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On the Culture of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

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Building an Evidence-Base for Education in Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD)

A central tenant in the practice of speech-language pathology and audiology is that of evidence-based practice (EBP) -- the notion disciplinary research (in concert with patient/family preferences and clinical judgement) should serve as the basis for clinical decision making. Ginsberg, Friberg, and Visconti (2012) argued that a similar standard of evidence-based education (EBE) should be in place for making pedagogical decisions in the classroom to support a scholarly, research-informed approach to teaching and learning.

Why is EBE important? Well-intentioned course instructors run the risk of implementing practices that are detrimental to learning without seeking guidance from teaching and learning research. This guidance should occur in advance of making decisions related to course design, instructional strategies, or assessment schemes. Research that provides the evidence base for educational practices in higher education is termed the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). SoTL is a worldwide, cross-disciplinary research practice, with students and faculty representing a myriad disciplines engaging in systematic inquiry related to teaching and learning.

Understanding SoTL Research

Lee Shulman (2000) once noted that it is important for anyone conducting SoTL work to do so in a manner that is consistent with how research is conducted in their own field of study. After all, he stated, "each of us in higher education is a member of at least two professions: that of our discipline…as well as our profession as educator" (Shulman, 2000, p. 49) and there is value in our SoTL work being consistent with the intellectual work of our discipline in order to be valued (Shulman, 1993). While there is credence to Shulman's thinking that the more closely our SoTL research is to disciplinary research the more likely it will be respected by many colleagues, we acknowledge that SoTL research is inherently different than the inquiry we engage in within our disciplines. SoTL is inherently action, practitioner research that is contextually-based. Such research is focused on pedagogical refinement or continuous improvement in a context that is continuously changing. As such, researchers acknowledge that SoTL inquiry varies by place, time, stakeholder, and sub-discipline.

Within communication sciences and disorders (CSD), the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) advocates use of a hierarchical model for research design, with randomized controlled trials (RCTs) being considered the

most desirable design for clinical research, followed by controlled studies without randomization, quasi-experimental studies, and case studies (ASHA, 2016). The idea of RCTs as the gold standard of research is not uncommon in many fields, including those (similar to CSD) that are based in medicine and allied health. However, for a variety of reasons, this same hierarchical approach to research design does not translate to SoTL. For instance, it is not feasible to conduct RCT studies in higher education settings for the purpose of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning scenarios. Much like physicians providing patient care, as educators, we must do no harm nor can we knowingly provide educational experiences that we know to be of lesser quality for the purposes of research. Students might agree to participate in our studies, but they enrolled in our courses -- first and foremost -- for a quality education. Additionally, the context in which most of us teach prohibits us from having access to factors that would allow us to create studies which would meet the highest level of evidence in quantitative studies, such as very large numbers of study participants or control/experimental group designs. In some university contexts, it may be feasible to conduct more controlled experimental research, however it should be noted that student learning must be assured in such a context and that a randomized, experimental designis not necessary in order to establish quality SoTL research that contributes to our field.

As a result of these ethical and practical limitations, SoTL research is different than clinical and science research that is conducted in CSD. In this case, SoTL as a "different" form of research does not subsume a lack of quality or rigor. Rather, SoTL can and should be conceived of as high-quality, high-value inquiry that adheres to the academic and disciplinary standards by which most of us were educated. Weimer (2006) has offered a classification system for the viewing of SoTL work. The category of "Wisdom-of-Practice" includes what faculty have learned as they have taught, often through use of Schon's reflection in practice (Schon, 1983). This category includes personal accounts of change; recommended-practices and recommended-content reports; and personal narratives. In contrast, the category of "Research Scholarship," depends on more traditional approaches to research, including quantitative investigations, qualitative studies, and descriptive research. Weimer identifies factors within each category that should be considered in making a critical assessment of the inherent value of the work, many of which are consistent with those factors we see in the analysis of our CSD work. Within Research Scholarship, Weimer recommends accounting for factors such as design quality, strong explanations of conceptual frameworks, literature reviews, clearly described methodology, and appropriate conclusions supported by effective analysis of the data. In reviewing Wisdom-of-Practice writing, critical elements to consider include the potential for the information to exceed the individual's

experience and context such that others can benefit from their writing, as well as the importance and relevance the information has for others in the discipline.

Framework for *Teaching and Learning in Communication Sciences & Disorders*

This journal, *Teaching and Learning in Communication Sciences & Disorders* (*TLCSD*), was conceived to feature SoTL work that focuses on the disciplines of speech-language pathology and audiology. In *TLCSD*, the Editorial Board seeks to publish work that is similarly aligned with Weimer's categories to honor the diverse nature of SoTL. We have devised a broad range of topic areas for *TLCSD*, which allow for a variety of types of research and reflection to be showcased and disseminated. Submissions include the following:

Research Scholarship:

- Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Research, which encompasses both quantitative and qualitative investigations.
- Early Discoveries, which are opportunities to share short reports of preliminary findings.

Wisdom-of-Practice:

- Scholarly Teaching, reports of the application of SoTL in CSD teaching and learning.
- Reflections on SoTL, sharing insights from reflective educators.

Student Voices:

- Student accounts of Wisdom-of-Practice through their reflections on participating in SoTL research
- Student accounts of Research Scholarship in reporting the SoTL research that they have conducted.

Book Reviews of new SoTL texts which critically examine content and describe applications to CSD are accepted as well. It is the goal of this journal to bring forth manuscripts of high quality and value to the teaching and learning experience for colleagues in our fields, consistent with the standards of our discipline and within SoTL.

TLCSD Reviewers, Review Processes, & Priorities for Reviews

Reviewers. In 2010, Sheila Pratt, Editor of the *American Journal of Audiology* (*AJA*), noted that while the peer review process can be challenging, time consuming, and imperfect, it is critical to the public dissemination of any research. *TLCSD* places a high value on a high-quality review process, as public dissemination for judgment by our peers is a critical component of SoTL (Shulman, 2000). We recognize that this process would not be possible without reviewers.

Like Pratt, we recognize the excess of work and the shortage of time for virtually all academics. Reviewing manuscripts takes time, skill, insight, and time. (Yes, we said time twice because we recognize that is the commodity we have the least of in that list). We are thankful to those who have volunteered their time and talents to review manuscripts for this inaugural volume of *TLCSD* and would invite others to serve in this capacity. Remember that in reviewing manuscripts for *TLCSD*, you have the opportunity to not only contribute to the evidence-base for CSD education which improves the quality of all of our students' learning and the preparation of future CSD professionals (Ginsberg et al., 2012), but you also have the opportunity to read about how someone else is studying teaching in CSD, learn about new approaches to teaching, and reflect on your own practices. Together these activities improve the quality of all of our students and the preparation of future CSD professionals (Ginsberg et al., 2012).

The review process. The review process is a critical step in the process of producing a high quality journal. In order to facilitate the review of submitted work, *TLCSD* has implemented an entirely electronic review process. Manuscript reviews are double-blind, with initial reviews submitted within 30 days following each reviewer's acceptance of their assignment. All completed reviews are available for authors online and, it is the hope of the Editorial Board that the combination of clear and timely feedback and an expedited review process, author frustrations are minimized and a collaborative partnership is established between our editors and submitting authors.

Priorities for reviews. Additionally, it is a priority of the Editorial Board to encourage facilitative feedback from *TLCSD*'s reviewers. We are focused on encouraging constructive, positive feedback to authors that is facilitative of manuscript improvements, whenever possible. We all know from experience and legend about the stories of reviewers gone amok, providing harsh and unhelpful reviews of manuscripts. That being said, some reviews that are productive and include constructive criticism do result in rejections. We hope that does not discourage future submission attempts, as we seek to empower the voice of those who value SoTL research. We aim to circumvent non-productive review processes to support authors and encourage future productivity, independent of the recommendations of the reviewers.

Mission and Vision of *TLCSD*

Within the framework and processes described above, the vision of *TLCSD* (and of its Editorial Board) becomes evident: promoting a culture of evidence-based education in speech-language pathology and audiology. Though this lens, *TLCSD*

functions as a professional, supportive platform to share systematic reflection of teaching and learning in a peer-reviewed context, advocate for SoTL in the discipline, set standards for SoTL in CSD, support the application of SoTL for scholarly teaching, and foster student engagement in SoTL. With this inaugural issue of *TLCSD*, we start this important work and look towards the future.

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