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## SoTL in the Margins: Teaching-Focused Role Case Studies

### ABSTRACT

The number of teaching-focused faculty (TFF) continues to increase, raising concerns about opportunities to engage in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) for academics who are hired to focus on teaching rather than research. Various names for these teaching-focused positions include, but are not limited to: instructional, limited-term faculty; permanent, but not eligible for tenure; equivalent to tenure-track (eligible for tenure); and casual teaching-focused. Regardless of title, TFF face a unique challenge: hired for excellence in teaching and committed to improving teaching and learning, they are often not granted support to engage in professional development or research related to teaching and learning. These and other challenges are associated with their academically marginalized positions. The authors are members of the Advocacy Committee of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL). This paper builds on a session we offered at the ISSOTL conference in Calgary in 2017 where we invited TFF to contribute narrative examples of institutional SoTL challenges and their strategies for overcoming them. We describe potential solutions to creating institutional cultures that are supportive of TFF engaging in SoTL. We finish by offering recommendations for creating a SoTL teaching-focused community within ISSOTL to provide social and professional support.

### KEYWORDS

teaching stream, SoTL, ISSOTL, advocacy and outreach, community

### BACKGROUND TO THE CURRENT STUDY

In October 2017, at the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) conference in Calgary, Canada, a sub-group of the Advocacy Committee offered a standing-room-only panel presentation on the challenges faced by faculty members who are hired at universities in teaching-focused positions engaging in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) (Gregory et al. 2017). Teaching faculty are the frontline teaching professionals of the institution, hired for their teaching excellence and interacting with many students. SoTL is a process of systematic inquiry into student learning that results in an advancement to the practices of teaching in higher education (Hutchings and Shulman 1999). We argued that it is important that institutions support their teaching stream staff in creating excellence in teaching and learning along with supporting engagement in SoTL. The packed session and follow-up communications from participants reinforced our sense that this topic needed to be addressed and led to a follow-up session in 2018 at ISSOTL in Norway (Simmons et al. 2018).

Both panel discussions focused on the ways in which traditional academic work (commonly 40% research, 40% teaching, 20% service) was shifting, especially in Australia and North America (Canada and the United States). This has resulted in many new configurations including variations on full-time (FT) tenure track, positions that are FT non-tenure track, and several instances of part-time (PT) non-tenure track. There are a growing number of variations falling outside of the traditional full-time tenure track category. In Table 1 we list of few of the common job descriptions in these three countries. While the list is not intended to be comprehensive, it shows the variations in such roles. Throughout this paper we use the phrase *teaching-focused faculty* (TFF) to represent these professionals who are hired for their teaching expertise and whose roles focus almost exclusively on teaching.

**Table 1. Variations of Academic (Faculty) Positions in Australia, Canada, and the United States (adapted from Gregory, Ahmad, Huber, Maurer, and Simmons 2017)**

Traditional FT tenure track	Non-traditional FT tenure track	Non-tenure track FT	Non-tenure track PT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>40/40/20; opportunity to move up through the ranks (assistant professor to associate professor to full professor)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Science Faculty with Education Specialties (CSU)</li> <li>“Teaching” Stream</li> <li>Lecturers with Security of Employment (UC) and other titles (U21)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professors of Practice</li> <li>Contract-Limited Teaching Positions</li> <li>Post-Doctoral Positions (e.g., Science Learning and Teaching Fellows at UBC)</li> <li>Staff Positions with teaching responsibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contingent Faculty (also called sessional and adjunct)</li> <li>Graduate Student TAs</li> <li>Undergraduate TAs</li> </ul>

These role variations led us to ask: What are the key experiences of TFF vis-à-vis SoTL? In what ways does the institutional culture around teaching and learning affect these roles and in what ways do they affect that culture? We argue that TFF are often trying to enact a professional responsibility to improve teaching and learning by conducting SoTL research but may find they are thwarted in doing so.

Our conference panel posed several troublesome questions, given that in many cases TFF may have little, if any, job security:

1. Is it likely that these precariously positioned faculty will avoid anything that might ‘rock the boat’ by not fitting with department expectations about teaching and learning, such as engaging in SoTL research when disciplinary research is predominantly valued by the tenure-track faculty?
2. Will they be as likely as tenure-track faculty to challenge students academically, given that many first-time implementations of new teaching approaches result in lower student evaluation of teaching scores, and such student feedback may be the only way these faculty are evaluated?
3. Who would evaluate their SoTL work and would those evaluators be knowledgeable about how to do so?

We acknowledge that not all TFF are contingent and that some, especially in Australia, may have continuing roles. We do, however, see non-traditional faculty members working in a “hierarchical system with unequal rewards and resources” (Gregory et al. 2017). This lack of support and other challenges are associated with their often academically marginalized positions (Flavell et al. 2018; Vander Kloet et al. 2017).

Given the large attendance of the sessions and the subsequent communications, we decided to formally invite TFF to share their experiences. We were curious about what supports and barriers they have faced in their SoTL work and what recommendations they had for improving SoTL engagement for this demographic group.

## CHANGING FACULTY ROLES

Higher education institutions have historically expected that academics in tenured positions could juggle high levels of sustainable success in teaching, research, governance, and working with the community (Flavell et al. 2018; Lovat, Davies and Plotnikoff 1995). Over time, universities have changed their approach to employment. Academics at the tertiary level were often hired into one of three categories of employment: continuing (tenure-track), fixed-term, and casual/sessional positions (Andrews et al. 2016). According to Bexley, James, and Arkoudis (2011), over the past 20 years there have been significant changes with the number of teaching-focused/casual/sessional staff who have been hired in teaching roles (rather than the traditional research/teaching split), resulting in a sudden and drastic increase of non-traditional faculty roles (Baik, Naylor, and Corrin 2018; Coates et al. 2009; Klopper and Power 2014; Vander Kloet et al. 2017). These teaching roles include teaching-focused equivalent to tenure-track and permanent, but not eligible for tenure.

There are many reasons why this shift to casualization has happened. As Vedder (2018) explains, academics on a tenure track are not cost-effective for universities. Those institutions that experience financial shortages often increase their hiring of casual staff, a better financial alternative for the institution (Coates et al. 2009). Coupled with this, a large percentage of casual academics carry out short contracts that increase an institution’s flexibility to manage its staff, but also negatively impact employee confidence in retaining employment (Anibas, Brenner, and Zorn 2009; Heffernan 2018; Matthews, Duck, and Bartle 2017). There are myriad examples of this shift in faculty roles across Australia, Canada, and the United States. Depending upon the specifics of the terms of each role, which vary by institution, non-traditional faculty experience very different levels of expectations and support to engage in SoTL.

In Australia, the shifts to increased numbers of casual academics are often coupled with an explicit separation from research expectations. For example, one third of full-time academics are hired to *only* conduct research due to tertiary institutions demanding more scholarly outputs (Ryan et al. 2013). Concurrently, 90% of casual academics were hired for teaching only, with less than 5% being paid to do research (Australian Government 2014). The number of teaching stream academics in Australia recently jumped from 755 in 2005 to 3212 in 2015 (Whelan 2017).

The variation is especially apparent in Canada. For example, the University of British Columbia has “Professor of Teaching” positions that are tenure track (Kindler 2013), while at the University of Victoria teaching professor faculty are evaluated every two years on their SoTL work (UVic Teaching and Learning Centre 2016). Several Ontario universities (Guelph, Toronto, Western, McMaster, and

York) had teaching stream positions prior to 2011 (Vajoczki et al. 2011). In 2012, McMaster converted 71 Contractually Limited Appointments (CLAs) to teaching stream positions where the “scholarship of teaching or pedagogy is required for promotion (but not permanence)” (McMaster 2011, Section 11).

In the United States, the erosion of tenure track positions began in the mid-1970s. In 1976, 45% of faculty were full-time tenured or tenure track, 10% were full-time non-tenure track, 25% were part-time, and 21% were graduate students. Three decades later in 2015, the difference is telling: 29% were full-time tenured or tenure track, 17% were full-time non-tenure track, 40% were part-time, and 14% were graduate students (AAUP 2017). AAUP (2018) reported that at all US institutions combined the percentage of instructional positions off the tenure track was 73% in 2016. This report also noted that part-time teaching positions tend to be less secure and the worst remunerated teaching positions in higher education, with low per-course pay and few benefits. If tenure is at its best a big “tent,” designed to unite diverse faculty within a system of common professional values, standards, rights, and responsibilities, then part-time positions can be seen as insecure, unsupported positions with little job security and few protections for academic freedom (AAUP 2018). Not surprisingly, these conditions result in little or no time nor support for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL).

This notable shift towards many universities hiring casual teaching professors raises the question of whether such academics are able to engage successfully in research, specifically in the SoTL. Regardless of geographic location, in most institutions, these TFF teach twice as many courses as their traditional tenure-track counterparts. This is coupled with a lack of support and resources as their contracts often do not include a requirement for research.

## WHY AND HOW TO SUPPORT SOTL

SoTL allows us to develop a better understanding of what works and does not work to enhance student learning and development across different learning contexts. This body of knowledge can then be used to support more effective teaching by both SoTL practitioners as well as those who are consumers but not producers of the research. For faculty whose primary duty is teaching, being an effective teacher is central to their role. We believe that at a minimum they should be regular consumers of SoTL. TFF should also be permitted to engage in SoTL research and be given support for that engagement.

The major shift of universities hiring increasing numbers of contract academics for teaching positions raises the question of whether such academics can engage successfully in SoTL, which may be important to their roles and academic identity as teaching-focused scholars. While it has long been argued that disciplinary research helps faculty maintain currency in their field of expertise, which should inform teaching and keep course content up-to-date (Bernstein 2013; Nyden 2003; Prince, Felder, and Brent 2007), a key element of SoTL is that it is specifically designed to improve the learning outcomes for students (Hostetter 2017; Kenny and Evers 2010).

Work that has meaning and connects to one’s personal values is also more likely to lead to a positive sense of balance (Koblyk 2018) and increased intrinsic motivation (Pink 2009). Engaging in SoTL leads faculty to continuous efforts to improve, preventing stagnation and ultimately benefiting student learning. Further, like disciplinary research, SoTL can involve students as collaborators. Such faculty-student collaborations can lead to strong professional relationships with students. In the case of SoTL, this promotes discussion and reflection regarding how a course is being delivered (Bernstein

2013; Norton 2009). These reflections, combined with the research data, inform the adaptation and modification of future learning experiences for students in the course (Allin 2014; Werder and Otis 2009). Such collaborative relationships also benefit the students as they more deeply engage the students in the learning experiences (Hodges 2013).

There are ways that institutions could support SoTL research for both traditional faculty and teaching stream/casual academics. A foundational aspect of support is access to individuals who can mentor and guide faculty understanding of SoTL and how to conduct it (Flavell et al. 2018). This type of support is especially needed by those who are just beginning in SoTL. Some institutions run specific SoTL workshops that assist in the understanding and selection of methods to enhance teaching and learning (Vander Kloet et al. 2017). Financial support to carry out the research and travel to present the research at conferences are also crucial aspects of institutional support.

If support is not provided by an institution, some faculty will seek external colleagues and resources. However, this external outreach requires more time and effort and suggests an institutional climate that is less supportive of SoTL. If access to resources is based upon faculty role, then those who do not receive the support may question whether their institution values them and their professional development efforts to enhance student learning.

Based on personal experiences of some of the current authors, conversations with other non-traditional faculty, and the passionate stories we heard from attendees at the 2017 ISSOTL panel, we saw a need to explore and share the experiences of TFF in their quest to engage in SoTL.

## METHODS

To collect accounts of TFF experiences engaging in SoTL, we invited persons with such roles to contribute to our qualitative study. We sent an email invitation through the ISSOTL and the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) listservs and *The SoTL Advocate* blog from Illinois State University. We indicated our interest in collecting a range of perspectives. Nine teaching-focused faculty (from Australia, Canada, and the United States) with a variety of roles within their institutions responded to the invitation and provided answers via email to the questions below.

We asked participants to briefly describe their role vis-à-vis SoTL, to indicate whether they were in a full-time or part-time position, and to respond to the following questions:

1. Are you able to engage in SoTL?
2. Do you feel supported when you do?
3. When you engage in SoTL, what barriers or supports do you encounter that are related to your position?
4. Are SoTL grants or other forms of monetary research support available to you?
5. Are there other exclusions or incentives for engaging in SoTL relating to your position?
6. What supports or institutional factors (including culture) would assist you in engaging in SoTL within your institution?

We assigned pseudonyms to participants with their approval. Table 2 summarizes their status as full or part time, the country in which they work, and their primary roles.

**Table 2. Participant Roles**

Pseudonym	PT/FT	Country	Primary role
Alison	FT/permanent	Canada	Teaching stream
Emma	FT	Canada	Teaching stream
Greg	FT; PT teaching	Canada	Staff
Jane	FT	USA	Tenured faculty
Natalie	FT	Canada	Teaching stream
Patricia	FT	Australia	Tenured faculty
Sally	FT	Canada	Tenured faculty
Shelley	FT 12-month contract	Canada	Teaching focused
Sam	FT 12-month contract	Canada	Teaching focused

One of us did a preliminary run through the data, taking an iterative and inductive approach (Neuman 1997). Line by line coding was done on words and phrases in the data inductively, whereby we built from coding data lines, to categories, to the themes outlined below. Next, we reviewed the data from a deductive perspective, which involved searching for any unassigned items or excerpts that fit closely with the already identified themes. The others in the group reviewed the coding and themes and made suggestions for changes, which were made until we had consensus on the data coding and themes of significance. In the next section, we present the themes that arose from our analysis.

#### THEMES ARISING FROM CASE STUDIES

Several compelling themes arose from our participants’ narratives. They experienced a lack of access to support for SoTL research. They also had difficulty maintaining a longitudinal effort across semesters due to lack of control over their teaching schedule. The participants’ sense of isolation in SoTL work was palpable and their courage to overcome the isolation was inspiring. Many of the participants experienced an overburden of work, an undervaluing of SoTL, and sought ways in which the teaching centres could further support their SoTL work. The final theme that arose from the case studies focused on participants’ motivation to engage in SoTL.

#### **Funding Access**

Funding access refers to the participants’ sense of supports available for their SoTL engagement, including their ability to be principal investigator on a study for institutional grants, obtain external funding, and make ethics submissions, along with having the opportunity to teach multiple semesters of a course so it could be part of a long-term SoTL project. The lack of access to funding, however, was the most often-mentioned impediment. For example, Greg noted:

*I cannot apply for teaching grants, at least not without a faculty co-signer ... I do not have access to PD funds for conferences, which makes networking and establishing professional relationships and collaborations in SoTL difficult.*

Natalie found the lack of funding means her SoTL research takes longer than she would like or leads to simpler research questions.

*This means always doing this on a shoestring (or without funding) and stretching the research over longer periods of time than is often useful or beneficial – or being highly selective (or sometimes worse, highly simplistic!) in the type of question asked or approach taken ... we have access in theory, but not really in practice.*

Emma noted that small institutional grants are in high demand and tend to be awarded to tenured and tenure track faculty. The lack of access is often embedded within institutional processes. For example, Alison received the following email in response to her application for a SoTL grant:

*Teaching stream professors are not eligible to apply for this program as their main role is teaching. While we understand lecture stream professors do engage in research activities, it should be outside the scope of their employment requirements.*

Given that Alison is hired to be a teaching expert, this seems a rather limited view.

Teaching-focused faculty, while motivated to engage in SoTL, experience challenges with access to funds and the kind of continuity with courses that would enable SoTL work.

### **Teaching centre support for SoTL**

Teaching and learning centres were mentioned by several participants, although the centre practices were inconsistent with respect to supporting TFF engaging in SoTL. For example, on the positive side, Alison found her centre

*has been wonderful in recognizing the work of teaching stream (and sessional) faculty through a quarterly newsletter. This has connected me with other teaching stream faculty at the campus who are engaged in SoTL projects and led to many wonderful networks and collaborations.*

At the same time, several participants noted limitations in the scope of support from teaching centres. Shelley remarked that “while the teaching centre supports SoTL, most of their efforts are directed towards a specific SoTL initiative,” not one for which teaching-focused faculty were eligible. This was echoed by Alison, who pointed out that there are rules about “who could or could not attend SoTL workshops,” with TFF often explicitly excluded. Greg argued that “directors of teaching and learning centres [must] advocate for a smoothening of the obstacles and inclusive practices for all appointments.”

Thus, the support received from teaching and learning centres was mixed and in some cases the centre practices became barriers for SoTL engagement by non-traditional faculty. At the same time the positive examples suggested a powerful potential support role that could be expanded.

### **Isolation versus connection**

Academics often report feeling isolated in their work (Eady et al. 2019; Seldin 1997; Simmons 2011); this is certainly true for many TFF wishing to conduct SoTL projects. Alison noted she is “the only teaching stream faculty member in my area, so there is a lack of collegial rapport around SoTL.” At

the same time, she “found a wonderful peer mentor who is an established teaching stream professor in another discipline who has been instrumental in guiding me through the grant application process and advising me on time management and priorities for promotion.” Natalie said, “It is rare to find other like-minded folk within home departments: we tend to be quite isolated in our interests and research questions, for example” and recommended finding “colleagues who can be supports either within your discipline or outside.”

While our TFF participants bemoaned their SoTL isolation, they were strategic in finding supports outside their disciplinary or departmental homes.

### **SoTL undervalued**

The tension between teaching and research in the academy is well-established (Hattie and Marsh 1996; Lapoule and Lynch 2018; Robertson 2007), along with the perception among many across higher education that SoTL is not ‘real research’ (McKinney 2006; Poole 2013; Simmons et al. 2013; Tierney 2019). Thus, like many full time and tenure track faculty who engage in SoTL work, our TFF participants experienced this devaluing of SoTL. Patricia found that “SoTL is not considered a valid form of research. The balance for promotion tends towards those with large external national or international grants, which are not typically available for SoTL.” Jane noted the onus is on her to promote her work: “There is scant public awareness at all academic levels about SoTL as a valid form of research... it is up to individual faculty (especially those on the tenure track) to advocate for their SoTL research agenda within departments.” In some institutions, the negative perception of SoTL may be more prevalent. Sally notes that “there is vocal backlash from traditional academics at my institution against the attention and financial commitment to SoTL” and Natalie reflects that “I am rarely seen as a ‘researcher’ when I am doing SoTL, and so there is little to no support or encouragement for the work.”

Our teaching-focused participants still chose to engage in SoTL, but the undervaluing of this work further contributed to their sense of marginalization.

### **SoTL as overload work**

Our participants all found ways to engage in SoTL but pointed to the negative impact of the corresponding workload as their teaching-focused position expectations did not include time for scholarly inquiry into teaching. Shelley said, “While I can engage in SoTL, it must be done as an add-on to my full-time teaching load of 30 credits/year (5 full year courses over the year)” and Alison noted while she does make time for SoTL, she has to “engage in SoTL on my own (unpaid) time . . . Colleagues I have spoken to say it’s difficult for them to engage in SoTL because of their heavy teaching load.” An additional time challenge noted by Natalie is that “responsibilities for staying current with my discipline research are in addition to my SoTL time; there’s a challenge of ‘competing’ in the SoTL world with those in Education Departments and Teaching and Learning Centres, whose work revolves around education.”

TFF already have extremely full teaching schedules; it is not surprising that few will engage in SoTL if any research they conduct is done as a voluntary effort.



### **Motivation to engage in SoTL**

In most cases, these TFF are not required to conduct SoTL work, but our respondents shared their desire to do so; such motivation was embedded in their participation in our study. For example, Natalie explains,

*I love teaching – and learning about learning, and I love the challenge of how to make the learning environment better and how I might find ways to share these ideas and challenges with others, so the incentive is self-motivating in many ways – the element of wonder, of ‘making things better,’ doing something that contributes to the world.*

Other participants contrasted their interest in engaging in SoTL against the constraints preventing them from doing so. For example, Sam found the lack of opportunity to teach the same class again a challenge:

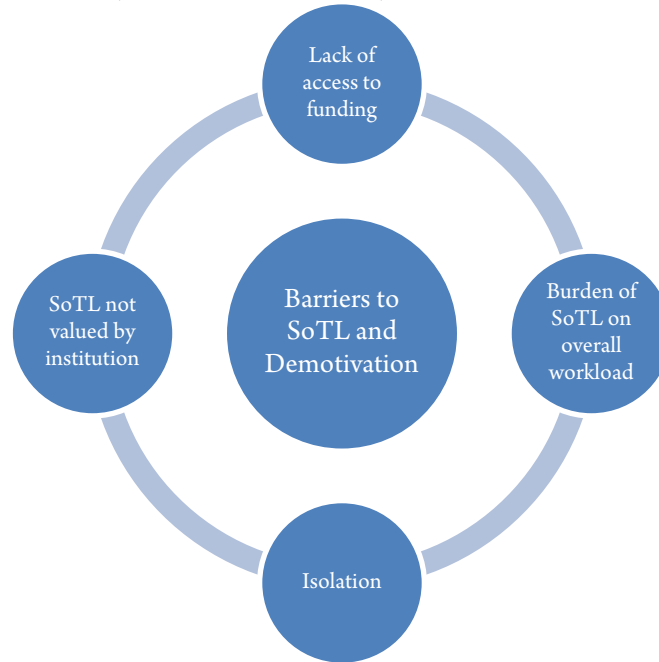
*It’s difficult to get any projects rolling because it seems that once I start something I may not see that class again for a long time (if ever). This makes it difficult to try and refine and develop teaching scholarship that is relevant.*

The motivation theme is given further consideration in our discussion where we explore the impact of demotivation on other aspects of their work.

## **DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The experiences of TFF participants motivated to engage in the SoTL are often characterized by their experiences of lack of access to SoTL funding, a lack of institutional support, their feeling of isolation, their sense of the burden of adding the voluntary work of SoTL to their overfull load, and their sense of this work not being valued by their institutions, all of which may result in their demotivation to engage in SoTL (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Barriers to SoTL Experienced by Teaching-focused Faculty (TFF) Experiences**



These themes are prevalent for many who undertake SoTL, regardless of position (Marquis et al. 2017; Mathany, Clow, and Aspenlieder 2017; McKinney 2004; Simmons 2020). SoTL practitioners still bemoan the scarcity of time and resources, the difficulty in finding like-minded colleagues, particularly within their own institutions, and the lack of recognition and value attributed to SoTL work. In addition, Billot, Rowland, Carnell, Amundsen, and Evans (2017) indicated that the expectations around SoTL research at tertiary institutions were not always clearly defined and that participants struggled with the perceptions of the lack of credibility mirrored to SoTL work. Along with the barriers of being a SoTL researcher, participants also reported significant hurdles when attempting SoTL including a lack of funds, the time to complete applications, and finding scholarly journals to publish SoTL research.

The themes described above are often experienced by tenure-track/research faculty who engage in SoTL; however, the magnitude of the barriers seem even greater for the TFF faculty. TFF typically teach twice as many courses, are often not eligible for such grants as may exist for SoTL, may be excluded from collegial exchange about teaching and learning, and they may find little in administration's response to their SoTL work to suggest it is valued. It is important to note that our participants are those who have already committed to SoTL and are feeling frustrated. This makes us wonder about those who do not have support to engage in SoTL at all.

## GRASS ROOTS EFFORTS BY TFF

We acknowledge the difficulty faced by our participants in pursuing SoTL projects: work they see as contributing to improving teaching and learning. However, there are some means by which individual TFF faculty could begin to overcome the challenges within their own sphere of influence.

First, collaborations greatly reduce the individual load and usually lead to richer projects and papers while concurrently connecting SoTL scholars to like-minded others (McKinney 2004; Simmons et al. 2013). As McKinney (2004) notes, collaborations within the institution can be created with a variety of colleagues, with each providing different benefits. For example, departmental colleagues might bring additional sections of data and direct familiarity with the pedagogical challenges within the discipline; research faculty within or beyond the department might have access to the resources not available to the TFF.

Some participants indicated that another option for connection was to find a SoTL mentor to provide support and guidance (Flavell et al. 2018). When one is not available within the institution, we encourage TFF to connect ISSOTL or other SoTL organizations in their region (e.g., SoTL Canada, EuroSoTL, Latin SoTL, SoTL Asia) to get connected to a suitable mentor. ISSOTL's International Collaborative Writing Groups and other partnerships across institutions provide another example of collaborations beyond one's institution.

Third, it may be serendipitous for TFF that thoughts of environmental sustainability, as well as the current COVID-19 pandemic, are leading to more online conference opportunities. It is also possible (and desirable) in these technologically enhanced times that future conferences will create virtual attendance options, which would concurrently address issues of the lack of travel budget resources for many in teaching-focused positions.

While efforts by TFF alone are unlikely to be enough to address all the barriers to SoTL, in tandem with initiatives at the institutional level and beyond, they could go a long way towards creating a multi-level movement towards change (Bernstein 2013). SoTL traction can be enhanced by capitalizing on parallel efforts at the micro, meso, and macro institutional levels (Miller-Young et al. 2017; Moore et al. 2018; Simmons 2016; Simmons and Taylor 2019).

## HELPING TO PROMOTE CHANGE WITHIN THE INSTITUTION

Grassroots action alone is unlikely to be enough for radical change. Institutional change, as noted above, requires concerted efforts at multiple levels. The themes in the data lead us to make recommendations for several ways by which institutions could better support their TFF to engage in SoTL. Following the descriptions of the themes, see Table 3 for a summary of the reported challenges, the needed actions, and the recommended institutional level at which they might be addressed.

### **Funding access**

A policy shift is needed regarding who qualifies to apply for grants and awards as echoed in Vander Kloet et al. (2017) and Newton, Miller-Young, and Sanago (2019). If institutions wish to demonstrate they value TFF, providing access to funding on an equal footing would allow these faculty to conduct research towards improving teaching. Change is possible; for example, at Brock University in Ontario, Canada, Instructional Limited Faculty are now eligible for all teaching grants and awards.

### **Teaching centre support**

TFF would benefit from flexible access to workshops about grants and other institutional resources that support research. It may be necessary to offer workshops online or in the evening or weekends. While these times may seem at odds with TFF concerns about overload, weekday 9-5 workshops are not available to many of these teaching faculty. Some participants voiced concerns about the supports the teaching centre could provide, however, the teaching centre does not always control the actual resources. At the same time, Potter and Kustra (2011) pose key critical questions about what kinds of SoTL supports, in times of dwindling resources, are the best use of centres' resources. More work is needed to strategize efficient and effective ways of providing support.

### **Reducing isolation**

Teaching-focused faculty are often excluded from department meetings, either by scheduling or by virtue of their position in the department hierarchy, and therefore are missing out on the vital discussions about curriculum, student success, and program goals (Brown et al. 2013; Kezar, Maxey, and Eaton, 2014). SoTL learning communities, supported by the teaching centres, could help overcome the sense of isolation (Felten et al. 2007); running or providing resources to attend small regional conferences or online discussion groups could allow networking with like-minded colleagues. For example, at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, an annual regional conference has provided a springboard for TFF and others to connect and collaborate with faculty from other institutions.

### **Valuing SoTL**

Making SoTL an explicit part of the institutional plan and strategic mission could show institutional valuing of SoTL, as could the inclusion of SoTL research in institutional and departmental research forums/presentations. At the same time, "the gap between the practice of individual academics based on the ideal of the SoTL ... and the institutional infrastructure and leadership to support that work is an ongoing challenge to the development of the field" (Simmons and Taylor 2019). Manarin and Abrahamson (2016) suggest that valuing SoTL may be a threshold concept for the field. This is a critical area for further research.

### **Avoiding overload**

TFF perceive significant work overload when they attempt to integrate SoTL into their roles (Gregory et al. 2017). Institutions could undertake pilot projects to determine the impact of course release to engage in SoTL. Efforts to support SoTL, which Hutchings, Huber, and Ciccone (2011) argue is a leadership responsibility, may prevent TFF from disengaging "as a self-protective measure and becom[ing] *amotivated* (Ryan and Deci 2000) from work that takes significant time and energy and that they feel does not contribute to a larger purpose" (Simmons 2020).

### **Avoiding demotivation**

Limited connections with others and opportunities to do research about teaching could have a negative effect on the self-efficacy of these casual academics, as they often feel that they do not belong, nor have enough expertise, which may lead to a lack of self-esteem (Kenny and Evers 2010). SoTL could

be supported explicitly to avoid demotivating these front-line teaching professionals (Hamilton and Simmons 2019). SoTL could be encouraged as professional development to provide the autonomy about choices, a sense of value in the work, and the chance to develop mastery that Pink (2009) argues are essential factors in intrinsic motivation and future innovations.

**Table 3. SoTL Supports for TFF**

Challenge	Recommended actions	Institutional level
Funding access	Equal access to SoTL grants	Institutional Policy Teaching centres
Teaching centre support	Connect to TFF Flexible online and recorded workshops, including evenings and weekends Equal access to SoTL mentoring Bring in SoTL plenary speakers for research events	Teaching centres
Reducing isolation	Develop SoTL learning communities Run/support local or regional SoTL networking conference	Teaching centres
Valuing SoTL	Include SoTL as named research to count towards promotion and annual bonuses Include SoTL research presentations as part of institutional research forums Create research awards for SoTL Include explicit reference to SoTL in promotional materials and administrative addresses	Administration
Avoiding overload	Integrate SoTL into roles Encourage repeat teaching of same course and/or multiple sections of same course	Institutional Policy Department
Avoiding demotivation	Encourage SoTL as professional development	Administration Institutional Policy Teaching centres Department

We acknowledge the simplistic nature of our summary. In the minds of our participants, the suggestions for change are indeed straightforward. At the same time, we are acutely aware that many of them require significant financial support. Institutions that hire TFF to pick up the teaching load may be reluctant to offer course release for SoTL, something they may not see as a TFF responsibility. While we argue that SoTL is important professional development for TFF, we suspect many institutions would be happy to have TFF simply teach.

Other recommendations require significant time. Teaching centres offering workshops online or on weekends means that someone must do that work. The same would be true for supporting communities of practice or running regional conferences. It is also worth considering whether there is the needed critical mass of TFF to make these endeavors worthwhile on a regional level. To allow TFF more opportunities to connect to others working in similar contexts, a broader perspective is needed.

## BEYOND THE INSTITUTION: OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCLUSIVE PRACTICE TO SUPPORT AND ADVOCATE FOR TEACHING ONLY POSITIONS IN THE SoTL SPACE

The focus of our recommendations relates to providing support for TFF interested in the work of SoTL. We have mapped recommendations of what could be done at the institutional level, by the department, teaching centres, senior administration, through policies, and by TFF themselves. We asked the participants how their work in SoTL could be better supported. While Shelley felt that “ISSOTL already provides amazing resources for advocacy and outreach. Many of the changes have to happen within our own institutions,” we acknowledge that change is often difficult, especially when tackling institutional cultures. These institutional cultures are individual, and successful institutional SoTL initiatives will need to vary based on that context (Simmons and Taylor 2019; Simmons 2016). At the same time, the participants’ responses and our own musings led us to pose two broad questions to help guide us and others in future TFF advocacy work:

- What supportive resources can be compiled and made available to support TFF?
- How can SoTL teaching-focused communities be created to provide social and professional support for TFF?

Concrete examples of resources from a variety of institutions and institutional cultures might provide motivation and ideas that will prompt other institutions to consider modifying their practices concerning TFF. Towards this, we plan to create webpages showcasing our participants’ narratives and specific examples of means by which institutions support their engagement in SoTL, as well as provide other TFF resources.

Responses from the nine participants revealed a sense of isolation, which was enhanced by a lack of funding to attend conferences where they might connect with like-minded peers. To help address barriers to conference attendance, ISSOTL has increased its funding for faculty and students who have need for additional financial support, which can help some TFF connect in person with others engaging in SoTL. A possible silver lining of the COVID-19 pandemic is that many conferences have moved online, which greatly increases convenience and reduces the cost of participating, both of which should help bring in those who have not been able to attend the physical conferences.

TFF would welcome a bigger “tent” (Huber and Hutchings 2005) to provide support and to pursue their SoTL interests. Participants noted that a more cohesive sense of community within ISSOTL would help address their sense of isolation. In response to this perception, the ISSOTL Advocacy Committee plans to initiate a teaching-focused community within ISSOTL through the formation of a new Special Interest Group (SIG). As with other SIGs, this group could take advantage of online discussion tools to connect with each other, providing an interactive ‘gathering point’ for TFF and a means to maintain a community that goes beyond the annual conference. Virtual groups are already in existence via SoTL Ontario and SoTL Canada. Similar virtual communities can be created more locally as well as across larger regions, perhaps connecting to global regional SoTL groups (EuroSoTL, Latin SoTL and SoTL Asia).

## FINAL THOUGHTS

While there are compelling themes that arise from our participants’ narratives, we acknowledge that our nine participants are from only three countries and cannot represent the full range of experiences of TFF engaging in SoTL. We also acknowledge that many of our identified themes can be experienced by all who engage in SoTL, not just TFF. Further research will be needed to ascertain

whether these findings apply to other TFF, especially in other countries. At the same time, as the number of TFF grows, we need to consider whether such academics can engage successfully in SoTL, which may be important to their roles and identity as teaching-focused scholars.

TFF are professional educators who seek to understand and improve teaching and learning processes through SoTL projects. Many of our recommendations for change are directed to the institutional level, where more equitable access to SoTL grants and other resources and integration of SoTL into teaching-focused roles would sit. As members of ISSOTL's Advocacy Committee we can continue to advocate and educate for these changes. We also recognize that in the meantime we can help make sure TFF feel less isolated by helping them connect with like-minded others to share strategies.

The barriers our participants face require intervention at the institutional level (i.e., lack of access to SoTL resources, a lack of institutional support, their sense of the burden of adding the voluntary work of SoTL to their overfull load, and their sense of this work not being valued by their institutions). Bolstering the support efforts from outside (such as ISSOTL's Advocacy Committee) could also encourage TFF at the grassroots level: to believe in their own agency to address their sense of isolation, to find mentors, and to build networks that might encourage a groundswell of institutional change.

We applaud our participants and other teaching-focused faculty for their commitment and determination to engage in SoTL to improve student learning. Ultimately, we all need to prioritize initiatives to help TFF have *access* to SoTL resources, feel *supported* in their SoTL work, navigate ways to have their SoTL work *integrated* into their roles, and feel that their SoTL work is *valued* by their colleagues and institution.

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