuals and findings do not fit the traditional understanding of rigorous, “true” research (Hutchings et al., 2011; Schroeder, 2007), with few or no connection to institutional initiatives (Schroeder, 2007).

Distance from mainstream SoTL centers adds further to the isolation, even as distance affords the space for self-determination (Chng & Looker, 2013). Colleagues in the Asia-Pacific region (Middle East and Africa, too) often have to travel thousands of miles to SoTL conferences held in the Europe and North America: that is how far we in Asia have to go just to connect with experts in mainstream SoTL. Adding to this gulf is the barrier posed by mainstream discourse. In conversations, mainstream experts and dominant voices (read: a name that “everyone knows” or “should have read”) and locations (“I am

from Bloomington”) are often provided as assumed points of reference with no elaboration. In these experiences of silence and isolation, there is a need for actively bridging of the gaps and active translation to foster a more inclusive community, something that ISSOTL has recently endorsed in its strategic plan paper.

It is therefore extremely important that growing SoTL locally in the institution receives the collective validation of well-positioned institutional champions (Ginsberg & Bernstein, 2011; Marcketti, VanDerZanden, & Leptien, 2015) such as the provost, or a dean and connected to institutional priorities. For SoTL to take root in institutions and for a network like SoTL-Asia to thrive requires not just a broader vision of scholarship in the Boyer sense, but also the courage to walk the talk that ensuring student learning is a key mission of universities, even as the research priorities drive us in an opposite direction. Growing SoTL internationally requires a true commitment to inclusivity that includes also emerging voices. The mindset change that is needed across different institutional, sociocultural, and ideological levels is the major challenge for SoTL-Asia.

Case 2: Sweden and Euro-SoTL

In Sweden, there are fixed national objectives for compulsory higher education teacher training that each university provides. Some of these outcomes indicate the importance of a scholarly approach, for instance that faculty members should be able to “independently and jointly with others, plan, implement and evaluate teaching and assessment in higher education with a scientific, scholarly or artistic basis and within their own area of knowledge,” and “collect, analyse and communicate their own and others’ experiences of teaching and learning practices, and relevant outcomes of research, as a basis for the development of educational practice and of the academic profession” (Sveriges universitets-och högskoleförbund, 2016, p. 2).

At Lund University, a research-intensive Swedish university, fostering engagement in SoTL has been an important strategy underpinning the institutional professional development work for almost two decades (Mårtensson, 2014). Academic developers (also called faculty developers) offer courses on teaching and learning and other related activities for academic staff. All activities aim at supporting a gradual increase in scholarly sophistication (Mårtensson, Roxå, & Olsson, 2011), and a purposeful change of the teaching culture from teaching being a mainly private and individual affair to one that is more collegial and communal. To this end, the main aim for the SoTL work at Lund University is to go public at the local level (Ashwin & Trigwell, 2004), through papers, posters, or presentations that are shared locally with colleagues in seminars and faculty-based and university-wide conferences on teaching and learning. This context was important for co-author Katarina Mårtensson’s engagement in ISSOTL, firstly as a conference participant and presenter, later as an initiator of a special interest group on scholarship of leading, as regional vice-president for Europe on ISSOTL’s board of directors, and eventually in as ISSOTL president for three years. As ISSOTL’s regional vice presidents for Europe in 2014, Bettie Higgs from Cork, Ireland, and Mårtensson collaborated with colleagues to initiate a conference called Euro-SoTL. Unlike SoTL-Asia, which is a network, Euro-SoTL is now a biennial conference focused on sharing and supporting SoTL practices in Europe.

Euro-SoTL provides a regional arena for European academics to share and discuss their scholarship focused on teaching and learning. This is an important platform because the ISSOTL conferences that were hosted in North America and elsewhere usually attracted only a limited number of European participants (≈ 50). Euro-SoTL allows European scholars to share educational issues across

European borders, nationally and institutionally, particularly since the Bologna declaration in 2007 aimed at creating increased mobility and a joint structure for higher education in Europe. In addition, having a Euro-SoTL conference platform also increases awareness of and support for SoTL in Europe; and lastly, Euro-SoTL is a springboard that contributes to a potentially increased and more visible European presence and engagement with ISSOTL. Some countries, such as Ireland, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, have already grown a SoTL movement over several years but in many other European countries, SoTL was and still is a new or even unknown phenomenon.

To date, the Euro-SoTL conference series has had three runs, with 200-300 participants from at least 15 European countries and other parts of the world. The first Euro-SoTL Conference (Cork, Ireland, 2015) had the theme of building bridges through the scholarship of teaching and learning. This was followed by the second Euro-SoTL (Lund, Sweden, 2017) on transforming patterns through the scholarship of teaching and learning, and the third on exploring new fields through the scholarship of teaching and learning (Bilbao, Spain, 2019). The fourth conference will take place in Manchester, UK, in 2021, on the theme of building communities through the scholarship of teaching and learning.

There was a consistently well-subscribed pre-conference workshop, “An Introduction to SoTL.” The 2017 conference provided a first option for delegates to present a long or short paper, with the former allocated slightly more time on the program and a commitment to write a 3,000-word article for inclusion in a conference proceeding. This option signaled the importance of providing different opportunities for scholars to “go appropriately public” with their SoTL work. In Bilbao 2019, for the first time, there were multiple language tracks (Basque, English, and Spanish), in recognition of the language issues related to SoTL in Europe. The main organizer for each conference has been a person who is connected to ISSOTL, usually one of the two ISSOTL’s regional vice presidents for Europe. To intentionally build continuity from one event to another, build a thematic progression, and stay connected to (rather than to compete with) ISSOTL and its annual conference, for each conference, there has been an international program committee with members from past and upcoming Euro-SoTL conferences.

Like SoTL-Asia, the Euro-SoTL community faces a number of challenges, including language and sustainability, described below.

Language

Europe consists of more than 40 countries, each with their own language—in some cases, several. An immediate and common challenge in Europe, therefore, is the cross-linguistic translational (im)possibility of the concept of scholarship in the term “scholarship of teaching and learning” itself. The concept of scholarship does not translate well from English into any of the European languages, as pointed out by Joanna Renc-Roe² in her 2012 keynote at ISSOTL in Hamilton, Canada. Consequently, one of the initiatives in preparing for the first Euro-SoTL Conference in Cork was to elicit participants’ translations of “scholarship of teaching and learning” into their own languages, as captured in Figure 1.

scholarship of academic development, understood in its broadest sense, as attention to change, quality, and equity in higher education. For South Africa, academic development has been a field of action and study since the 1980s, where the concern has been with race-based inequality in society and in higher education generally. It had a strong emphasis on student support, although this has changed over the decades (Boughy, 2010), and for many in the field, a strong emphasis on liberation (Volbrecht, 2003). South Africa has a well-established teaching and learning network, Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa (HELTASA, <http://heltasa.org>), with special-interest groups and an annual conference that attracts 200 to 500 delegates. HELTASA has traditionally attracted more academic developers than university teachers to its activities, which is one reason why the concept of SoTL has not been a specific focus or the title of a special-interest group. In addition, the Southern African Universities Learning and Teaching (SAULT) Forum was formed as a partnership between the International Consortium for Educational Development and HELTASA in 2014. The SAULT Forum focuses on teaching and learning in higher education in general, rather than having a specific focus on SoTL.

More recently, SoTL has come into its own as a specific component of academic development, and in many universities, including the one where co-author Brenda Leibowitz worked, the University of Johannesburg, SoTL is an accepted field in which academics are encouraged to engage. Many South African universities now have teaching and learning conferences, with several having the phrase “scholarship of teaching and learning” or “SoTL” in its title. At the University of Johannesburg, SoTL is seen by many heads of departments or deans as an opportunity for academics who do not have a strong disciplinary research trajectory, and who are very committed to their teaching, to engage in research. Production of research on teaching and learning is an important criterion for promotion in the band of professional development. Brenda Leibowitz was appointed chair of teaching and learning at the university in 2014, the only such chair in the country. The facilitation of SoTL had always been a key facet of a Leibowitz’s work, where, along with academic development colleagues, she initiated a research project and seminar series, SOTL@UJ: Towards a Socially Just Pedagogy (<http://sotlfor-social-justice.blogspot.com/>). This project, which ran from 2014 to 2017, culminated with a conference, “SoTL in the South,” hosted at the University of Johannesburg, and a journal, *SOTL in the South* (<http://sotl-south-journal.net>), was launched. At this conference, an informal SoTL network in the country was proposed, which would later connect to ISSOTL. Such a network would not be seen as in competition with HELTASA and would in all likelihood form a special interest group or a similar formal or informal linkage with HELTASA.

Together with colleagues from various universities, Leibowitz conducted many activities to support SoTL in South Africa. Examples include workshops at her own and other universities, a short course on aspects of researching one’s teaching, and convening the national Teaching Advancement at University Fellowships program. This prestigious national program for mid-career or senior academics (four contact sessions and individual work on a teaching and learning research or developmental project), has three golden threads: fostering teaching excellence, engaging in SoTL, and being a change agent. SoTL is clearly and strongly featured in this program.

As in Asia and Europe, in spite of all these consolidated efforts, supporting the growth of SoTL in the global South is challenging for various reasons. From the Southern viewpoint, SoTL is something that was conceptualized in the global North, in privileged university contexts. Yet, in a country like South Africa, it is the less research-oriented and privileged universities, often the technically or

professionally oriented institutions, that encourage SoTL. These universities see SoTL as a more feasible way of encouraging academics to produce research outputs, in this time of performativity and a corporatized approach to research. Born out of frustration, a small research project on the challenges and opportunities provided by SoTL in South Africa was undertaken (Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2018). This study's findings (p. 986-992) included a number of joys, challenges, and constraints facing academics wishing to pursue SoTL in South Africa, many are shared in contexts like Asia and Europe, and perhaps elsewhere, too. Among the challenges are the following:

- Frequent misunderstanding, by academics and academic developers, about the meaning of SoTL.
- Academics who do not have an established discipline-based research trajectory engage in SoTL because they believe it to be an easy way to produce research.
- Academics do not credit the rigor of the educational research paradigm and underestimate how difficult it is to cross over to educational research.
- Institutional conditions hinder engagement in SoTL (for example, having a high teaching workload and large classes, is, ironically, often the case at precisely those institutions where SoTL is strongly encouraged).
- The current contextual climate of performativity has led administrators to encourage academics to pump out SoTL publications, without the necessary depth and engagement.

But here are the joys:

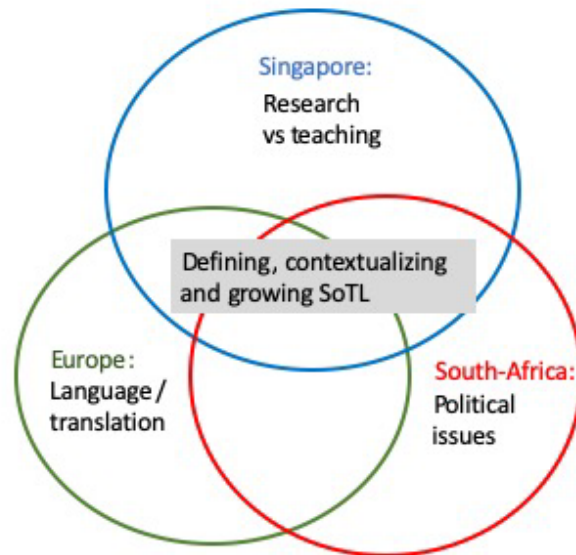
- SoTL provides intellectual nourishment for academics who engage in it.
- Academics are able to generate research from teaching.
- Engaging in SoTL affirms academics' professional identity and belief that they can make a contribution to students' well-being.
- SoTL is a source of professional development and adds to an emerging confidence.

In addition to this contributing to this study, Leibowitz noted additional key tensions in other projects she was engaged in. One challenge she identified was to make *SOTL in the South* a genuinely global South enterprise, when the very concept of "SoTL" originates from the global North. *SoTL in the South* was not sufficiently popularized, which made it difficult to set up an editorial board from all regions in the global South. This connects to a second challenge, often typical of the global South: a set of conditions whereby universities are not well resourced, do not provide optimal conditions for SoTL to occur, and geographical and cultural isolation, as with SoTL-Asia, discourages the up-take and (re)contextualization of new ideas. By way of example, the SAULT Forum meets annually, and colleagues find it immensely difficult to fund their attendance at this regional meeting. Another challenge is that colleagues follow programs and paradigms promoted in the global North and do not have the confidence and opportunities to participate in the field by contextualizing mainstream concepts from the North. Guzmán-Valenzuela (2017) discusses this tendency of not dialoguing with, or sufficiently contextualizing, mainstream Northern concepts in those articles that are produced in the Southern Hemisphere—in that case, Latin America.

IMPLICATIONS OF CONTEXTUALIZING SoTL FROM DIFFERENT SHORES

In offering our narratives, we have had the opportunity to reflect on the similarity in the struggles we experience as emerging voices in SoTL; and the differences we discern from our own positioning in relation to ISSOTL.

Figure 2. Differences in contextualizing SoTL in three geographical locations



The fundamental differences we experience among our three locations and in relation to other locations is one relating to sociopolitical and educational context and language (see Figure 2). With respect to context and location, differences in context have effects on the type of SoTL work we undertake. For example, if a North American colleague or someone from anywhere else were to come to Asia, Europe, or South Africa to collaborate in scholarship with us, a number of assumptions will have to be actively reviewed: What are the students' assumptions about learning and education? What are their goals? How do they define success or learning gains? Furthermore, we would need to discuss contextual nuances of linguistic usage, and we would need to ask what priorities teachers have in relation to their student learning in a political context where the curriculum itself is constantly being interrogated and destabilized. The expectations we may have of education, and the fundamental difference in political and cultural realities would have to be carefully understood before we could embark on a collaborative investigation about teaching and learning, precisely because location and context matter, and these differences in geopolitics directly inform priorities in and questions about teaching and learning in these locations. And perhaps it is exactly those kinds of deep conversations across contexts that will support SoTL's growth internationally.

Language, specifically the use of English as the sole language of SoTL engagement in ISSOTL activities, is another barrier. Because language lies at the heart of all attempts at meaning making, the barrier posed by the North-American brand of English has far-reaching implications for how members in Asia, Europe, and South Africa (to name just our three locations) relate to the dominant discourse originating from the established English-speaking SoTL centers.

For example, due to different political experiences (consider that Vietnam was once colonized by the French; Singapore was a British colony; Japan has never been colonized), people in Asia speak English with widely varying degrees of fluency, from near-native, if not native, competence (as in Singapore) to second language (as in Vietnam), to a foreign language (as in Japan). Even in near-native contexts, the people in those contexts are generally bilingual, if not multilingual, and have a high level of cultural consciousness tied to their own political and cultural positioning. Similarly, in heterogeneous and multilingual Europe, Europeans speak English with varying levels of competence, generally as a foreign language, but Europeans also have a strong sense of a continental European identity that is markedly different from the Anglo cultures instantiated in the North American contexts and in the United Kingdom. In South Africa, due to its unique political history, many people speak English, but as with multilingual Asia and Europe, English is not necessarily the first language of personal or official communication. What these three contexts share is a relationship with English that is ideologically accented and at least still a half step removed from the Anglo-Saxon affiliation to English. Even among the most competent English users in Asia, Europe, and South Africa, we often have a sense of being the proverbial “adopted child” or “poor country cousin”—not fully identifying ourselves as a legitimate part of the community of native speakers but as “excellent tokens” of an external community that have been able to function like natives until the fissures surface. In short, we belong to the “alien” category as currently defined in the official discourse on immigration in United States.

This “outsider” experience appears in encounters big and small. For example, one of us experienced this at an ISSOTL forum, when a USA-based colleague’s self-introduction as “I am from X” (where X is part of the name of a university in the United States). “X” was presented as if complete information, in a way that did not entertain the possibility that not everyone knows where X is, or even *what* it is (A town? An institution? An organization?). This is a simple example of how specific contexts are taken as the default. Another example is representative of responses on learning that an ISSOTL conference was to be hosted in Melbourne in 2015: “But Australia is so far to go! It takes two days just to get there and two more to get back!” Distance is a two-way issue (Asia-Pacific members have been spending four days flying to North America and back for a long time.) More importantly, the remark reveals again the assumed reference to an origin, where other locations are treated as periphery. What surprises us is that there has not been as much conversation about ensuring that the vocabulary and discourse are more inclusive in a way that is truthful to the “International” in ISSOTL’s name. Language can both include and exclude—these are examples of daily practices of unintentional exclusion that arise from a form of neglect to intentionally embrace other points of reference.

For people with rich cultural and linguistic affiliations to a non-English-speaking or multilinguistic sensibility, and for those of us who experience daily expressions of all kinds of defaults, we are made acutely aware of our sense of secondary status, and this is perhaps why we are particularly sensitive to the claims made on the “International” in ISSOTL’s name and gestures made toward “big tent” inclusivity and appreciation for diversity. If it is challenging to pinpoint what is different between SoTL in Asia, Europe, the Southern Hemisphere, and the SoTL center, it is because many of us have either been co-opted by the dominant communities and have learned to speak about and practice scholarship focused on teaching and learning in the way the field of SoTL is conducted and discussed, or we are still struggling with our own sense of identity of being an ISSOTL member but feeling like an outsider to the community. The impetus for our regional networks may have received extra fuel from just this conundrum—of consciously trying to speak a different language that is more “acceptable”

(because it possesses an inherently higher social capital) but yet not having the full range of vocabulary to do so. Much of the attempt at dialogic engagement has been unidirectional, from margins to centers, and, as yet, too few sustained attempts have been made from the core to the periphery. In offering this article, we have hoped to make visible the need for just such rich and nuanced conversations about internationalization, about inclusivity, about diversity, and about what it means to value different takes. And it starts with a critical self-reflective look at the way we converse and engage when we meet in the SoTL/ISSOTL context.

We have taken up Booth & Woollacott's (2018, p. 538) call for "a better understanding of the diversity evident in SoTL work" by offering these three narratives of SoTL from completely different continental contexts. Starting with Singapore, the national impetus to achieve high standards in every state-initiated project is reflected in the ways key education institutions, like National University of Singapore, realize their mission with an entrenched understanding and expectation of excellence that translate into an investment in teaching and research. "Going SoTL" is a manifestation of such a belief in creating an excellent teaching culture, or what has been called the "didactic domain," where the motivation for SoTL is to raise the quality and status of teaching (Booth & Woollacott, 2018, p. 540-541). The challenges for SoTL-Asia are daunting: there is a need for an institutional shift in mindset toward scholarly. While it is no small task to manage the diversity of context, languages, meanings, goals, and practices across Asia, there is a strong desire to find a way to join the mainstream SoTL conversations, and, *at the same time*, to heed Guzmán-Valenzuela's (2017) warning to sufficiently contextualize mainstream concepts simply because there are differing starting points and ideological underpinnings for defining a voice for SoTL-Asia.

Lund University in Sweden, like the National University of Singapore and the University of Johannesburg, is a competitive research-intensive university. In such contexts, the struggles to effect a more balanced focus on research and on teaching have usually ended with a persistent bias towards research. However, Lund University also has a long-standing tradition of educational development and support for its academics to set and maintain high standards of teaching and learning, and this has made some difference in restoring the status of teaching in the institution and over time gradually changing the institutional culture. In this slightly more conducive teaching context, "going SoTL" is arguably less of a hurdle than it might be elsewhere—though, we hasten to add, it is also no less challenging in many ways. As Boshier (2009) puts it, SoTL is "a hard sell." Like Asia, Europe is diverse and complex along linguistic and cultural lines, and, like Singapore and South Africa, the challenges to establish a SoTL culture internal to Europe and externally in relation to mainstream SoTL require sensitive acknowledgment of diversity, differences, and politics.

Due in no small part to its complex political history, certain ideas that may be very popular in the global North and in the West do not have as much currency in South Africa. For example, student engagement in curriculum delivery and design, while elsewhere high on many institutions' list of priorities, is not as much so in South Africa. Because of the enormous student protests in recent years, the concerns on South African educators' minds are understandably and expectedly on issues like the decolonization of the curriculum, equitable access, and social justice. In addition, academics in some South African universities (including the University of Johannesburg) continue to experience a dearth of resources, including a lack of access to intellectual resources, which makes the South African contexts, both nationally and institutionally, increasingly complicated. In such a context, the motivations to "go SoTL" are therefore a lot less obvious than they might be in Singapore and Sweden, even in a climate

where SoTL, broadly understood, was already integrated in some form in institutional practices. Furthermore, the size of and diversity in South Africa, as in Asia and Europe, is just as daunting, especially given that South African academics are deeply sensitive to the need for inclusion and respect for diverse voices and representation in relation to others in the North and in the West. Whatever “grand ideas” may originate from outside South Africa will most certainly have to be rigorously scrutinized before one can even consider applying them to this complex location.

While the national contexts, motivations, and goals differ across these three geographical locations, what we have in common is the desire to develop institutional excellence in teaching through engaging in scholarly conversations—internally within our institutions and externally among our regional partners and other practitioners situated farther away in the SoTL community—so that we can one day arrive at a form of practice that serves our own needs and goals, that fits our own context. The implications of our contextual differences are such that we each have to engage with and interpret SoTL slightly differently. The manner in which we are or are not able to join certain conversations comfortably (as in the wrangling over the term *scholarship* among European SoTL practitioners or the equation between scholarship, research, and publication in Asian and South African institutions); the lack of agreement over what are or are not pressing priorities and determining the relevance of “grand ideas” (as in the case of South Africa); or the perceived need to go regional, to find our own voice after the long political histories of being embedded in colonial discourse and practice (as in the case of SoTL Asia)—these are the challenges that are faced internally and in relation to the mainstream.

In summary, we have offered three different narratives that have not only defined the ways in which each of our institutions approaches and develops SoTL, but these institutional narratives have also fundamentally influenced our specific approaches to “going SoTL” and determined the practices in our own contexts. We have articulated the need for creating our own SoTL communities and networks even as we attempt to relate to established SoTL communities abroad; and the key strategies each has adopted to bring about change in our respective institutional teaching culture, and the challenges encountered in building our SoTL culture. The different voices within our institutions and regions struggling to shape our SoTL practices to enable identity formations and the discourses that are circulating in each institutional and geographical context are all key drivers in defining our SoTL work. Our reflections have revolved around how SoTL networks created a fair distance removed from established SoTL networks in the Anglo-speaking world can meaningfully engage one another as we share common struggles and visions; and in defining such relationships, we strive to evolve an understanding of what it means to “do SoTL” from our own shores. Our hope is that these narratives can inform and influence other shores where SoTL may be in similar need of being contextually framed and translated.

EPILOGUE

In our efforts to lead change from where we are located, we cannot avoid having to regularly reflect on how our work can be contextualized and how we can connect with the international community of scholars involved in SoTL who operate from other shores. The linguistic and cultural barriers we detail in this article are real, and bring to our minds something former ISSOTL president and *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* co-founder Gary Poole once said about how we often think of other people as having accents, as if we ourselves speak in a neutral tongue. In the ISSOTL context, the “International” of the society’s name requires us to actively pay attention to large range of different

accents and to the words we use in our conversations. The non-translatable nature of key words like *scholarship* that developed from the roots of our specific linguistic, cultural, and institutional history and praxis cannot be easily mitigated by any kind of straightforward translation service or a simple glossary of terms because the meanings and differences, while signaled on the surface by what appears to be a common linguistic reference (that is, the English word *scholarship*), go much deeper and farther in semantic connotation. The cultural baggage of specific terms (as in the European example of *scholarship*) cannot be lightened by appealing to multiple ways to unpack this term (as in “a scientific approach to teaching” in one meaning, or “visible excellence in teaching” in another, or even a combination of the two) because each attempt at translation from a particular language addresses only one facet of the complexity of connotative meaning of *scholarship* in the European consciousness and the relevant languages in question.

It is challenging to spell out an exact list of recommendations to ease this difficulty in translation (or lack of), but one thing is certain—we cannot assume that the meanings of these key terms are shared readily, because terms are accented differently across languages and cultures. We must instead cultivate sensitivity and awareness about the possibility of such differences, to exert much scholarly effort and a generosity of spirit so that we can come together as an international community of scholars. It would be ideal within the field of SoTL generally, and within ISSOTL specifically, for all of us to frame our work explicitly, and not assume that we share a common starting point. This would have to be an intentional, explicit description of the SoTL context from which our work arises, and be reflexive about the limits of our own situatedness, against the backdrop of the diversity of the field, and the uniqueness of each context. Only then can issues of internationalization, diversity, inclusion, and contextualization of SoTL be productively pursued.

We end with a final but important caveat: we, Katarina Mårtensson and Chng Huang Hoon, count ourselves as privileged members of ISSOTL, having had the opportunity to serve on ISSOTL board of directors (as former regional vice presidents and as former and current members of the presidential team). There is therefore a limit to our own claims to being outsiders in the ISSOTL community, even though for a much longer time in our own professional history, we were situated outside the inner circle, and it remains true that our contexts are situated a fair distance from the center of ISSOTL activities. As individuals, our voices have been regularly invited—and often intentionally included—precisely because ISSOTL has a conscious awareness of its own need to realize the “International” of ISSOTL’s name as integral to the society. However, though we treasure and do not for a moment take our inclusion lightly, there is nevertheless much room to enhance diversity and inclusivity in ISSOTL for the many more other individuals who do not necessarily enjoy the access and privilege that we both have. Hence our need to write this article.

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NOTES

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