

Chapter 12

Navigating SoTL Horizons: An Intercultural, Interinstitutional, and Interdisciplinary Exploration in Japanese Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a dual perspective on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) in Japan, drawing from the author's roles as an English lecturer and academic development (AD) researcher at two higher education institutions. Recognising that SoTL is interpreted differently across global contexts—from classroom inquiry to rigorous educational research—this chapter explores SoTL within the Japanese context through a combination of local insights and personal experiences. This chapter seeks to broaden the inclusivity of the SoTL community by reflecting on ways to enhance teaching and learning practices. It aims to serve as a resource for educators considering engagement with SoTL, providing insights into the unique professional pathway taken by the author. Participation in this project, which highlights SoTL in the Asian region, offers a valuable opportunity to contribute to ongoing community discussions.

INTRODUCTION

Embarking on a reflective journey in the context of SoTL (Scholarship of Teaching and Learning), this chapter unfolds my dual perspective as an English lecturer and academic development (AD) researcher at two higher education institutions in Japan. Understanding that the concept of SoTL has a wide-ranging interpretation across the globe on a continuum from classroom inquiry to rigorous educational research (Bernstein, 2010), I am writing this chapter with the hope that my local and personal version of SoTL experience in Japan may contribute to further enrichment of the field's inclusivity that welcomes those interested in improving teaching and learning for students to join in the community conversations (Bernstein, 2010; Feltion, 2013). What has mostly gravitated me to this area of study is this very essence of SoTL: the inclusive and empathetic nature of practice and the flexible ways of conducting research which encourages exploration for the best ways to answer research questions that could be heavily de-

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pendent on culture, institution, and discipline (see Yeo et al., 2023). One may argue that because of this open nature of the field with no clear boundaries for entrance to the field, knowledge, or experience, there is a perception it lacks academic or disciplinary rigour unlike other fields such as medicine and law whose boundaries are relatively clear. However, just as there is no one fixed manual for nurturing a child, there is no one-size-fits-all manual for nurturing students, let alone for solving issues around improving teaching and learning. Rather, the act of teaching involves much imagination and creativity with the need to *share* stories with empirical evidence among those who are responsible for all things related to teaching and learning. Indeed, as Wenger et al. (2011) claim,

By itself, one indicator is merely suggestive and one story is anecdotal, but the cumulative effect of a set of indicators with a collection of related corroborating stories starts to provide robust evidence (p. 38).

While communications among different disciplines could be in silos in many institutions (Stirling, 2014), the field of SoTL provides opportunities for anyone interested in improving teaching and learning and who care about students' optimal learning experiences to join the community and *share* stories. In essence, I believe SoTL is about *sharing* knowledge, skills, and experiences across disciplines and is indisputably essential if education is to be taken seriously. In this context, I echo Bernstein's (2010) argument of recommending those interested in engaging in SoTL activities to participate in a sustainable way that suits their academic/professional life, with no rigid set of rules for commitment so as not to make this, in any way, a burden among the many roles that academics or professional staff may have. Fortunately, my past experiences as an English lecturer and AD researcher in higher education institutions have reassured me that such values and theories can, indeed, be put into practice. It is, indeed, a great honour to be invited to this unique project focusing on SoTL in our Asian region, and I hope to contribute to the best of my ability to *share* my experiences. Perhaps it will be a reference for people who may be thinking about joining in our SoTL conversations, perhaps it may bring about a surprising reaction for the unique pathway I have taken to this day. I am still in the beginning of my SoTL exploration and look forward to learning from the others as much as endeavouring to contribute in my own little way.

Who Am I as a SoTL Practitioner?

The convergence of my academic background in international relations and applied linguistics, coupled with my latest role as an academic development (AD) researcher has shaped me into a unique SoTL practitioner. In this section, I will elaborate on my past professional roles which have gradually shaped my current understanding of SoTL and my unique professional identity. Indeed, who am I as a SoTL practitioner? In order to answer this pertinent question, my international, interinstitutional, and interdisciplinary identity in Japanese higher education will be explored, shedding light on how these facets intersect and have impacted my approach to SoTL.

I have been teaching English in Japanese higher education approximately ten years. Reflecting on my educational practices during this period, I find that my teaching style has developed from lecture style to an interactive style, and further, to a hybrid style. I believe this significant transformation in my teaching reflects my journey as a SoTL practitioner: evolving from simply being a 'guide' or 'transferer' of specific knowledge and skills to becoming a 'facilitator' of learning—and now embodying both roles. I am currently a SoTL practitioner who teaches in a hybrid style because I found in my own study that students preferred a good balance of both (Mori, 2020).

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