

## Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

Are you curious about how to enhance teaching and learning in your classroom or program? Have you ever thought about formally studying some aspect of that learning, and then sharing your insights with others? Well, then you're thinking about doing Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)! SoTL is a multidisciplinary field that involves an instructor's systematic investigation into, and reflection about, their teaching and their students' learning that they share with other educators. As shown in the figure below, SoTL can be seen as the mid-point between the practices of teaching (top) and theories of teaching (bottom).

Spectrum	Definition	Example question
<b>Good Teaching (GT)</b>	Intentional and reflective practice of effectively demonstrating and explaining disciplinary concepts in multiple ways, using good teaching practices in response to learner needs (Streveler et al., 2007).	<i>How can I better engage students with ethical engineering concepts?</i>
<b>Scholarly Teaching (ST)</b>	Evidence-based practice informed by research on teaching and learning, well-reasoned theory, and critical reflection. The main goal of scholarly teaching is to maximize student learning (Potter & Kustra, 2011).	<i>How can I improve my teaching of algorithms in my introductory programming course?</i>
<b>Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)</b>	Collaborative, critical, and self-critical inquiry by practitioners into a question, issue, or concern in their own practice (Miller-Young and Yeo, 2015).	<i>How can I improve student contextual understanding in my thermodynamics class?</i>
<b>Discipline-based Educ. Research (DBER)</b>	Examination of teaching and learning practices through a perspective that honours the knowledge and practices of a specific discipline.	<i>What are the threshold concepts in chemical engineering?</i>
<b>Educational Research (ER)</b>	The field of study focusing on developing theories and generalizations of education and learning processes by systematically exploring human attributes, interactions, organizations, and institutions that shape educational outcomes.	<i>What are the characteristics of learning activities that most effectively support life-long learning?</i>

Figure 1: SoTL conceptualized on the Practice (top) to Theory (bottom) spectrum

### Why should I get involved in SoTL?

SoTL is scholarly work and its main purpose is to **inform teaching practice**. It is therefore aligned with the goals of many instructors and is even the expected form of scholarship for some Teaching Stream academic positions. SoTL requires both disciplinary and pedagogical expertise and emphasizes the importance of sharing insights and building knowledge beyond individual classrooms. In essence, these are the two goals of SoTL – *systematically investigating teaching practice* coupled with *disseminating and sharing results*. As an aside, instructors will often learn more about their topic through the writing and review process.

### How does SoTL compare with other research activities?

SoTL can consist of similar activities to other forms of research such as: identifying a topic or problem of interest, conducting a literature review, asking a question, generating and/or collecting data to systematically develop an argument, and disseminating findings. Therefore, the boundaries between SoTL and Educational Research (ER) are blurry (as shown in the practice-theory spectrum in Figure 1). As can be seen, SoTL questions tend to originate in the classroom, whereas DBER/ER questions tend to originate in theory.

### Why are these distinctions important?

Understanding these terms can help you situate your work within a broader community of ST, SoTL, DBER, and ER scholars. You can identify the community that is investigating the types of questions that you are most interested in, as well as a community of practice that can help you develop your skills and knowledge in that area. Additionally, several of these distinctions shape funding opportunities in ways that are not always explicit to potential applicants. Understanding the terms of granting agencies can help you optimize your grant writing processes. At a community level, it can also help us collectively advocate for new bodies of funding in support of our work.

### How do I get involved in SoTL?

Look for SoTL presentations and workshops at the CEEA-ACÉG conference. Reports on SoTL investigations can also be found in discipline-specific and multidisciplinary journals, conferences, and books. Several SoTL journals also publish other academic genres such as systematic reflections and scholarly essays. Other venues of peer reviewed dissemination that are “appropriately public” (Felten 2013, p.122), depending on the instructor’s goals, include teaching portfolios, blog posts, podcasts, and other types of peer reviewed presentations to colleagues. Finally, contact your institution’s teaching and learning centre for help. They may even have grants!

### Key references

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