Empowering Educators through SoTL: Insights and Innovations from Real-Time Audience Engagement

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Abstract

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is a conceptualisation of the teaching role in higher education that can transform academic understanding and practices by incorporating research as integral to teaching - an evidence-based and theoretically informed approach to teaching. Moreover, SoTL involves the systematic study of teaching and learning processes with a singular goal: improving educational practices and, most importantly, enhancing student outcomes. It is a form of research that holds transformative power, not only in how we teach but in how we elevate student learning to its fullest potential. This study explored the perceptions of academics related to SoTL and what supports would empower uptake and advocacy of SoTL. This was accomplished by engaging HERDSA keynote attendees through real-time audience polling. Guided by a participatory action research (PAR) approach, data were gathered in an online format (Mentimeter) from 263 participants during the keynote, responding to 10 questions related to SoTL, institutional challenges, and future action. This study highlights key areas where educators seek clarity and offers insights on how HERDSA can support its membership by addressing SoTL barriers, enhancing collaborative networks, and fostering continuous professional development. The implications of these findings extend to HERDSA's potential role in shaping the future of SoTL practices and empowering its members to advocate for SoTL within their institutions.

Keywords

SoTL, educational practices, Participatory Action Research, real-time audience engagement

Key contributions

- Elucidates the dynamic role of SoTL in empowering educators and transforming educational practices.
- Engages HERDSA keynote attendees in real-time reflection, thus revealing insights into the barriers faced by educators.

- Identifies practical steps to support SoTL integration, not only through professional development and mentorship but also through institutional advocacy and community-building efforts within HERDSA.
- Highlights the significance of collaborative networks and mentorship in fostering SoTL engagement and advancing professional development among educators.
- Explores actionable strategies to overcome institutional challenges, such as resource constraints and undervaluation of SoTL, by advocating for leadership support and recognition of SoTL's contributions to teaching excellence.
- Inspires educators and administrators to champion systemic changes that create supportive environments, ensuring the long-term sustainability and impact of SoTL practices in higher education.

Introduction: Establishing the Context

Empowering educators has always been at the heart of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), and this was the core message I sought to convey in my keynote address at HERDSA, titled Empowering Educators: Navigating SoTL Realities and Best Practices. SoTL has seen countless attempts at definition over the years, but many scholars return to the foundational work of pioneers such as Ernest Boyer, Lee Shulman, and Pat Hutchings. At its core, SoTL involves the systematic study of teaching and learning processes with a singular goal: improving educational practices and, most importantly, enhancing student outcomes. It is a form of research that holds transformative power, not only in how we teach but in how we elevate student learning to its fullest potential (Boyer, 1990; Din et al., 2022; Felten & Geertsema, 2023; Hutching, 2000; Shulman, 2004).

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is a powerful tool for transforming education, as it places a critical emphasis on the inquiry into pedagogical practices and their impact on student learning. At its essence, SoTL involves educators investigating their own teaching methodologies, gathering evidence, and applying that knowledge to improve both instruction and learning outcomes. Scholars such as Boyer, Shulman, and Hutchings, laid the groundwork by emphasizing the importance of reflective, evidence-based teaching, encouraging educators to view their classrooms as dynamic spaces of inquiry and growth. Ultimately, SoTL fosters a deeper engagement with the art and science of teaching, creating a bridge between scholarly research and the lived experiences of both teachers and students (Boyer, 1990; Hutchings, 2000; Shulman, 2004).

The act of teaching, whether formal or informal, shapes the way future generations of students engage with knowledge, emulating the exceptional qualities they encounter and, perhaps, seeking to avoid repeating those that are less effective. SoTL offers educators a unique opportunity to enhance their craft, not through isolated practice but by drawing on research,

evidence, and peer collaboration (McKinney, 2005). It transforms teaching into a public, peer-reviewed endeavour, one in which educators build on the work of others and contribute to a growing body of knowledge designed to benefit students and their learning communities.

As I reflected in my keynote, we stand on the shoulders of giants in SoTL—figures like Ernest Boyer, who advanced the Scholarship of Discovery, Integration, and Application; Pat Hutchings, whose systematic inquiry into classroom teaching has influenced countless educators; and Lee Shulman, who highlighted pedagogical content knowledge and the importance of making teaching a shared, public enterprise. I invite us all to honour and read their works as they continue to inform and inspire educators across disciplines.

The scholarly contributions of more contemporary figures, such as Din (Din, et. al., 2022), Culver (2023), Felten, and Geertsema (2023), have extended SoTL's reach into leadership, mentorship, and the intersection of teaching with global educational challenges. Their insights remind us that SoTL is not only about improving classroom experiences but also about addressing the broader challenges facing students, communities, and the world.

The evolution of SoTL over the past three decades has brought us to a new era—one shaped by the professionalization of teaching, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational practices, and the ongoing indigenization of the curriculum. As we continue this journey, it is crucial to recover SoTL's original purpose, ensuring that its influence extends beyond the walls of academia to impact society at large (Felten & Geertsema, 2023).

Empowering educators through SoTL is not merely about refining instructional techniques. It is about participating in a global, transformative movement to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, benefiting both students and the communities they will go on to serve.

Despite the growing body of literature on SoTL, I found it quite challenging to find any research that has focused on the specific SoTL needs of academics themselves. Papers have identified the lack and/or limited institutional support (Gansemer-Topf et al., 2023; How, 2020), pressures of professionalization (Felten & Geertsema, 2023), and methodological challenges faced by academics (How, 2020). Yet research focusing specifically on the SoTL research needs of academics seemed limited. This caused me to deeply consider what I should do with my invitation as a keynote speaker on the topic of SoTL.

Being intrigued by the aforementioned gap prompted me to approach the keynote presentation in a creative way, by mirroring the key stages of a SoTL project while involving HERDSA conference participants in the identification and potential resolution of SoTL challenges. This participatory approach not only allowed for real-time engagement with the audience but also served as a practical exploration of the very gap I had identified. By framing the keynote as a "live" SoTL needs assessment, I was able to gather insights into the priorities, challenges, and aspirations of educators present at the conference.

Reflecting on this experience, it became clear that these interactions illuminated a significant limitation in the existing literature: the lack of focused research on the specific SoTL needs of academics. This realization crystallized the central research question guiding this paper: What are the specific SoTL needs of academics, and how can these needs be systematically assessed and addressed to enhance their engagement and impact in teaching and learning scholarship? Addressing this question not only seeks to fill a critical research gap but also aims to provide actionable strategies for empowering academics as they navigate the complexities of SoTL and contribute to transformative educational practices.

Methodology

This study employed a participatory action research (PAR) framework, designed to actively involve key stakeholders—including students, academics, and administrators—in the research process. The PAR approach was chosen to foster collaboration and ensure that research outcomes directly address the needs and challenges identified by those most impacted by educational practices. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of Manitoba's Research Ethics Board (HS26557 [H2024:220]).

The study is grounded in a constructivist ontology, which acknowledges the existence of multiple truths shaped by individual experiences and contexts. Epistemologically, it embraces the belief that practitioners possess valuable, situated knowledge about their own practices. These philosophical underpinnings guided the inquiry, emphasizing the importance of co-constructing knowledge with participants and ensuring that their lived experiences were central to both the data collection and analysis processes.

Recognizing a significant gap in understanding the SoTL needs of academics (the conference participants) themselves, this study sought to explore these needs by engaging participants in real-time reflection during the keynote address. The desire to surface and address challenges faced by educators—whether they related to the identified gap or other concerns—informed the methodological choices. The interactive keynote presentation served as both a platform for data collection and an opportunity for participants to contribute their perspectives, fostering a sense of shared inquiry.

Key ethical challenges were identified and addressed to ensure the study adhered to rigorous standards of ethical research. These included: 1. Informed Consent: Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and assured of their anonymity. By using Mentimeter, an online polling tool, participants could provide input without revealing their identities. 2. Data Confidentiality: Responses collected through Mentimeter were anonymized to protect participant privacy. 3. Voluntary Participation: Participation was entirely voluntary, with individuals free to abstain from answering any or all questions.

Nearly 400 attendees were invited to respond to a series of carefully designed questions, seven of which mirrored the foundational steps of creating a SoTL project. Up to 263 participants provided responses during the 40-minute session, generating a rich dataset rooted in the lived experiences and expertise of the attendees. This approach aligned with the collaborative ethos of PAR, ensuring that the research was directly informed by those engaged in SoTL practices.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data, following Braun and Clarke's (2013) six-phase framework:

1. Familiarization with the Data: The researcher reviewed the Mentimeter responses multiple times to gain a thorough understanding of the dataset.

2. Generating Initial Codes: Key phrases and concepts were identified and systematically coded.

3. Searching for Themes: Related codes were grouped to form preliminary themes reflecting participants' insights and experiences.

4. Reviewing Themes: Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately captured the data's essence.

5. Defining and Naming Themes: Clear definitions and concise names were developed for each theme to encapsulate their core meanings.

6. Producing the Report: Themes were synthesized into a coherent narrative that addressed the central research question.

By combining a constructivist epistemological foundation with a participatory methodology, this study not only explored the specific SoTL needs of academics but also modeled an approach to engaging educators in reflective and collaborative inquiry. This methodology ensures that the findings are both contextually relevant and practically applicable, advancing a deeper understanding of how to support academics in their SoTL endeavours.

Results

This section presents the findings of the study, addressing the research question: What are the specific SoTL needs of academics, and how can these needs be systematically assessed and addressed to enhance their engagement and impact in teaching and learning scholarship? The results are organized into subsections to provide a comprehensive overview of participant responses and insights derived from the data. First, the rank-ordered response rates highlight which questions garnered the most engagement, offering a preliminary understanding of participant priorities and interests during the keynote. This is followed by an exploration of the

audience composition, detailing their levels of familiarity with SoTL concepts and practices, including their self-reported knowledge and application. The next subsection identifies the barriers to engaging in SoTL as perceived by participants, shedding light on the challenges academics face in pursuing scholarly teaching and learning initiatives. Subsequently, the analysis delves into participants' responses to the SoTL research steps, encompassing:

- Current SoTL research themes of interest.

- Preferences for research design methodologies.

- Data collection method preferences, categorized into quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches.

- Comfort levels with data analysis.

- Preferences for disseminating SoTL research projects.

The final subsection shifts focus to participant feedback regarding the keynote address. This includes reflections on unanswered questions that emerged during the session and expressions of inspiration to action, detailing how the keynote motivated participants to engage with SoTL in new and meaningful ways. This structured presentation ensures clarity and coherence, allowing readers to follow the findings as they address the central research question while offering actionable insights into the SoTL needs of academics.

Survey Questions Receiving the Greatest Responses During the Keynote

As shown in Table 1, the highest response rate among the ten research questions posed during the keynote was for Question 3: "What are the current SoTL challenges and/or barriers at your institution?" This question garnered a notable response rate of 78%. The remaining questions received response rates ranging from 63% to 69%, indicating a strong level of engagement from the audience throughout the presentation.

However, the response rates for two specific questions were significantly lower. Question 10, asking participants to share one idea they were committed to applying from the session, received a 49% response rate. Meanwhile, Question 9, which inquired about any remaining questions post-presentation, garnered the lowest rate at 30%.

Table 1

Rank Ordering of Responses to the 10 Survey Questions Presented During the Keynote Address

Survey Questions	Participation Percentage	Response Numbers
1. How would you rate your familiarity with the SoTL?	63%	N/A
2. What are the current SoTL challenges and/or barriers at your institution? Use key words (e.g., time, financial support, etc.)	78%	592
3. What current teaching and/or learning challenge(s) would you like to know more information about?	68%	248
4. Which research design(s) are you most comfortable with?	68%	338
5. What data collection method do you find most accessible (or easy to use)?	67%	342
6. How confident do you feel in your data analysis skills?	69%	N/A
7. How do you prefer to share your research findings?	66%	345
8. Demographic Questions	69%	N/A
9. As the result of today's presentation, what question would you still wish to have answered?	30%	98
10. Please share one idea, encouragement, or inspiration you gained from this session that you're committed to applying.	49%	133

Note. Questions 1,6 & 8 represented 5-point Likert scales (quantitative data).

Demographic Insights: Audience Composition and SoTL Experience

As shown in Table 2, the session's demographic composition was diverse, with the majority being experienced academics (more than six years in academia), followed by faculty developers, early-career academics, and administrative decision-makers. As seen in Table 3, and regarding familiarity with SoTL, 54.02% of the attendees indicated they had incorporated SoTL into their work, while 45.98% had not. Interestingly, 14.37% of respondents admitted limited familiarity, while the majority (85.63%) had practical knowledge of SoTL.

Table 2

Rank Ordering of Current Role of Conference Attendees

What best describes their current role	Frequency	Percentage
Academic (6 or more years)	70	38.46%
Faculty/Educational/Academic Developer	37	20.33%
New Academic (first 5 years)	22	12.09%
Administrator, Policy and Decision Maker	19	10.44%
Higher Education SoTL Researcher	11	6.04%
Curriculum Designers	8	4.40%
Other	7	3.85%
Student	4	2.20%
Information Technologists	2	1.10%
Journal Editors and/or Reviewers	2	1.10%
Total	182	

Table 3

Rank Order from Lowest to Highest Frequency and Percentage Levels of SoTL Knowledge and Application

Level of SoTL Knowledge	Frequency	Percentage
Unaware: I have no knowledge of SoTL	7	4.02%
Expert: I have extensive knowledge of SoTL and could confidently facilitate a workshop on it.	14	8.05%
Vaguely aware: I've heard of SoTL but know little about it.	18	10.34%
Somewhat familiar: I have a basic understanding of SoTL concepts.	19	10.92%
Moderately familiar: I'm familiar with SoTL and have considered its application.	36	20.69%
Very familiar: I am well-versed in SoTL and regularly integrate it into my practice.	37	21.26%
Knowledgeable: I understand SoTL well and have applied some of its principles.	43	24.71%
Total	174	100.00%

Barriers to SoTL: Navigating Institutional and Academic Challenges

As seen in Table 4, a thematic analysis of the barriers academics face when conducting SoTL projects revealed several major themes. First, Perceived Value and Institutional Support: Many respondents reported that SoTL struggles to gain widespread institutional support and legitimacy. Despite superficial acknowledgment, it often lacks tangible backing, making it difficult to prioritize SoTL within academic settings. Second, Financial Constraints and Resource Allocation: A scarcity of funding and resources was frequently identified as a challenge, limiting the capacity for sustainable SoTL research and growth. Third, Capacity Building and SoTL Literacy: Gaps in expertise, training, and confidence among faculty emerged as significant barriers. Many educators lacked the knowledge or skills necessary to fully engage with SoTL research. Fourth, Institutional Governance and Structural Challenges: Bureaucratic hurdles and misaligned institutional priorities were seen as further complicating SoTL efforts. Leadership support for SoTL is inconsistent, with hierarchical structures sometimes inhibiting its advancement. Fifth, Competing Academic Priorities and Research Legitimacy: There was a clear tension between traditional disciplinary research and SoTL. Many academics felt that SoTL was often seen as secondary to disciplinary research, contributing to its marginalization. Sixth, Mentorship and Support Systems: The lack of experienced mentorship in SoTL was identified as a barrier, limiting opportunities for faculty to grow and succeed in this area of research. Seventh, Evaluation Standards and Academic Accountability: Rigid performance metrics and unclear evaluation standards were reported to shape perceptions of SoTL's value. High standards for academic rigor and accountability often restricted SoTL initiatives.

Steps of SoTL Research: Themes, Methods, and Comfort Levels

The keynote presentation was structured to elicit information from participants following the sequence of considerations and steps in a SoTL project. To stay close to the keynote design I am presenting the findings of the data collection in the same sequence.

Step 1: Formulating the Research Question: Trending Themes in SoTL

The most prominent themes identified for SoTL research, as seen in Table 5, were artificial intelligence (19.76%), student engagement in online learning (11.38%), and assessment/feedback (10.78%). These focus areas illustrate growing interest in technology, student-centered learning, and assessment tools. Other themes are reported in Table 5.

Table 4

Theme Analysis of Barriers

Barrier	Freq	%
Time: capacity, opportunities	275	31.43%
Perceived Value and Institutional Support: Undervalued/value, recognition, worth, lip service to value (Edubabble), reward, lack of priorities, importance, superficial, acceptance, commitment, incentive, respect	178	20.34%
Financial Constraints and Resource Allocation: budget, costs, funding, investment, money	104	11.89%
Load: Work, teaching	101	11.54%
Capacity Building and SoTL Literacy: awareness, clarity, confidence, expertise, familiarity, knowledge, not sure how to, skills, SoTL literacy, training, understanding	55	6.29%
Institutional Governance and Structural Challenges: administrative/Leadership support/buy in, HE policies, hierarchical determinants, institution, egos, leadership, management bureaucracy, commercial approach, structural	28	3.20%
Resources	27	3.09%
Competing Academic Priorities and Research Legitimacy: Disciplinary research priorities, publish/perish, not real research	20	2.29%
Mentorship and Support Systems: mentorship, supervision, guidance	19	2.17%
Evaluation Standards and Academic Accountability: Performance metrics, quality, reputation, assessment, academic rigour, promotion, WBA, Clear outcomes, outputs, Key Performance Indicators	18	2.06%
Collaboration, connections	13	1.49%
Ethics	11	1.26%
Staffing, personnel	7	0.80%
Engagement of students	4	0.46%
No enthusiasm, interest, motivation	4	0.46%
Casualisation of academics (reliance on part-time, temporary, or contract-based academic staff rather than full-time, permanent faculty)	3	0.34%
Authenticity/transparency, bias	3	0.34%
Artificial Intelligence	2	0.23%
Restricted to academics, segregation	2	0.23%
Demographics	1	0.11%
Total	875	100%

Step 2: Research Design Preferences: Qualitative vs. Quantitative Approaches

As seen in Table 6, HERDSA attendees exhibited a preference for qualitative research, particularly interviews (14.71%), followed by thematic analysis (7.65%) and case studies (6.47%). In quantitative designs, surveys and questionnaires were the most favored (27.43%), highlighting a clear inclination toward gathering empirical data from large populations.

Step 3: Data Collection Methods: Qualitative Dominance

As seen in Table 7, most preferred data collection methods of attendees was qualitative data collection (62.37%), followed by quantitative data collection (37.63%). In the qualitative data collection, the top three included overall qualitative, interviews and thematic data collection techniques. For the quantitative the top three included overall quantitative, surveys and questionnaires.

Step 4: Comfort in Data Analysis: Confidence and Collaboration

As seen in Table 8, the audience's comfort level in working with statistics ranged from not at all confident to very confident with most (80.57%) having the confidence (moderate, confident, very confident) to conduct data analysis skills. However, a total of 19.43% would need some guidance and/or additional assistance.

Step 5: Disseminating SoTL Research: Traditional Channels Prevail

As seen in Table 9, journals and conference presentations were the most popular dissemination methods (41.27% and 35.24%, respectively), followed by public talks (12.65%) and seminars (3.61%), then social media (3.31%), enacted by teaching (3.01%), and have not disseminated yet or not sure (0.9%).

Table 5

Research Question Themes

Research Questions	Frequency	Percentage
Generative AI, best practices, assessment, ethics	66	19.76%
Student engagement/motivation, online	38	11.38%
Assessment, analytics, student feedback	36	10.78%
SoTL specific	22	6.59%
Learning: active, applied, authentic, experiential, heutagogy, game-based	21	6.29%
Administration/University, SoTL and T&L in HE support	18	5.39%
Curriculum design, review, renewal	14	4.19%
Teaching effectiveness	13	3.89%
Learning environments, especially online	12	3.59%
Well-being	12	3.59%
Educators/Mentors	11	3.29%
Student Support	11	3.29%
Students: new cohort/generation, entitlement	9	2.69%
Diversity, equity, inclusion	8	2.40%
Indigenous curriculum	8	2.40%
Casualisation	7	2.10%
Academic integrity, cheating, plagiarism	6	1.80%
Professional development for staff	6	1.80%
Teaching with Technology, AR/VR/MR	6	1.80%
Interdisciplinary/Transdisciplinary	3	0.90%
Language	3	0.90%
Professionalism	2	0.60%
Storytelling	2	0.60%
Total	334	

Table 6

Research Design(S) that Attendees are Most Comfortable with

Research Design Type	Frequency	Percentage	Overall %
Qualitative	**170**		**48.43%**
Qualitative	63	37.06%	
Interviews	25	14.71%	
Thematic analysis	13	7.65%	
Autoethnography, ethnography, meta ethnography	11	6.47%	
Case study	11	6.47%	
Grounded theory	10	5.88%	
Phenomenological	8	4.71%	
Action research	3	1.76%	
Storytelling	3	1.76%	
Observation	3	1.76%	
Narrative inquiry	3	1.76%	
Document analysis	2	1.18%	
Exploratory	2	1.18%	
Collaborative inquiry	1	0.59%	
Feedback from students	1	0.59%	
Focus group	1	0.59%	
Human centred	1	0.59%	
Inductive Thematic Analys	1	0.59%	
Interpretive critical	1	0.59%	
Text based	1	0.59%	
Sociocultural	1	0.59%	
Reflective	1	0.59%	
Bricolage	1	0.59%	
Discourse analysis	1	0.59%	

Table 6 (Continued)

Research Design(S) that Attendees are Most Comfortable with (Continued)

Research Design Type	Frequency	Percentage	Overall %
Listening	1	0.59%	
Systematic reviews	1	0.59%	
Quantitative	**114**		**32.48%**
Quantitative	54	47.79%	
Surveys, questionnaire	31	27.43%	
Evidence based	11	9.73%	
Experimental design	5	4.42%	
Pre post designs	5	4.42%	
Design based research	4	3.54%	
SEM	1	0.88%	
Randomized controlled trials	1	0.88%	
Quasi-experimental	1	0.88%	
Unit of analysis	1	0.88%	
Mixed methods	**49**		**13.96%**
All	**2**		**0.57%**
Other	**12**		**3.42%**
Literature review	5	41.67%	
Course	2	16.67%	
Peer	1	8.33%	
Practitioner	1	8.33%	
Problem based	1	8.33%	
Project	1	8.33%	
Life	1	8.33%	
Not sure, none, need more awareness	**4**		**1.14%**
Total	**351**		

Table 7

Data Collection Type Attendees Feel Most Comfortable with

Data Collection Type	Frequency	%	Overall %
Qualitative	**174**		**62.37%**
Qualitative	63	36.21%	
Interviews	25	14.37%	
Thematic analysis	13	7.47%	
Auto, collaborative, meta ethnography	11	6.32%	
Case study	11	6.32%	
Focus group	10	5.75%	
Phenomenological	8	4.60%	
Literature review	5	2.87%	
Storytelling	3	1.72%	
Observation	3	1.72%	
Narrative inquiry	3	1.72%	
Action research	3	1.72%	
Exploratory	2	1.15%	
Document analysis	2	1.15%	
Collaborative inquiry	1	0.57%	
Feedback from students	1	0.57%	
Grounded theory	1	0.57%	
Human centred	1	0.57%	
Inductive Thematic Analys	1	0.57%	
Interpretive critical	1	0.57%	
Text based	1	0.57%	
Sociocultural	1	0.57%	
Reflective	1	0.57%	
Bricolage	1	0.57%	

Table 7 (Continued)

Data Collection Type Attendees Feel Most Comfortable with (Continued)

Research Design Type	Frequency	%	Overall %
Discourse analysis	1	0.57%	
Listening	1	0.57%	
Quantitative	**105**		**37.63%**
Quantitative	54	51.43%	
Surveys, questionnaire	31	29.52%	
Pre post designs	5	4.76%	
Experimental design	5	4.76%	
Design based research	4	3.81%	
Systematic reviews	1	0.95%	
Randomised controlled trials	1	0.95%	
SEM	1	0.95%	
Quasi-experimental	1	0.95%	
Evidence based	1	0.95%	
Unit of analysis	1	0.95%	
Not sure, none, need more awareness	**4**		
Other	**7**		
Course	2		
Peer	1		
Practitioner	1		
Problem based	1		
Project	1		
Life	1		

Table 8

How Confident Attendees Feel in their Data Analysis Skills

Level of Confidence	Frequency	%
Not at all confident: I lack confidence in my data analysis skills.	12	6.86%
Slightly confident: I have a basic understanding but significant doubts.	22	12.57%
Moderately confident: I'm fairly confident but recognize the need for further improvement.	68	38.86%
Confident: I feel confident in my skills and can perform most analyses independently.	48	27.43%
Very confident: I am highly skilled and completely confident in my data analysis abilities.	25	14.29%

Keynote Feedback

Unanswered Questions from the Audience

At the conclusion of the keynote, participants were invited to reflect on lingering questions, echoing the format of the "3-Minute Paper" technique. This approach encourages deeper engagement by prompting individuals to articulate key takeaways or unresolved queries. As shown in Table 10, the most common themes from attendees' questions revolved around institutional and administrative concerns (19.15%), followed by inquiries on publishing strategies (10.64%), mentorship and peer collaboration (9.57%), and funding opportunities (8.51%). These responses highlight key areas where attendees sought additional clarity and practical guidance.

Inspiration to Action

At the close of the keynote session, attendees were asked to reflect on ideas, encouragement, or inspirations they were committed to applying in their professional practice. This reflective prompt served to measure the impact of the session on participants' future actions and professional growth. As presented in Table 11, the most frequent responses included plans to initiate, continue, or deepen involvement in Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) research (23.53%), along with a strong commitment to fostering collaborations, networking, and partnerships (17.65%). Other notable areas of inspiration were the formation of communities of practice, such as research teams, local HERDSA groups, TATAL, and mentorship initiatives (11.11%), as well as advocacy efforts to promote and share SoTL, and to engage more actively with managers and administrators (9.8%). These findings demonstrate a clear commitment by participants to not only internalize the insights from the keynote but also to translate them into meaningful, sustained action.

Table 9

Dissemination Preferences

Channel of Dissemination	Freq	Overall Freq	%
Publications		**137**	**41.27%**
Journals	126		
Journals	65		
Peer- reviewed publications	58		
Open journals	1		
Preprint	1		
Industry reports	1		
Book or Book Chapter	3		
Papers	**8**		
Reports	4		
News articles	1		
Opinion piece	1		
University T&L newsletter	2		
Conference/congress, posters, round tables		**117**	35.24%
Public Talks		**42**	12.65%
Informal discussions, chats, meetings, peers, talking to peers	25		
Institutional presentation, forums, symposiums, peer workshops	11		
Communities of Practice, collaboration	6		
Seminars, webinars, showcasing, training, group		**12**	3.61%
Social media, Podcast, Website, Vlog, Blogs		**11**	3.31%
Enacted in practice, courses		**10**	3.01%
Teaching	7		
In practice	1		
Student workshops	1		
Educative tools	1		
Haven't disseminated yet, not sure		**3**	0.9%

Table 10

Questions as the Result of the Keynote Address.

Question Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Administration and Institutional	18	19.15%
Publications	10	10.64%
Mentors and Peer Collaborators	9	9.57%
None	9	9.57%
Funding	8	8.51%
SoTL as Research Area	7	7.45%
Time	5	5.32%
Ethics	4	4.26%
Challenges and Barriers	3	3.19%
Definitions and Theories	3	3.19%
Indigenous	3	3.19%
SoTL vs. Educational Research	3	3.19%
Students as Partners	3	3.19%
Privilege	2	2.13%
Quality of SoTL	2	2.13%
SoTL Academic Journey	2	2.13%
Application of SoTL into Teaching	2	2.13%
SoTL Methodology	1	1.06%
Total	94	

Table 11

Inspiration Themes

Inspiration Themes	Frequency	Percentage
Inspired to start, do, continue SoTL research	36	23.53%
Collaboration, partnerships, networking	27	17.65%
Communities of practice, research teams, local HERDSA (TATAL), mentorships	17	11.11%
Champion, advocate, promote, share SoTL, encourage and confront administrators	15	9.80%
Importance/essential SoTL	11	7.19%
SoTL awareness, clarity, confidence, knowledge, history, principles	11	7.19%
Disseminate, publish	8	5.23%
Indigenous ways of knowing	6	3.92%
Students as partners, beneficiaries	6	3.92%
Incentivize, provide time, support for staff as an administrator	5	3.27%
Story telling as research method	4	2.61%
Keynote feedback	7	4.58%

Discussion

This research aimed to explore the specific SoTL needs of academics, a surprisingly under-researched area despite the expanding body of SoTL literature. This gap prompted a creative approach during the keynote presentation, which mirrored the key stages of a SoTL project to transform the session into a live needs assessment. Attendees reflected on their understanding and experience with SoTL while progressing through key SoTL steps—formulating questions, gathering data, analyzing results, and disseminating findings. What follows is a discussion of the results organized into these steps, offering insights and practical applications for HERDSA members.

Unveiling Engagement: SoTL Challenges and Audience Reflections

The high engagement with Question 3 underscores the importance of addressing SoTL barriers in academic institutions. This strong response suggests that overcoming institutional and logistical barriers remains a critical concern for educators, aligning with previous studies that highlight the need for institutional support in advancing SoTL research. The lower engagement with Questions 9 and 10 may indicate that the presentation met its objectives,

leaving attendees feeling confident with the content rather than seeking additional clarification. Alternatively, the lower response rates for these final questions could reflect survey fatigue among participants. Regardless, HERDSA can leverage these insights by encouraging further post-conference reflective sessions, enabling members to engage in deeper reflections and follow-up discussions on unresolved questions.

Demographic Insights: Audience Composition and SoTL Experience

The diverse audience, from early career to experienced academics, reflects SoTL's broad appeal and relevance across academic levels. This trend aligns with global higher education, where SoTL enhances teaching and student outcomes (Trigwell & Shale, 2004). While many are engaged with SoTL, barriers remain, particularly for early-career professionals, with 45.98% of participants yet to adopt SoTL. HERDSA can address this by offering workshops and mentoring programs to boost SoTL literacy, especially for newer academics. A smaller group (14.37%) expressed limited awareness of SoTL, highlighting the need for targeted efforts to bridge the knowledge gap (Felten, 2013; McKinney, 2007). HERDSA can help by offering entry-level resources like webinars and toolkits to make SoTL more accessible. HERDSA can expand professional development, mentoring, and peer-review opportunities to promote SoTL engagement and support publishing. Offering recognition or certification programs around SoTL would further incentivize adoption and foster leadership in SoTL, advancing its integration across the educational community.

Barriers to SoTL: Navigating Institutional and Academic Challenges

These themes on barriers echo global challenges academics face in conducting SoTL, aligning with research in Canada (Hubball & Clarke, 2010; Newton, Miller-Young & Sanago, 2019). Canadian academics similarly report issues like Lack of Recognition, Time Constraints, and the Choice between SoTL and Disciplinary Research. A key barrier is the low Perceived Value and Institutional Support for SoTL, often viewed as secondary to traditional research (Fanghanel et al., 2016). HERDSA should advocate for policies that elevate SoTL, such as including it in tenure criteria. Financial Constraints, another barrier, reflect global concerns about limited funding for SoTL (Felten, 2013). HERDSA could address this by offering grants, promoting collaborations, and providing funding workshops. Capacity Building and SoTL Literacy are also significant issues, with many educators lacking training (Hubball & Clarke, 2010). HERDSA could expand professional development to build capacity through workshops, mentoring, and resources. Institutional Governance challenges require leadership support and HERDSA could develop leadership training for administrators to promote SoTL.

The tension between SoTL and traditional research legitimacy persists (Shulman, 2004). HERDSA could advocate for SoTL by integrating it into mainstream publications and conferences. Additionally, Mentorship and Support are critical, as lack of experienced mentors

limits emerging scholars (Felten, 2013). HERDSA could establish mentorship networks to support early-career researchers. Finally, concerns over Evaluation Standards reflect the need for clear criteria for SoTL research (Trigwell & Shale, 2004). HERDSA could help by developing best practices for evaluating SoTL to ensure consistent and rigorous standards across institutions.

Steps of SoTL Research: Themes, Methods, and Comfort Levels

Step 1: Formulating the Research Question: Trending Themes in SoTL

The focus on AI, student engagement, and assessment echoes recent trends in higher education research. As these areas evolve, HERDSA can help its members by organizing special interest groups, workshops, and publications that explore these themes further. Additionally, creating resources that address best practices for integrating AI and fostering student motivation would align with the emerging needs of SoTL practitioners.

Step 2: Research Design Preferences: Qualitative vs. Quantitative Approaches

The preference for qualitative methods, particularly interviews and thematic analysis, aligns with the broader trend in educational research to capture in-depth, experiential data. HERDSA could support this preference by offering specialized training in these methodologies, enabling educators to refine their qualitative research skills and effectively translate their findings into impactful publications. Also of importance is the lack of familiarity with the differences between research design, methodologies, and analysis approaches as seen in the Table 7. Opportunities to provide more training and mentoring in assisting researchers new to these key terms would be of value going forward.

Step 3: Data Collection Methods: Qualitative Dominance

The strong preference for qualitative data collection reflects a desire to capture the nuances of educational practices. HERDSA might address this by curating resources that provide practical guidance on qualitative data collection, ensuring that members are equipped to gather rich, meaningful insights in their SoTL work.

Step 4: Comfort in Data Analysis: Confidence and Collaboration

Given the substantial percentage of attendees who feel confident with data analysis but still require support, HERDSA could foster collaborations by establishing a network of statisticians and data analysts who are willing to partner with SoTL researchers. This could be supplemented by professional development opportunities focused on improving data literacy among educators.

Step 5: Disseminating SoTL Research: Traditional Channels Prevail

The preference for traditional dissemination channels like journals and conferences suggests that HERDSA should continue emphasizing publication opportunities, while also encouraging members to explore emerging platforms, such as social media, to share their work more broadly. HERDSA might consider developing a SoTL digital repository where members can showcase their research across multiple formats, further promoting the visibility and impact of SoTL findings.

Keynote Feedback

Addressing Institutional and Administrative Uncertainties

The findings from the "Unanswered Questions from the Audience" section reveal that participants expressed significant concerns related to institutional and administrative processes, with nearly one-fifth of the questions focused on these themes. This reflects a broader trend in higher education where faculty, especially early-career researchers, often struggle with navigating institutional structures and understanding administrative expectations (McKinney, 2010). This balancing act is a persistent issue within academia, and without adequate support, it can hinder scholarly productivity and professional development.

For HERDSA members, these findings emphasize the need for more structured guidance on institutional navigation and professional development within higher education settings. One practical application could be the creation of dedicated mentorship programs that connect emerging researchers with experienced HERDSA members to address these administrative challenges. Additionally, HERDSA could develop workshops or webinars focused on demystifying the publishing process and securing research funding, providing tangible resources and strategies that can empower members to confidently tackle these challenges. Furthermore, fostering an open dialogue around institutional barriers within the HERDSA community could lead to broader advocacy efforts aimed at improving systemic support for academics.

These findings underscore the complexity of the challenges faced by academics, many of which were echoed in the 91 questions submitted following the keynote. To address these concerns more comprehensively, I have organized the questions into 10 key thematic groupings, offering responses to each category as a foundation for further exploration and discussion.

1. **Administration and Institutional**: *How can we raise the profile of SoTL within our institutions and ensure it is valued and supported at all levels, from policy to administration?* **Response***:* Raising the profile of SoTL requires a cultural shift within

institutions. Start by connecting SoTL with the institution's mission to improve student learning outcomes and teaching excellence. Share successful SoTL projects that demonstrate clear impacts on teaching and student success. Collaborate with administrators and decision-makers to integrate SoTL into promotion and tenure guidelines. Teaching awards and recognition can also elevate the importance of SoTL, but beyond awards, it is vital to embed SoTL into everyday academic life by making time for research on teaching a recognized, rewarded, and expected part of the academic role. Engaging in cross-departmental collaborations and sharing success stories can create momentum. Advocacy at senior levels should emphasize that strong teaching, supported by SoTL, enhances the institution's reputation and student experience.

2. **Publications**: *How can SoTL researchers navigate the publication process, especially when faced with challenges such as long review times and critique?* **Response**: Publishing in SoTL can be challenging, especially when competing with traditional research journals. Focus on building resilience—rejection and critique are part of the process. When submitting to journals, aim for those that align with your research methodology, whether qualitative or quantitative. Engaging with the SoTL community, participating in peer reviews, and learning from constructive feedback can help refine your work and improve future submissions. Collaborative writing with experienced colleagues can also help strengthen your papers and navigate the publication process more smoothly.

3. **Mentors and Peer Collaborators:** *How can we find mentors and collaborators for SoTL research, and how can we build supportive SoTL networks?* **Response:** Mentorship and collaboration are key to thriving in SoTL. To find mentors, start by reaching out to colleagues who have experience in SoTL or have published in the field. Attending SoTL conferences, joining SoTL-focused professional organizations, and participating in workshops can help you meet potential collaborators. Building a SoTL network and/or Community of Practice on SoTL within your institution or across institutions can create opportunities for peer support and joint research projects. Collaboration with educational departments or centers for teaching excellence can provide valuable cross-disciplinary perspectives that enhance your SoTL work.

4. **Funding**: *How can we find and secure funding for SoTL research?* **Response:** Securing funding for SoTL can be challenging but not impossible. Start by exploring internal grants within your institution—many universities are developing funding streams specifically for teaching- and/or learning-related research. External funding opportunities are also available through educational bodies, professional organizations, and government grants. Networking at conferences like HERDSA can reveal opportunities, and joining professional SoTL networks may connect you with

collaborators and funders. Crafting a compelling narrative around how your SoTL research aligns with institutional priorities (such as improving student outcomes) can make grant applications more competitive.

5. **Ethics:** *How can we navigate ethics in SoTL, ensuring robust yet feasible processes for gaining consent and conducting ethical research?* **Response:** Navigating ethics in SoTL requires balancing rigor with accessibility. Ethical approval processes should be approached proactively; early planning can help align SoTL projects with institutional ethics guidelines. Ensuring student consent can be streamlined through clear communication about the purpose of the research and the value it brings to improving teaching and learning. Making ethics processes accessible and understandable, and providing templates or guidance for common SoTL methodologies, can help reduce the burden on researchers. Institutions can support SoTL researchers by providing specific pathways for gaining ethical approval that acknowledge the unique nature of classroom-based research. Above all, consider requesting guidance from those who have successfully submitted ethics applications.

6. **Framing the Research Question**: *How can we effectively frame research questions in SoTL that reflect the most important teaching and learning issues?* **Response**: Framing research questions in SoTL should start by identifying a genuine challenge or curiosity you have about your teaching practice. Begin by reflecting on student outcomes or classroom dynamics that seem problematic or intriguing, then formulate a question that seeks to explore and address that issue. In SoTL, it is important to remain open to iterative cycles of inquiry—questions may evolve as you engage with data and stakeholders. Collaborating with peers, or even students, can help refine your questions, ensuring they address the most pressing educational challenges.

7. **Challenges and Barriers**: *How can we overcome the challenges and barriers that prevent academics from engaging fully with SoTL?* **Response**: Overcoming challenges in SoTL requires a mix of institutional support and personal perseverance. Academics can be encouraged by peer support and collaborative SoTL networks that share best practices and offer mentorship. Time constraints are a significant barrier, so starting small, integrating SoTL with existing teaching responsibilities, and seeking collaboration with like-minded colleagues can make SoTL more manageable. Institutions can support by providing funding, reducing administrative burdens, and creating flexible research timelines for SoTL projects. Highlighting the impact that SoTL can have on teaching can also motivate academics who may feel disengaged, especially when SoTL aligns with their personal teaching goals.

8. **Definition/Theories**: *What exactly is SoTL, and how do educational theories inform it?* **Response**: SoTL is the systematic study of teaching and learning processes with the

aim of improving educational outcomes. It involves asking research questions about teaching and learning, gathering data, analyzing results, and sharing findings. SoTL is often informed by educational theories such as constructivism, transformative learning, or active learning theories, which provide frameworks for understanding how students learn best. SoTL researchers explore how these theories play out in real classrooms, using their findings to refine both theory and practice.

9. **Indigenous**: *How can we ensure SoTL research is sensitive to and respectful of Indigenous knowledge and diverse student experiences?* **Response**: To make SoTL research sensitive to Indigenous knowledge and diverse experiences, it is essential to engage with Indigenous communities and scholars from the beginning of the research process. Co-create research questions and approaches with Indigenous partners to ensure the research reflects their priorities and values. Respecting diverse knowledge systems and embedding cultural humility into your research will lead to more meaningful, inclusive outcomes. Additionally, SoTL research should take into account the lived experiences of all student groups, ensuring that it is responsive to the needs of marginalized and underrepresented students.

10. **Privilege**: *How does privilege impact SoTL research, and how can we ensure equitable access to SoTL opportunities?* **Response**: Privilege plays a role in SoTL, just as it does in other forms of research. Those with access to institutional resources, funding, and supportive networks often have more opportunities to engage in SoTL. To mitigate this, institutions should create equitable opportunities by offering targeted funding for underrepresented faculty and providing SoTL training and mentorship to early-career and marginalized academics. Ensuring that SoTL is accessible to all faculty members, regardless of discipline or background, is crucial to fostering diversity in research and teaching practices.

Translating Inspiration into Action for SoTL and Collaboration

The "Inspiration to Action" findings indicate that participants left the keynote with a strong motivation to engage more deeply in SoTL and collaboration initiatives. The enthusiasm for SoTL research and networking reflects current literature, which underscores the growing importance of SoTL in advancing teaching practices and enhancing student outcomes (Felten, 2013). Participants' responses highlight their commitment to not only pursue SoTL individually but also create communities of practice, a key concept in knowledge sharing and professional growth (Wenger, 1998). The significant interest in collaboration and networking aligns with the findings of Roxå and Mårtensson (2009), who argue that SoTL thrives in environments where educators can engage in meaningful peer interactions and cross-institutional partnerships.

For HERDSA members, these findings point to the value of fostering a strong community of practice within the organization. HERDSA could take an active role in connecting members interested in SoTL through initiatives such as SoTL-specific working groups, research partnerships, and mentorship programs aimed at supporting collaborative projects. The formation of local HERDSA groups or TATAL (Talking about Teaching and Learning) sessions could provide further opportunities for members to share their experiences, challenges, and insights on teaching and research. Additionally, HERDSA could develop resources to support members in advocating for SoTL within their institutions, providing templates, case studies, and strategies to help members champion the importance of SoTL in academic decision-making. Such initiatives would not only enrich individual practices but also strengthen the collective scholarly community.

Research Gaps

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, several research gaps remain. First, the study primarily relied on self-reported data from participants, which may not fully capture the depth of their understanding or the complexities of the barriers they face in conducting SoTL research. Additionally, the focus on immediate reflections during the keynote limits the long-term applicability of the findings. Future research could explore how these initial inspirations and intentions translate into sustained actions or changes in practice over time. Moreover, the study does not account for regional or institutional variations in SoTL support, which could provide a more nuanced understanding of how SoTL is embraced across different academic environments.

Implications of the Findings for Future Research

The findings suggest that future research should delve deeper into the specific institutional and administrative barriers that hinder SoTL engagement. By conducting longitudinal studies, researchers can track how educators' motivations evolve and whether their initial commitments to SoTL action, as seen in this study, lead to tangible outcomes. Additionally, research could examine how mentorship and peer support networks impact the successful adoption of SoTL practices, particularly in institutions where SoTL is not prioritized. Investigating cross-institutional collaborations, especially in relation to regional differences in SoTL funding and support, could offer further insights into how institutional contexts shape SoTL engagement and dissemination.

Implications of the Findings for Future SoTL Practices

The study highlights that many educators are eager to engage in SoTL but face challenges related to institutional support, mentorship, and access to resources. To advance SoTL practices, institutions need to prioritize capacity-building initiatives, such as professional

development workshops and mentorship programs that target early-career academics. By fostering communities of practice within academic environments, educators can exchange insights, collaborate on SoTL projects, and build a stronger culture of teaching and learning innovation. Furthermore, integrating SoTL into performance evaluation and promotion criteria would legitimize its importance and encourage greater participation among faculty.

Implications of the Findings for HERDSA

For HERDSA, the findings underscore the critical role the organization can play in supporting educators' engagement with SoTL. By offering targeted resources, such as webinars, workshops, and toolkits on navigating institutional barriers, HERDSA can help its members overcome the challenges identified in this study. Additionally, expanding mentorship and networking opportunities would foster collaboration among members, enhancing their ability to engage with SoTL in meaningful ways. HERDSA could also advocate for the inclusion of SoTL in institutional policies, supporting members as they champion SoTL in their own academic settings. Ultimately, HERDSA has the opportunity to shape a stronger SoTL community by addressing the key needs identified through this research.

Conclusion: Empowering Educators through SoTL

This study sheds light on the dynamic role of the SoTL in empowering educators and transforming educational practices. By engaging HERDSA keynote attendees in real-time reflection, the research uncovered critical insights into the barriers educators face—ranging from institutional challenges to a lack of mentorship—and the inspiration they draw from collaborative SoTL initiatives. These findings call for actionable steps to support SoTL integration, not only through professional development and mentorship but also through institutional advocacy and community-building efforts within HERDSA. The commitment to SoTL displayed by the participants highlights a shared desire for innovation in teaching and learning, a desire that HERDSA is uniquely positioned to nurture. As educators continue to navigate complex academic landscapes, the words of Lee Shulman serve as a guiding reminder of the value of SoTL: "Teaching is community property. It's a collaborative process, not a solitary one." (Baptiste & Leck 2023). This vision of collective growth through shared knowledge perfectly encapsulates the spirit of SoTL, reinforcing the need for educators to engage with, support, and uplift one another as they strive to improve both their teaching practices and student outcomes.

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