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## Engaging and empowering students in the culture of higher education: a "Native" analysis of students' experiences in the Teaching-Learning Academy

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**Engaging and Empowering Students in the Culture of Higher Education:  
A “Native” Analysis of Students’ Experiences in the Teaching-Learning Academy**

By

Megan M. Otis

Accepted in Partial Completion  
Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Moheb A. Ghali, Dean of the Graduate School

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Chair, Dr. Joyce Hammond

Dr. Joan Stevenson

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## **MASTER'S THESIS**

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Megan M. Otis

November 4, 2011

**Engaging and Empowering Students in the Culture of Higher Education:  
A “Native” Analysis of Students’ Experiences in the Teaching-Learning Academy**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of

Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

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November, 2011

## Abstract

There is a marked climate of concern over the quality of teaching and learning in the culture of higher education. In the 1980s, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching conducted a national survey and found that most faculty members felt strained by the competing priorities of teaching and research, which at times negatively impacted their performance in the classroom and their relationship with students. Carnegie addressed this problem by spearheading a reform movement to study and enhance teaching and learning in the university classroom, a growing body of literature known today as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). Western Washington University (WWU) was an early participant in these efforts beginning in 1998, and has since received national and international acclaim for the Teaching-Learning Academy (TLA), WWU's primary SoTL initiative. The TLA uses a participatory action research (PAR) process in its work; students partner with administrators, staff and faculty to study and enhance the learning culture at WWU through dialogue and action. Little has been published about the impact of partnering with students in SoTL and this thesis examined how students benefitted from participation in TLA.

The author of this thesis participated in the TLA as a student and also worked for the program as a staff member. Using an anthropological approach, the author situates herself as a "native" researcher, and uses a grounded theory approach to analyze the benefits students perceived. Five themes were discovered in the students' surveys: 1) increased opportunities for self-awareness and self-expression; 2) increased awareness/understanding of the diversity of ideas/perspectives; 3) increased pedagogical intelligence and learner autonomy; 4) increased sense of power within the university; and 5) increased sense of belonging and community at WWU. The key findings indicate that participating in TLA increases students' engagement in their learning, and empowers students to make a difference in the university because they feel they are valued members of the campus community. The TLA's PAR model has significant benefits for student participants which can and should be expanded both in the field of SoTL as well as in other aspects of higher education.

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## **Introduction:**

### **The Culture of Higher Education and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning**

“The” culture of higher education is difficult to describe monolithically because of the vast diversity within higher education institutions. In the United States alone, there are “over 4,000 public and private accredited universities and colleges, including doctoral universities, master’s universities and colleges, baccalaureate colleges, and a huge community college sector” (Hutchings et al. 2011:xiii). Institution type is a crucial factor in shaping institutional culture because it influences how much institutional emphasis is placed on research, teaching, and service (the three primary priorities of the faculty). For example, a Ph.D. granting, research-oriented institution might weight research heavily in the requirements for tenure and promotion, whereas a community college might require little, if any, research from the faculty. There are a number of other factors that influence the culture of higher education within an institution, including (but not limited to) type and size of the institution, geographical location, demography of the surrounding community and of the student body, history, formative influences, past/current leaders, the degree of legislative involvement in decision-making, etc. (Van Patten 1993). Despite the diversity, higher education institutions share common goals and significant challenges. I use “the culture of higher education” as an umbrella term to encompass the wide differences between higher education institutions as well as the common goals and challenges among them.



The current economic recession has increased numerous pressures on the culture of higher education. For students, having a college degree is economically valuable because college graduates on average earn \$1 million more over the course of a lifetime than people with only a high school diploma (Pennington 2004). Many students come to college focused more on graduation than on learning because of the economic advantages of having a degree (Hersh and Merrow 2005). There is some evidence to suggest that college students are not learning as much, or as well, as they should (e.g. Arum and Roksa 2011; Bok 2006; Nathan 2005). There is a marked climate of concern over the quality of teaching and learning in the culture of higher education.

Undergraduates... are not learning as much or as well as they should. If students are to be adequately prepared for life, work, and civic participation in the twenty-first century, colleges and universities must pay closer attention to the heart of the educational enterprise. What is it really important for students to know and be able to do? How can higher education and their faculty help students get there? (Hutchings et al. 2011:3)

Many within the academy have called for reform (e.g. Arum and Roksa 2011; Bok 2006; Hersh and Merrow 2005; Miller 1998; Hunt et al. 2006) which has lead educators to find more meaningful ways to engage students in their learning. The growing cross-disciplinary field of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) is one such effort to deepen the collective understanding of teaching and learning in order to improve the learning experiences of college students.

### *What is the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning?*

“The scholarship of teaching and learning is part of a broader transformation in the intellectual culture of higher education, where attention to learning has been growing

steadily over the past twenty years” (Hutchings et al. 2011:3-4). During the 1980s, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (hereafter the Carnegie Foundation) undertook an in-depth examination of the American undergraduate experience and found that the priorities of the faculty have a profound influence on students’ educations and on the culture of the campus community in their roles as teachers, mentors and scholars (Boyer 1987:119). Ernest Boyer (1987), President of the Carnegie Foundation from 1979-1995, found that most faculty members felt strained by the competing priorities of teaching and research, which at times negatively impacted their performance in the classroom and their relationship with students. These effects were observed at all types of institutions, including liberal arts colleges which traditionally have a greater emphasis on teaching, but were most marked among research and doctoral-granting institutions (121). Boyer concluded that research is the heart of the faculty profession, and critical to maintain the vigor of higher education, but at the same time, priorities ought to be reexamined and teaching should be given special emphasis in the faculty reward system (131).

In 1990, Carnegie conducted a further study which focused on the nature of scholarship which was later to become the foundation of the field of the scholarship of teaching and learning. In *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (1990), Boyer argued that the academy desperately needed to reevaluate the meaning of “scholarship.” Despite variation across disciplines, and institutions, Boyer argued that in general, higher education had a narrow, restricted view which equated scholarship with research and saw publication as the primary tool to measure output of scholarly activity. This view of scholarship led to a hierarchy of faculty functions, which placed the greatest

prestige, and oftentimes the quickest route to tenure and promotion, on publication – especially in the hard sciences, and in research, doctoral-granting and comprehensive universities. However, even in liberal arts colleges, 40% of the faculty surveyed agreed with the statement “In My Department It Is Difficult for a Person to Achieve Tenure If He or She Does Not Publish” (85). Boyer advocated broadening the perspective of scholarship and argued that by taking this more holistic vision of scholarship, higher education would better recognize and support the vast diversity of talent and ability within the professoriate. He also advocated that the notion of scholarship be expanded to include the “scholarship of discovery” (discovery of new knowledge), the “scholarship of integration” (connecting ideas from across multiple disciplines to create new understandings), the “scholarship of application” (bringing new knowledge to bear to create change in real world situations) and the “scholarship of teaching.” Ernest Boyer’s *Scholarship Reconsidered* is often attributed by many scholars as the first introduction of the phrase “scholarship of teaching,” and thus seeding the birth of the field of the *scholarship of teaching and learning* (SoTL). Despite the fact that Boyer is attributed with the origin of the concept, he “did not define clearly what this scholarship would be. He thereby touched off a decade of academic thought and controversy over this topic” (Thompson n.d.:17).

There is no one widely accepted definition for “the scholarship of teaching and learning,” indeed some scholars have published on “the diversity in definitions or understandings of SoTL that exist even among experts in the field” (McKinney 2007:5; also see Kreber 2002; McKinney n.d.). But at the heart of this growing field is a reevaluation of

the concepts of “teaching” and “scholarship.” Lee S. Shulman, President of the Carnegie Foundation from 1995-2008, stated:

Too often teaching is identified only as the active interactions between teacher and students in a classroom setting (or even a tutorial session). I would argue that teaching, like other forms of scholarship, is an extended process that unfolds over time. It embodies at least five elements: vision, design, interactions, outcomes, and analysis. (Shulman 1998:13)

Additionally, Shulman has argued that in order for something to be designated as “scholarship:” “It should be *public*, susceptible to *critical review and evaluation*, and accessible for *exchange and use* by other members of one’s scholarly community” (Shulman 1998:13, emphasis in original). Using these expanded concepts of “teaching” and “scholarship,” Shulman provided a cornerstone understanding of SoTL as this:

In sum, a scholarship of teaching will entail a public account of some or all of the full act of teaching – vision, design, enactment, outcomes, and analysis – in a manner susceptible to critical review by the teacher’s professional peers, and amenable to productive employment in future work by members of that same community. (Shulman 1998:14)

Senior Scholar at the Carnegie Foundation, Mary Taylor Huber, and Vice President for the Carnegie Foundation from 2001-2009, Pat Hutchings, described four core practices that define SoTL: “framing questions, gathering and exploring evidence, trying out and refining new insights in the classroom [or other learning context], and going public with what is learned in ways that others can build on” (Huber and Hutchings 2005:20). Due to the cross-disciplinary nature of SoTL, those four defining features tend to be broadly interpreted in order to accommodate disciplinary differences in what constitutes a good research question, and what constitutes good evidence. Huber and Hutchings (2005) calls this “methodological pluralism” which makes sense for the field because “Teaching and

Learning are complex processes, and no single source or type of evidence can provide a sufficient window into the difficult questions raised by student learning” (24).

One question often asked about SoTL is how it is different from disciplinary research in the field of education, but there is no quick and easy answer. Experts in the field have acknowledged that SoTL builds on many scholarly traditions within higher education, among them traditional educational research (e.g. McKinney n.d.:1; Thompson n.d.:16). Part of the difference is that SoTL research is not confined to education researchers. SoTL research has been conducted within many different disciplines (to see a few case studies that explore different “disciplinary styles” in SoTL, see for example Huber and Morreale 2002; Huber 2005). Another difference may be the origin of the research question; SoTL research is most often promoted by questions grounded within the researcher’s own classroom/context, rather than from arising from theory or from the literature (Werder, personal communication, October 2011).

If the overarching goal of SoTL is to improve teaching and learning in specific contexts and more broadly, then some scholars have argued that necessarily all SoTL is action research (e.g. Schön 1995, Simmons 2011). Many SoTL and education researchers have advocated for the use of action research to study teaching and learning (e.g. Carr and Kemmis: 1986; Cook et al: 2007; Gray et al. 2007; Kember 2000; Norton 2009). SoTL researcher from the University of Waterloo, Nicola Simmons (2011) points out that the goals of SoTL and the goals of action research are the same by referencing education action research advocates Wilfred Carr and Stephen Kemmis (1986):

Action research aims at improvement in three areas: firstly, the improvement of a *practice*; secondly, the improvement of the *understanding* of a practice by its

practitioners; and thirdly, the improvement of the *situation* in which the practice takes place. (165)

So, as Simmons (2011) argues, SoTL action research aims to improve the practice of teaching and learning, improvement of the understanding of teaching and learning by practitioners and the improvement of situations (such as schools/universities, classrooms, laboratories, etc.) where teaching/learning takes place.

The Carnegie Foundation was key in spearheading the development and growth of SoTL. In 1998, the Carnegie Foundation launched the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL), an initiative designed to create a community “to support the development of a scholarship of teaching and learning that: fosters significant, long-lasting learning for all students; enhances the practice and profession of teaching, and; brings to faculty members' work as teachers the recognition and reward afforded to other forms of scholarly work” (Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, n.d.). Within the CASTL program, one of the major sub-programs was the CASTL Campus Conversations program, for institutions wishing to explore and encourage the scholarship of teaching and learning on their individual campuses (which in 2000 developed into the CASTL Campus Program, and then in 2006 evolved into the CASTL Institutional Leadership Program). Between 1998 and 2009, over 200 campuses became affiliated with the CASTL program<sup>i</sup> (Huber and Hutchings 2005:78). In both the CASTL Campus Program and the CASTL Institutional Leadership Program, the involved campuses were organized into clusters in order for interested campuses to collaborate in their investigations around specific themes (Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, n.d.); one of those clusters in both programs was dedicated to exploring student voices in the scholarship of

teaching and learning, and both clusters were led by Western Washington University (but more on this later).

In this thesis, I will bring anthropological methods and methodology to bear in investigating students' experiences within one unique subculture of higher education – the Teaching-Learning Academy (TLA) at Western Washington University (WWU). I will examine what students report on their surveys that they gain from their participation in the TLA, a major SoTL initiative at WWU. I will begin by exploring the inclusion of student co-researchers in the SoTL literature, in order to provide a context for the creation of, and the ongoing research of WWU's TLA. After situating the TLA's work in the wider SoTL context, I describe the TLA's structure and method for studying teaching and learning, which I demonstrate is a participatory action research (PAR) approach. Next I discuss grounded theory approach to text analysis, the method I used to analyze TLA student participants' surveys, and then I situate myself, a former student participant and TLA staff member, as a "native" researcher. Then I discuss the major themes I discovered in the survey data, and connect those outcomes to the research on student engagement, and the theory and outcomes of participatory action research. I will finish my discussing the implications of my research for SoTL specifically, and teaching and learning more broadly.

## Chapter 1:

### Student Voices in SoTL at Western Washington University and Beyond

#### *“Student Voices” in the SoTL Literature*

SoTL can be differentiated from other kinds of scholarship in higher education in that instead of conducting research within a specific discipline, research is conducted on the process of teaching and learning. However, *how* the scholarship of teaching and learning is conducted, and *who* conducts it, varies widely across disciplines and institutions. In the beginning of the field, the scholarship of teaching and learning was primarily conducted by faculty members with students serving primarily in the role of research subject. Over the last decade though, slowly but surely more and more students have become involved in SoTL as co-researchers, and not just as research subjects.

Starting from very early in the development of the SoTL field (the 1990s), SoTL was touted as collaborative inquiry and discourse-centered work. Mary Taylor Huber (1999), a senior scholar at the Carnegie Foundation, outlined several different arenas for collaborative discourse forums on SoTL across campuses and disciplines. The emerging field called for collaboration between faculty members in individual and groups of disciplines and institutions. Huber argued that the more widespread SoTL becomes, the greater it's potential to affect the culture of teaching and learning on campuses nationally. She discussed students as being important members of academia, and primary stakeholders in the teaching and learning process that would ultimately benefit from SoTL, but in 1999, at



the time she wrote the article, she did not consider the possibility that students could or should be part of the discourse or collaborative partners in the research process itself.

I believe that part of the initial hesitancy of SoTL scholars more broadly to partner with students in inquiry on teaching and learning stems from a common mindset discussed in the foundational article, “The Scholarship of Teaching: What’s the Problem?” Author, leading SoTL scholar and professor at Georgetown University, Randy Bass (1998) identified a pervasive trend in the SoTL field that he called the “problematization of teaching.”

In scholarship and research, having a “problem” is at the heart of the investigative process; it is the compound of the generative questions around which all creative and productive activity revolves. But in one’s teaching, a “problem” is something you don’t want to have, and if you have one, you probably want to fix it. Asking a colleague about a *problem* in his or her research is an invitation; asking about a problem in one’s teaching would probably seem like an accusation. (Bass 1998:1)

If teacher-scholars don’t want to talk about a “problem” in their teaching with their *colleagues*, they certainly wouldn’t want to talk about a “problem” in their teaching with their *students*; and conversely, students would not want a teacher with teaching “problems.”

However, early in the growth of the SoTL field there were several individuals and institutions who were working tirelessly to bring students as active partners in this work. (For example, WWU and Elon University, who had been partnering with students since nearly the beginning of their institutional involvement with SoTL in the late 1990s, but more on this later.) Sadly there was (and to some extent still is) a wide gap between the growing involvement of students in SoTL, and evidence of that trend in the published literature.

Australian SoTL scholars Keith Trigwell and Suzanne Shale (2004) shared their serious concern over this absence of students in the field when they wrote:

... it is particularly striking how absent students are from some representations of scholarship of teaching... Students do not appear as partners in learning. They do not appear as neophyte scholars in the community. They do not appear as critics or connoisseurs of teaching. When they do appear it is as objects of concern, objects of analysis, or presumptively passive consumers. (Trigwell and Shale 2004:534)

Leaders at the Carnegie Foundation, Mary Taylor Huber (senior scholar) and Pat Hutchings (the then Vice President of the Carnegie Foundation) issued a call to action when they recommended that SoTL practitioners need to “establish more and better occasions to talk about learning,” and that “students need to be part of the discussion about learning” (2005:118-119). Huber and Hutchings even referenced WWU’s work in the Teaching-Learning Academy as an excellent example of a way institutions could be “inviting students into the teaching commons” (2005:114). This call to action from Carnegie, I believe, was a watershed moment for student voices in SoTL, because in the years following several studies featuring students as co-researchers were published (e.g. Mihans et al. 2008; Holmes 2009; Werder and Otis 2010; Bovill et al. 2011).

In 2007, Kathleen McKinney, the K. Patricia Cross Endowed Chair in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning at Illinois State University (and one of the members of the CASTL Student Voices Institutional Leadership Group) discussed the possible benefits of partnering with students in SoTL *but pointed for the need of further research:*

Involving students, not merely as research participants, but as coresearchers in our SoTL work is a critical tenet of this work... involving students in various phases of SoTL projects... can enhance the design of the study and the interpretation of the data. Furthermore, this activity provides a special and important learning opportunity for our students, which we hope will enhance learner motivation and autonomy (an empirical question for another SoTL study!). (McKinney 2007:44)

Then at the 2009 International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) annual conference, plenary speaker Tai Peseta (2009) from La Trobe University in Australia voiced her concern over the seemingly missing students from the SoTL field, saying “I look forward to the day when students actually respond and get engaged with SOTL in a critical way. I look forward to the day students become schooled as researchers and writers of our teaching and their learning” (as quoted in Lochbaum 2010:4). However, I said “seemingly” missing because, ironically, at the same conference that Peseta said these words, no less than the 20 of the posters or presentations featured SoTL research done by or with students (both undergraduate and graduate students). Also at the conference, the book *Engaging Student Voices in the Study of Teaching and Learning* (Werder and Otis 2010) was launched. The book, a product of the CASTL Student Voices institutional leadership group, was co-edited by a faculty member and a graduate student, and contains 11 chapters co-authored by faculty and students from 14 different institutions from across the country. In the book, the authors of *Engaging Student Voices* discussed of various theoretical and methodological underpinnings from several different disciplines, and shared various models in use by several different institutions. *Engaging Student Voices* is possibly the most significant “student voices” contribution to the SoTL literature thus far.

A recent book from CASTL leaders and SoTL experts Pat Hutchings, Mary Taylor Huber and Anthony Ciccone, entitled *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Reconsidered* (2011), repeatedly highlighted SoTL work where students are taking more active roles in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Hutchings, Huber and Ciccone argue that through taking these active roles in SoTL, students are poised to make positive

contributions to faculty development, and institutional research, as well as classroom-based SoTL research. They also assert that SoTL encourages faculty to view themselves “as a *learner about learning*” (65) which I believe is a key mindset in widely legitimizing this work because, as Hutchings, Huber, and Ciccone argue, “... by thinking of themselves as learners, faculty are more likely to think of their students as informed consultants who take their own learning just as seriously... [which] leads naturally to the idea that students can become participants and co-investigators in the study of teaching and learning” (66).

### *Student Voices and SoTL at Western Washington University*

In 1998, Western Washington University (WWU) began its involvement in SoTL when WWU signed on to participate in part one of the CASTL Campus Conversations project, a national dialogue to explore the scholarship of teaching and learning sponsored by the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE), the Carnegie Foundation and the Pew Foundation (Bulcroft et al. 2002). Initially, the conversation at WWU only included a small number of faculty who addressed questions sent by the Carnegie Conversation. But the response to these conversations was overwhelmingly positive and faculty were eager to continue the conversation, so Western signed on to participate in part two of the Campus Conversations project in 1999 (Bulcroft et al. 2002; Kris Bulcroft, personal communication, May 2008.)

In 1999, the second year of WWU’s involvement in the project, SoTL grew more prominent and widespread on campus due the support of Karen Morse, WWU’s President (from 1993-2008) in creating a SoTL fellowship, as well as the financial support from Provost

Larry DeLorme (1991-1999). Involvement in the Campus Conversations program expanded to include many more faculty members, but initially student voices were still missing from the conversation (Bulcroft et al. 2002). However, after participating in the dialogue, one of the faculty participants, Bill Lay, from WWU's Woodring College of Education, believing that students are crucial partners in dialogue about the teaching-learning process, asked the question, "Where are the students?" (Bill Lay, personal communication, July 2008). Spurred by Lay's question, Western began to make a concerted effort to invite students into the scholarship of teaching and learning initiatives:

[That] question brought the conversation to a halt. The group dynamics that followed clearly reflected a group epiphany. Subsequent sessions led to in-depth discussion about the need for student perspectives in order to understand what constitutes "good" teaching, as well as to develop a scholarly approach toward the assessment of student learning. The education professor's query prompted a sincere desire on the part of all faculty member participants to seek a means of incorporating student voices in the... conversation. (Bulcroft et al. 2002)

One of the first steps Western took to incorporate students into the Carnegie Campus Conversations (CCC) program was to create an undergraduate seminar on leadership in academic settings. Offered during the winter and spring of 2000, the students in the course worked closely with the core CCC faculty and, together, they created a collaborative action plan for developing and expanding SoTL at Western (Bulcroft et al. 2002).

In the spring of 2000, Western (jointly with Elon College in North Carolina) was recognized and rewarded with the first Carnegie "Going Public" grant for their efforts to incorporate "the student voice into the scholarship of teaching and learning" (Sullivan and Werder 2000:13). The grant supported a team of students and faculty, from both Elon and WWU, to attend the AAHE Summer Academy and "identify emergent principles for

integrating the student voice in the teaching-learning endeavor” (Sullivan and Werder 2000:13). Institutionally, Elon and Western took different, yet complementary, approaches to enacting their common goal of incorporating students into SoTL. Elon’s student voices work focused on faculty-student partnerships to study and strengthen teaching and learning at the course-level, while WWU focused on incorporating student voices at the institutional level (Sullivan and Werder 2000; Bulcroft et al. 2002).

Building on the work completed in part two of the CCC in 1999, and the recommendations of the student-faculty team at the AAHE Summer Academy, Western developed and launched a new course for undergraduate students, in the 2000-2001 academic year, to study learning and promote institutional change. As part of the course work, students participated in an ongoing dialogue with the CCC faculty, in a campus-wide body newly designated the Teaching-Learning Academy (Bulcroft et al. 2002) which I will delve into further later in this thesis.

Western maintained its working relationship with Carnegie for over a decade. From 2002-2005, Western was selected to serve as a leader within the CASTL Campus Program for the cluster entitled “Sustaining the Student Voice in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning” (Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, n.d.); in addition to WWU, there were four other institution-members of this cluster: University of Maryland-College Park, University of Washington-Bothell, North Seattle Community College, and California State University-Long Beach. In order to “go public” and showcase the work resulting from this three year collaboration, the cluster developed and published online a cluster snapshot (Sustaining Student Voices in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning,

n.d.) and a CD-rom enumerating a set of “eco-principles” for sustaining student voices in the scholarship of teaching and learning (Student Voices in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning 2010).

Then in 2006, the CASTL Campus Program evolved into the CASTL Institutional Leadership Program, and Western Washington University was again selected to serve as the coordinating institution for the “Student Voices in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning” leadership group. Five other institutions joined WWU to become part of this leadership theme, including California State University-Long Beach, Elon University, Illinois State University, North Seattle Community College, and University of Nevada-Las Vegas (Student Voices in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning 2010). As I mentioned earlier, part of the collaboration of the Student Voices leadership theme, 41 faculty and students involved in the CASTL program, wrote and published a book, *Engaging Student Voices in the Study of Teaching and Learning* (Werder and Otis 2010), probably the most significant contribution to the student voices in SoTL literature thus far, which was edited by WWU faculty member and director of the Teaching-Learning Academy, Carmen Werder, and myself, Megan M. Otis, a WWU anthropology graduate student.

After the CASTL program was concluded in 2009, WWU continued its leadership role by spearheading the creation of a new special interest group “Students as Co-Inquirers” within the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) (International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, n.d.) which now includes over 50 members internationally.

### *The Teaching-Learning Academy at WWU*

The central hub for SoTL at WWU since 2000 has been the Teaching-Learning Academy (TLA). The TLA is a forum which seeks to study and enhance the institutional learning culture at Western, and beyond, through dialogue and action. Currently, an average of 100 people participate in the TLA every academic quarter including faculty, staff, administrators, students from around the campus as well as community members, including local business people, educators from other nearby institutions, and others. Most of the TLA members participate voluntarily, though most of the students receive credit for participating through a number of different courses (and many students continue to come back to TLA even without receiving academic credit). The TLA offers four smaller dialogue groups, of around 20-40 people, that meet every other week during the academic quarter, on different days and times, and locations around the campus in order to accommodate the members various schedules and commitments.

At the beginning of each year, during fall quarter, the TLA members collectively decide on a study question that provides the frame for the year's activities; in this way, the participants identify the topics and issues that are the most important and relevant to them, and that they feel would benefit from study. Next, through dialogue, participants collaboratively explore the question, identify possible sub-questions, and define the terms involved. Each participant is simultaneously a co-researcher and a research subject, because each person uses his or her own knowledge and personal experiences as data in this collective study. After mining the collective wisdom of the participants, the TLA members



often invite others into the study to further understand the topic from additional perspectives.

Then, after much dialogue and study, the TLA participants collectively analyze the data and develop action projects – proposals for positive, institution-wide change in the campus community based on the TLA study. Often, TLA student participants wish to continue to pursue the action projects after the quarter or year has concluded and they can, and have done so in the past, for independent study or practicum credit. Here is an example of the kind of institution-wide change initiatives that originate from the TLA dialogue: during the 2007-2008 academic year, TLA participants collectively developed the study question, “What keeps us from genuine dialogue across multiple perspectives? And what would encourage that dialogue in sustaining a respectful, inclusive learning culture?” One of the action items that resulted from the year’s dialogue was a proposal for a virtual learning commons, which was taken up by a task force of students, faculty and staff from the TLA, Academic Technology, and the Library, who then spearheaded the launch of a university-wide online dialogue form called Viking Village in 2008 and it is currently (in 2011) an ongoing, and well-used online community for engaging in discourse and information-sharing at WWU.

But the changes that stem from TLA do not always occur on a macro- or institutional level; often the dialogue spurs micro-level change, or change at the personal level. Students, staff and other university stakeholders are able to connect, exchange perspectives and share experiences in an open environment where the primary goal is to create a deeper understanding of the issue(s) under study and of the university learning culture more

broadly. Participants often will change their behavior within their role in the university based on the new understandings they have gained from the TLA dialogue.

The paid program coordinator and the work study student-staff members serve to facilitate the action research process in a number of ways. At the beginning of the year, the staff administers an open-ended “Opening Survey” in order to identify participants’ interests. Then “TLA staff members compile the survey data and detect patterns across the survey responses, identifying any emergent themes the whole group can use to construct one overarching question” (Otis and Hammond 2010). The TLA staff also take notes during the TLA dialogue sessions, as well as compile the notes from other participants, and under the guidance of the director, identify emerging themes in order to create a set of highlights for each round of TLA. These highlights serve as a record of the ideas and questions that emerged, and are used as a springboard for the next round’s activities. At the end of each the quarter, the TLA staff distribute a “Closing Survey” in order to get participants’ suggestions on how to enhance their experiences in the TLA, and to find out what aspects of the TLA participants feel benefitted them the most.

### *The TLA as Participatory Action Research*

The TLA’s work is a reiterative, participatory action research (PAR) process (Otis and Hammond 2010). In its most general sense, PAR is “research conducted *with* people rather than *on* people” (Heron and Reason 2001: 179). More specifically, PAR can be defined as:

... a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview... It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing

concern to people, and more generally with the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (Reason and Bradbury 2001: 1)

Another researcher describes PAR as “a collaborative approach to *inquiry or investigation* that provides people with the means to take systematic *action* to resolve specific problems” (Stringer 2007: 8). The research process is not a linear progression, but a spiral or a “continually recycling set of activities” (Stringer 2007:9).

While the TLA did not intentionally set out to implement a PAR model in its SoTL work, the TLA espoused PAR values and unintentionally enacted the PAR process because it produced the best outcomes for the program and its participants. In the *Engaging Student Voices* book, my co-author (Joyce Hammond, an anthropology professor who teaches a course at WWU on PAR, and a long-time TLA participant) and I outlined the several PAR qualities possessed by the TLA: “Paralleling the qualities that distinguish PAR from other forms of research, the TLA is participatory, collaborative, democratizing, action oriented, and cyclical” (Otis and Hammond 2010:38). The TLA inclusively invites all stakeholders in the teaching-learning process to be participants and co-researchers, including and especially students (who are typically solely relegated to the role of “research subject” in most SoTL research). All of the participants are involved at all stages of the research: from developing the research questions, to investigating the questions through dialogue, to collectively analyzing the data, to developing and advancing action projects that promote positive change for all stakeholders. All participants’ knowledge and experiences are considered legitimate and valued equally, “regardless of rank or position within the university” (Otis and Hammond 2010:40). Through collaboration in the TLA, a sense of community is created, and TLA members share a vision and commitment to teaching and learning. And then the

collaborative research process recycles every academic quarter and year in a reiterative pattern, building on the work done by participants in prior quarters and years.

Due to the longevity of the program, the high number of members who have participated over multiple quarters and years, and the overwhelmingly positive feedback on the surveys, WWU has shared the TLA's work with others through published articles and conference presentations (e.g. Otis et al. 2009; Otis and Hammond 2010; Ware et al. 2008; Werder 2004; Werder 2010; Werder et al. 2007; Werder et al. 2010; Werder and Murphy 2008). WWU faculty and staff have also advocated for student voices in SoTL primarily based on students' experiences in the TLA. However, the great wealth of data gathered from students through their TLA closing surveys has been under-analyzed<sup>ii</sup>. The TLA staff analyzed the survey data at the end of each quarter and used the data internally to enhance the program for the next group of participants. But no systematic, longitudinal analysis of the survey data had been done, and little has been published for audiences external to WWU. I address this gap with my thesis research.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **“Native” Text Analysis Using Grounded Theory: Method and Methodology**

#### *Grounded Theory Approach to Text Analysis*

The TLA began operating in its current format in Fall Quarter of 2002. As part of the TLA’s regular method for its collective investigation into WWU’s university culture, the TLA staff members have collected opening and closing surveys from each participant at the beginning and ending of each quarter’s work. The closing surveys are used internally by the TLA staff to enhance and improve the program by determining what participants viewed were the most effective features of the program, and what parts of the program could be changed or improved. For the purposes of my research, I looked at the 227 student participants’ closing surveys from between 2007-2010, which provided a wealth of rich, written text on what students had to say about their experiences in the TLA, what aspects they felt were most effective, what they saw as needing to be improved, and most importantly what they said they gained from their experiences.

At the time of my writing this thesis (at the end of the 2010-2011 academic year), the TLA has completed nine academic years, or 27 academic quarters, worth of work in its current format of institution-wide dialogue groups. This means there are 27 quarters worth of opening and closing survey data on file, both in hard copy and electronically, in the TLA staff office, which (as the number of students who participate varies from quarter to quarter, year to year) roughly equates to several hundred surveys from TLA students over the past nine years.

I selected three consecutive and relatively recent academic years to examine, as it would reveal data from a mature phase of the TLA's ongoing research cycle: 2007-08, 2008-09, and 2009-10. These three academic years contained nine academic quarters: Fall 2007, Winter 2008, Spring 2008, Fall 2008, Winter 2009, Spring 2009, Fall 2009, Winter 2010 and Spring 2010. However, I was able to examine survey data from only eight of those quarters, excluding Winter 2008, because the TLA staff were unable to send me the survey responses from that quarter.

In addition to the maturity of research phase, I chose to examine more recent data for ethical considerations (more on this later) but also for convenience. Beginning in the 2007-08 academic year, the TLA began distributing and collecting their opening and closing surveys online using [surveymonkey.com](http://surveymonkey.com), a free web-based survey tool. Prior to this academic year, the TLA surveys were distributed and collected on paper. Using paper surveys required the TLA staff to print, collect, and store hundreds of sheets of paper, as well as the often painstaking process of deciphering the handwritten survey responses and transcribing them into an electronic document (which as anyone familiar with transcription will tell you involves a lot of creative interpretation of handwriting). Thus, I decided to examine surveys from years that had been collected electronically, to avoid the possibility of transcription errors due to handwriting interpretation.

To protect the confidentiality of the student respondents, I asked that the TLA staff remove respondents' names prior to sending me the survey data to be analyzed. Despite the student respondents' individual anonymity, there is a lot of information available about the kinds of students who participated in the TLA and filled out the surveys during the time

period I examined. The largest proportion of TLA students participated as part of their coursework in one of a number of courses (Education 109, Communication 322, and Communication 339) though there are also students who participate voluntarily, without receiving credit for their involvement in the TLA. *Education 109: Introduction to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* is a large, undergraduate course that counts towards the social science general education requirement for graduation. It is among a small handful of courses in education that does not require that students be admitted to the Woodring College of Education prior to enrolling. Because of that, Educ 109 tends to attract students, primarily in the first and second years, who have an interest in majoring in education and have not yet declared their major (though any student can register for the course, and occasionally students in their third, fourth years do enroll in the course). *Communication 322: Civil Discourse as Interactive Learning* is a small (usually no larger than 25 students) seminar style undergraduate course in the Communication department. This course is an upper division course which counts as an elective and does not have prerequisites, so about half of the students who enroll are communication majors or pre-majors, and half of the students come from other majors (Werder, personal communication, October 2011). Moreover, Comm 322 is a requirement for the *Diversity in Higher Education* minor, so there are several students in the course participate through that degree program. *Communication 339: Practicum in Applied Communication* is not a regular course, but a practicum (similar to an independent study) where students may receive course credit for participating in a number of different applied communication projects, among which participating in the TLA is an option. Comm 339 is a variable credit course, from 1-3 credits, is repeatable for up to

12 credits, counts towards the upper-division course requirement for graduation, and does not have a prerequisite to enroll. Many students who initially enroll in Educ 109 or Comm 322 and who want to continue participating in the TLA after their coursework is complete, are encouraged to enroll in Comm 339. Students who participate voluntarily tend to be “veteran” participants who keep coming back to TLA even without receiving credit, though some student volunteers come to TLA with a friend who is participating in one of the associated courses, or attend at the invitation of a TLA faculty or staff participant.

Occasionally, graduate students voluntarily participate in the TLA as well. Because of the associated courses, there is a common misconception that students who participate in TLA are either education or communication majors. While a good portion of the students who participate indeed do major in those disciplines, there is more diversity within the TLA student population than at first glance. That being said, the surveys I examined for this thesis came from student respondents who tend overwhelmingly to come from social science majors, and I recognize that this bias towards social science majors will affect the findings from the analysis of TLA students’ closing surveys (though exactly how is a question for another study at a later time).

Using a grounded theory approach was a perfectly suited method to analyze the TLA students’ closing surveys, as it is essentially the same approach employed by the TLA staff members while analyzing the opening or closing surveys and the weekly dialogue group notes.

Originally developed by sociologists Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, the grounded theory approach “is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of



procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon” (Strauss and Corbin 1990:24) which is often used in social science fields like anthropology. According to Bernard (2006), “The grounded theory approach is a set of techniques for: (1) identifying categories and concepts that emerge from text; and (2) linking the concepts into substantive and formal theories” (492), and “is mostly based on inductive or “open” coding” (493). So, instead of using deductive coding, in which I would identify a hypothesis before coding and then look for those specific themes within the text, I read through all of the surveys, identified patterns in the responses and let the cultural themes arise from the text.

### *“Native” Analysis*

One of the most critical methodological issues involved in my thesis research stems from my long involvement with the Teaching-Learning Academy. I worked as an undergraduate student employee for the TLA from the beginning of Fall Quarter in 2002, until the end of Winter Quarter in 2005 when I graduated from Western Washington University with my Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology. As a TLA student-staff member, I participated in the TLA’s work in two different ways. First, I represented myself as a student and participated as such in developing the TLA’s research questions and examining the questions through dialogue. Secondly, as a member of the staff, I officially represented the program and was involved in planning the weekly agenda for the dialogue groups, facilitating the dialogue, as well as collecting, transcribing and analyzing the survey data (including the aforementioned task of handwriting interpretation) and presenting the TLA research to external audiences. After graduating with my BA, my involvement with the TLA

took a brief hiatus as I left Western and Bellingham for over a year, until I returned to begin my graduate studies in anthropology in the Fall of 2006 (indeed, my prior deep and meaningful experiences within the TLA was a major contributing factor in deciding to return to WWU for my graduate program, rather than another university). When I returned to WWU for graduate school, I rejoined the TLA as a volunteer participant.

At the end of my first year of graduate school, in the Spring of 2007, I realized that I was very interested in the TLA as a unique subculture in higher education. I connected many of the anthropological concepts I learned in my anthropology courses with the TLA's work. In particular, I realized the anthropological emphasis on getting the cultural "native's" point of view corresponded with the TLA's emphasis on bringing students (the "native" learners) into the study of teaching and learning. I made the decision to focus my thesis research on students' experiences participating in the TLA. In doing so, I made myself one of my own research subjects, and in doing so re-categorized my own undergraduate experiences participating in the TLA as a kind of "retrospective fieldwork" (Okley 1996:10) – where "the research' may be defined in terms of the researcher's decision to engage in the act of producing anthropological knowledge; that is (re)classifying interaction as research" (Pink 2000:99).

After making the decision to focus my thesis research on the TLA, the director of the TLA, Carmen Werder, approached me and asked me to come back to work for the TLA. I wrestled with ethical considerations of doing so, before agreeing to return as a paid staff member. Knowing I was going to be studying the survey data for my thesis, part of the agreement I made with the director was that I was not going to have any direct involvement

collecting, transcribing or analyzing the survey data on behalf of the program. I did not want to, in my role as a staff member, involuntarily influence the data that I planned to study as a graduate student. (This was also a major contributing factor for why I excluded survey data from years 2002-2005 for my thesis research, as I know that the transcription of the survey data involved my own interpretation of the participants' handwriting, of what I thought they were trying to say on their surveys.)

My deep, long-time involvement in the TLA, and in the SoTL field, has profoundly impacted me, coloring my worldview, which most certainly would make it impossible to conduct my thesis research on this topic objectively, i.e. neutrally or without bias (if indeed such a thing were possible, as many postmodern anthropologists have argued is not). And I am sure there are researchers who may have concerns that as a former paid staff member and participant of the program I am researching, that I cannot be objective in my analysis and therefore discount my findings. Much of that critique stems from positivist social science methodology:

*Positivism sees social science as an organized method for combining deductive logic with precise empirical observations of individual behavior in order to discover and confirm a set of probabilistic causal laws that can be used to predict general patterns of human activity. (Neuman 1997:63, emphasis in original).*

Rather than a positivist approach, an interpretive social science (ISS) methodological approach “sees facts as fluid and embedded within a meaning system in the interpretive approach; they are not impartial, objective or neutral. Facts are context-specific actions that depend on the interpretations of particular people in a social setting” (Neuman 1997:72). As an anthropologist, I am my own research instrument and what I see and how I interpret it cannot ever entirely be divorced from my personal biases. Thus my research and outcomes

cannot be neutral or value-free. “The interpretive researcher... argues that researchers should reflect on, reexamine, and analyze personal points of view and feelings as a part of studying others” (73); for anthropologists, this is called *reflexivity*, a sense of self-awareness of positionality. I hope that I have indeed reflexively acknowledged my biases in favor of the TLA, based on my long-time, wholly positive involvement with my research topic. And for interpretivists, “good” research is very different than for positivists:

Positivists evaluate a theory by using a set of procedures to test hypotheses. They logically deduce from theory, collect data, and analyze facts in ways other scientists can replicate. An explanation is considered to be true when it stands up to replication. For ISS, *a theory is true if it makes sense to those being studied and if it allows others to understand deeply or enter the reality of those being studied.* (Neuman 1997:72, emphasis mine)

Because I am a TLA “native,” I share a cultural meaning system with other TLA members, and as an “insider” I am able to interpret and analyze the data in a way that is meaningful and relevant to other TLA members.

Since the 1980s, studying “at home” has becoming a booming trend for American anthropologists (Moffatt 1992); many modern anthropologists have studied themselves and the cultures they themselves are/were part of (e.g. Behar 2009; Carroll 1988; Curren 1989; Hayano 1982; Konner 1987; Yang 1972). This new trend – sometimes called “native ethnography,” “autoethnography,” or “indigenous research” – is in stark contrast with traditional anthropological research or ethnography, the work of describing a culture, which has historically been conducted by an “outsider” studying *another* culture, but trying to grasp “the native’s point of view” (Malinowski 1922:25). Native research has evolved within the field of anthropology after several decades of debate over the politics of representation

– “who has the right to represent whom and for what purposes” (Lassiter 2001:138) – and is often associated with the rise of postmodernism in anthropology.

At the root of the “crisis of representation” and the rise of postmodernism, are questions about knowledge and power: who has the power or authority to create new knowledge or to represent a culture? Can an outsider come in, observe an unfamiliar culture for a period of time, then write up their interpretation of that culture and call it “Truth”? Social theorist Michel Foucault asserts that there can be no objective truth (Truth with a capital “T”) because of the inextricable link between the production of knowledge and the exercise of power (1972). The relationship between knowledge and power is embedded in discourse; discourse is the location where individuals and groups battle for control over meaning and hegemony. Foucault argues that, in order to move away from discursive hegemony, multiple, diverse perspectives be incorporated in the understanding of society (1972).

Postmodern theorist Jacques Derrida (1976) offers an additional view on the knowledge/power relationship. Cultural life can be viewed as texts, and all cultural participants have different interpretations and understandings of the texts, according to their own personal framework. People in positions of power and authority in social hierarchies impose their interpretations and their perceptions on subordinates. Derrida advocates for creating opportunities for wider participation in determining the cultural ideals imbedded in the texts, and finding ways to make knowledge production more democratic and less hierarchical.

Another postmodern theorist, Andreas Huyssen (1986) suggests that in developing scientific explanatory systems, theorists and researchers assume they represent others' views. But no single explanatory system or view of reality can, or should, account for all of life's phenomena. Huyssen argues that all groups should have the right to speak, in their own voices, for themselves, and that their knowledge should be considered legitimate types of knowledge.

The discipline of anthropology has been criticized both by anthropologists themselves and others for its ties to colonialism. As anthropologist James Clifford (1983) has asserted, "... the West can no longer present itself as the unique purveyor of anthropological knowledge about others" (119). Clifford and other anthropologists (e.g. Clifford 1983; Fals Borda 1996; Tierney 1998) hold that anthropologists must encourage the dispersion of ethnographic authority (allowing cultural "natives" to represent their own culture, and for their own means). Postmodernist anthropologists I believe would agree, as a TLA "native" I necessarily should be allowed to represent, investigate and analyze the TLA subculture in this thesis.

## **Chapter 3:**

### **Findings**

While analyzing the TLA survey texts, I used grounded theory to inductively generate several themes for each of the two main questions common across the eight academic quarters' students closing surveys. In this chapter, I present two questions posed at the end of every term to all TLA participants on the closing surveys, then I identify the themes that arose from students' responses to each question including exemplars (representative quotes from the anonymous student surveys that I believe illuminate the theme), and then discuss the characteristics of the themes and subthemes that emerged from grounded theory analysis. Tabulations of the number and percentage of occurrences of each theme are included in Appendices B1 and B2.

*Question One: What feature/aspect of the TLA benefitted you most individually?<sup>iii</sup>*

In analyzing the students' responses to question one across eight academic quarters, five main themes (and in the case of theme five, with two corresponding subthemes) emerged from the responses.

*Theme One: Increased opportunities for self-expression and self-awareness*

I have found that I learn best through verbal dialogue. Just communicating with others helped me to learn about who I am in the world and my identity. (TLA Student Closing Survey, Fall 2007)

19% of the survey responses indicated that they benefitted most from the increased opportunities for self-expression and self-awareness. Within this theme, students often expressed that they most appreciated the opportunity to use their *voice* and *just talk* to others in TLA. Being able to talk about their opinions, ideas and experiences often helped them to clarify what they really believed and valued. One student wrote that he or she benefitted most from having “open discussions, because it allowed me to take [my] thoughts and bounce ideas off others to develop those thoughts” (TLA Student Closing Survey, Fall 2007). Additionally, several student respondents wrote that having these opportunities to express their own thoughts and ideas in TLA increased their self-awareness; for example, one student said that through the dialogue in TLA he or she “...was really able to look at my own identity and try to figure out who I am” (TLA Student Closing Survey, Fall 2007).

*Theme Two: Increased awareness/understanding of the diversity of ideas/perspectives*

[I benefitted most from] the diversity of students and faculty. Not only the fact that we have both [faculty and students] in the same room sharing with each other but also the diversity among their different backgrounds and subjects of study. This has allowed me to build a better image of the issues we are talking about. (TLA Student Closing Survey, Fall 2008)

One of the major themes that emerged from the students’ survey responses was their deep appreciation of the dialogue that occurs among all members of the dialogue groups because it served to increase their awareness and understanding of the diversity of ideas and perspectives that the other various participants bring to the dialogue. Out of 227



responses to question one, 25% of the responses fell within this theme. Students often responded that they gained a lot from listening to the perspectives of other students, particularly students not in the same year or major. For example, one student wrote he or she benefitted most from "...discussion with [students] in different positions in the school. Since I am a freshman I find myself only interacting with other freshmen, and TLA was a nice way to branch out" (TLA Student Closing Survey, Fall 2007). But most particularly, the respondents felt they gained the most from hearing the perspectives of the faculty and staff from around the campus; one student wrote, "The close interaction with teachers was quite helpful for me in understanding the multi-faceted nature of most issues. Being a student, it is difficult to understand where teachers stand on issues, and why" (TLA Student Closing Survey, Spring 2008).

*Theme three: Increased pedagogical intelligence and learner autonomy*

I enjoyed the chance to be reflective about *how* I teach and learn, rather than focusing on the content of *what* I'm teaching and learning. (TLA Student<sup>iv</sup> Closing Survey, Fall 2007, emphasis mine)

27% of the students' survey responses indicated that they benefitted from TLA because they learned more about (their) teaching and learning, which I termed as being increased pedagogical intelligence and learner autonomy. *Pedagogical intelligence* is a term I borrow from Pat Hutchings, former Vice President of the Pat Hutchings at The Carnegie Foundation, who describes the term as "an understanding about how learning happens, and a disposition and capacity to shape one's own learning" (Hutchings, n.d.). Pedagogical intelligence is a concept developed initially in discussions on what students need to have in

order to assess and evaluate their own learning and their professors' teaching. *Learner autonomy* is a similar concept that I borrow from other Carnegie colleagues at Illinois State University: "Autonomous learners are students who take responsibility for their learning, are willing to collaborate, partnering with faculty and peers in their learning, are reflective about their learning..." (Sublett et al. 2010). Building on those two concepts within this theme, I included responses that indicated an increased understanding of teaching and learning styles, increased reflectivity, increased awareness and understanding of themselves as learners, and increased acceptance of responsibility for their learning. For example, one student wrote: "Just the chance to talk and listen helps me to gain broader understanding of education, understand and refine my own perspective on my learning" (TLA Student Closing Survey, Fall 2008). Also within this category, I included responses on building academic skills, such as studying, listening or facilitating groups, and responses on increased understanding of a specific course, topic or educational theory, for example, assessment and evaluation.

*Theme Four: Increased sense of belonging and community at WWU*

[TLA] helped me understand my part in the university and feel more connected as an important part of the community. (TLA Student Closing Survey, Winter 2009)

The theme that emerged with the highest percentage of responses, 37% of the 227 responses to question one, was the increased sense of belonging and community at WWU. Encompassed in this theme are responses about feeling more "involved" at WWU, feeling more "at home" at WWU, increased understanding of the university and how to navigate through it, increased opportunities to connect to others on a "personal" level including

increased feelings of caring for others and increased feeling that others care about them.

Over and over, students wrote about feeling more “connected” to other students, to faculty and staff, and to the university; “Felt like I was an appreciated member of the school community. I finally felt connected to everyone here [at WWU]” (TLA Student Closing Survey, Fall 2009). One student wrote, “Making connections and networking, meeting new people and growing while having a large support system of students and faculty I’ll be working with while here at Western” (TLA Student Closing Survey, Spring 2009).

*Theme Five: Increased sense of power within the university*

The validation of my ideas as equal to those presented by participating faculty and staff members. This was beneficial in that I felt that Western and its community was inviting me to be an active participant and explicitly saying that my opinions, thoughts, feelings, etc. matter when it comes time to look for solutions or ways of change and improvement. (TLA Student Closing Survey, Fall 2008)

31% of the students’ responses indicated they felt an increased sense of power within the university. Primarily this was shown in two major sub-themes. The first sub-theme was feeling an increased sense of equality with faculty, staff and administrators (non-students) or a decreased sense of hierarchy. Students often described they felt more comfortable talking with, and collaborating with non-students; “I reconsidered my views on how I interact with faculty and staff, and perhaps all adults who are older than me. Before coming to TLA, I would have been afraid to enter into such dialogue with my professors, but I have grown comfortable with it” (TLA Student Closing Survey, Spring 2008). Over and over again, students responded that thanks to TLA they felt “heard” and that they “matter” at WWU; “I feel that TLA benefited me as a student because I was able to get my voice heard.

It made me feel like I can make a difference on campus” (TLA Student Closing Survey, Spring 2009). The second major sub-theme was a sense of increased opportunity and ability to make change within the university. One student wrote, “Being able to voice my opinions to teachers and other people more superior to me. To actually be heard and taken seriously. I have been able to be participate in the dynamic change of my university!” (TLA Student Closing Survey, Spring 2008).

### *Fall 2009 Closing Surveys*

While question one was primarily an open-ended question across the seven quarters I examined, question one on the closing survey in the quarter of Fall 2009 included a multiple choice component in addition to the open ended question. The usual question “How do you think TLA benefitted you individually this quarter?” was followed by the instructions to “*Please check all that apply:*” and offered the following options: Increased personal understanding of myself as a teacher/learner; Gave me a new practice(s) or technique to try; Made me feel more connected to WWU; Made me care more about other teachers/learners; Made me feel heard and that my ideas matter. (See Appendix B3: F09 Responses and Percentages.)

These five options fit well within the themes I discovered. “Increased understanding of myself as a teacher/learner” and “Gave me a new practice(s) or technique to try” I argue would both fall under my theme of *increased pedagogical intelligence and learner autonomy*. Out of 74 respondents to this question, 54% selected “Increased understanding of myself as a teacher/learner” and 26% selected “Gave me a new practice(s) or technique

to try.” The option “Made me feel more connected to WWU” falls perfectly within my theme of *increased sense of belonging and community at WWU*; 93% of student respondents selected this choice on the Fall 2009 Closing Survey (and *increased sense of belonging and community at WWU* was the theme with the greatest number of responses across all seven quarters). I would argue also that the option “Made me care more about other teachers/learners” also would fall within the scope of the theme *increased sense of belonging and community at WWU*; 70% of Fall 2009 respondents selected that choice as well. 84% of the students selected the choice, “Made me feel heard and that my ideas matter” which falls nicely within the scope of the theme *increased sense of power within the university*; both in the Fall 2009 Closing Surveys, and across all seven surveys this theme was the second greatest percentage of responses of all the themes.

*Question Two: What changes/additions/suggestions do you have for next quarter? v*

While the responses to question two are primarily used by the TLA staff to maximize the effectiveness of the program and adjust the TLA’s format to best suit the needs and wants of its participants, I decided to examine the responses to this question for my thesis research in the hopes it would shed light on the most (and perhaps the least) beneficial aspects of the TLA.

Over the eight quarters’ responses that I examined, students wrote in 28% of the 218 total responses that they did not have any suggestions. This was often coupled with a follow-up statement that TLA is good the way that it is; for example, one student wrote “I feel that TLA has a great structure and opens a free place for dialogue. I do not see

any[thing to] change/add/delete...” (TLA Student Closing Survey, Spring 2009). Another student wrote, “I enjoyed this format and I thought the dialogue benefitted from the way it was set up” (TLA Student Closing Survey, Fall 2009).

The next greatest percentage of responses, 26%, requested *more interaction* in some fashion. Primarily this came in the form of requesting that the dialogue groups meet more often, or for longer periods of time. There were also several requests that TLA expand dialogue and interaction into an electronic arena. Depending on the quarter, some respondents suggested more time to interact in small groups, or in the large group. Some students requested that the groups be mixed up more often so that they could interact with even more people within the TLA and some requested that there was a way to further increase interaction with participants in other days/times.

15% of students responded that they wished to see *more participants*, and in particular *more diversity* among participants, in order to gain more diverse perspectives and ideas. One student responded, “More involvement from [other] groups would establish a greater amount of diversity, and would help contribute to... a greater collective, shared meaning on what students, faculty, staff, and the Western campus holds as important issues” (TLA Student Closing Survey, Fall 2008). Some students suggested that students from other majors or programs be invited (as I mentioned earlier, the bulk of the student participants come from the social sciences). But most of all students suggested that more faculty and staff be invited to participate; for example, one student wrote “I think more people should hear about TLA – ESPECIALLY teachers. [Students have so much to say] and I think TLA is one of the best and only advocating groups for students on campus... students

are a great resource for departments [on] teaching strategies. Especially as student bodies are constantly changing as society is. Tell teachers to come!!!!!" (TLA Student Closing Survey, Fall 2008).

8% of students' responses requested *more clarity* in TLA on the format, purpose, ground rules, or scope of the work either initially, or as the quarter's work progressed. As one student stated, "At first I did not understand the format but with time – I got it" (TLA Student Closing Survey, Fall 2007). Another student wrote, "I came into TLA spring quarter, and I had no idea what was going on. It would be nice to... have a thorough briefing about what the focus [is]... and what the main goal... will be. I think this will help newcomers feel more comfortable and confident speaking during TLA" (TLA Student Closing Survey, Spring 2008).

The rest of the suggestions occurred in smaller percentages. Some students (6%) requested *more facilitation* or structure, while some students (also 6%) suggested *less facilitation* or structure, and more open ended discussions. Another 6% of responses said that they appreciated the hands-on activities and wished to see *more creative activities* in TLA (as opposed to just dialogue). And finally, another 6% of students requested *more action* and less talk; as one student responded "It might be nice to see more options available for action. While I definitely recognize the importance of dialogue, it would be great to be able to share what we do in the TLA with the rest of the campus" (TLA Student Closing Survey, Spring 2008).

## Chapter 4:

### Conclusion: Discussion and Implications

#### *Discussion of Themes*

When students participate in the TLA, they partner with faculty, staff, administrators, community members and other students from around Western's campus and the Bellingham community to identify important questions *to them* about the process of teaching and learning and the learning culture, investigate those questions through dialogue to create new knowledge, and then based on those new understandings, formulate and advance proposals for positive change. In analyzing TLA students' closing survey responses, I've found that students say that they benefit from increased awareness/understanding of the diversity of ideas/perspectives; increased opportunities for self-expression and self-awareness; increased pedagogical intelligence and learner autonomy; increased sense of belonging and community at WWU; and increased sense of power within the university. But, the next important question to ask is this – why are those outcomes important for students? What are the effects on students of those outcomes?

#### *Increasing Student Learning and Student Engagement*

Many of the benefits that students report they gain in TLA have been shown by other researchers to increase student learning and student engagement. "Student engagement" is a particularly pervasive "buzz word" in studies on higher education these days. Sometimes used interchangeably with "student involvement" or "student



integration,” student engagement refers to meaningful participation in the learning environment and includes psychological and behavioral components and has shown to be crucial to student success in college (Astin 1993). The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) – a large scale effort to survey hundreds of thousands of students at hundreds of colleges about how students engage in learning – equates ‘student engagement’ with the amount of *time* students put into their educational activities as well as how well institutions organize and support engaging learning experiences for students (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2011).

The most commonly observed theme I found in TLA students’ responses was that participating in the TLA increased their sense of belonging and community at WWU particularly due to the more personal interactions with other students, faculty and staff within TLA. On their surveys, students write over and over that it is the dialogue with other students but especially with faculty and staff that they appreciate most about TLA. In fact, as seen in students’ responses to question two, they frequently request that even *more* faculty participate in TLA. In his well-known study on the causes of student attrition and retention, Vincent Tinto (1993) discovered that students who had successfully integrated academically and socially within their college were less likely to drop out; a major factor in successful integration was increased interactions between faculty and staff. Based on my findings in conjunction with Tinto’s research, I would hypothesize that students who have participated in the TLA (and especially students who participate repeatedly) had higher retention rates than the general population of WWU students, but that is research I highly recommend be taken up in the future. One of the major findings in the student engagement

literature is how crucially important faculty-student interaction is to student engagement: the more interaction with faculty both in and out of class, the more students are engaged in their learning (e.g. Astin 1993; Chickering and Gamson 1991; Kazami 2010; Kinzie 2005; Tinto 1993; Umbach and Wawrzynski 2005). Additionally, results from the NSSE indicate that collaborative learning with other students, both inside and outside of class, also increases student engagement (Laird et al. 2008). Thus, one way that participating in TLA helps to increase student engagement is simply by increasing interaction with faculty and other students and creating a collaborative learning community.

Additionally in the TLA, a concerted effort is made to start with, and build on, participants' previous knowledge and experiences, which is another factor that studies show increases student engagement as well:

Recognizing what students know and their perspectives, including asking for students' opinions and taking their responses into account when making decisions, listening to students' concerns... go a long way to foster student engagement in learning... This pedagogical strategy... helps instill a sense of agency in students. (Kinzie 2005:3).

Students say they gain opportunities for self-expression and self-awareness, as well as greater understanding and awareness of the diversity of ideas and perspectives, through the dialogue in TLA. Education researcher, Jane Vella (2002) asserts that for adult learners, dialogue is a powerful process to foster effective learning. In TLA, the primary stated goal of the work is to create a deeper understanding through multiple perspectives. TLA Director Carmen Werder frequently references Ellinor and Gerard's (1998) discussion of convergent versus divergent communication and emphasizes that the goal of TLA dialogue is not consensus (convergence), but an opening up of ideas (divergence). Embracing a diversity of

perspectives, as TLA advocates, is also a factor that studies on the NSSE has shown to increase active learning and student engagement:

[Students] who report more exposure to diverse perspectives in their classes are more likely to report higher levels of academic challenge, greater opportunities for active and collaborative learning, and a more supportive campus environment. (Kinzie 2005:3)

As I discovered in the closing surveys, students are gaining an increased understanding and awareness of the diversity of ideas and perspectives, so it is apparent that TLA's emphasis on divergent dialogue is resonating with the student participants.

Another theme arising from the students' surveys is that participating in the TLA increases students' pedagogical intelligence and learner autonomy. This theme, to me, seems like common sense; it stands to reason that when students participate in SoTL and research different aspects of teaching and learning that their understanding of teaching and learning (their pedagogical intelligence) increases. My findings are similar to a couple of other recent SoTL studies on the positive outcomes of partnering with students. Mihans, Long and Felten (2008) discovered that at Elon University, when students partnered with faculty to redesign a teacher education course, students reported "significant new disciplinary knowledge, greater understanding about learning, the ability to effect their own learning, and increased self-efficacy in expressing their own views in an academic context" (McKinney et al. 2010:82). In another study, on the benefits of their participation in SoTL Grant Program research at Illinois State University, students reported during interviews that their learner autonomy and pedagogical intelligence increased as well:

Students felt uniformly that they became better researchers in the process. Some credited their project with either propelling them to the next stage in their life (e.g. graduate school) or planting the idea that graduate school or a teaching career

ought to be something for them to consider. A nontraditional (over the age of 25) female student said she used to be the sort of student who sat in class, took notes, and tried to be invisible. Following her participation as the sole student collaborator on her learner autonomy project, she now strives to involve herself in class and as a result feels “more confident.” (Sublett et al. 2010:157)

It is clear that there are common trends across institutions in the outcomes for students who participate as SoTL co-researchers, but this is definitely an area where there needs to be far more research made public.

This type of outcome is paralleled in research on outcomes from undergraduate research experiences (typically disciplinary-based research rather than SoTL). Undergraduate research has long been considered a particularly effective pedagogical strategy particularly in the hard sciences, but use of this strategy has also grown more prominently in other disciplines as well (Craney et al 2011; Kuh 2008). Involvement in inquiry projects is shown by researchers to increase student engagement, critical thinking, persistence [retention], interest in graduate school, and interest research-related careers (Hu et al. 2008). Moreover, research *with* a faculty member has also been shown to increase student engagement and retention, particularly when students receive ongoing feedback from the professor (Astin 1993; Craney et al. 2011). In one study measuring the outcomes for students involved in undergraduate research in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields, students’ confidence and skills as learners and researchers increased (what I would term learner autonomy), as well as their understanding of STEM fields, interest in STEM careers and in graduate school increased (Russell 2007:548). An increased interest in graduate school was also an outcome observed by Student Voices colleagues at Illinois State University in their research on the outcomes of

students involved in their SoTL grant program research (Sublett et al. 2010). I am curious to see if similar outcomes could be found among TLA students, but I recommend research for another time.

### *Increasing Empowerment in the University: PAR Outcomes for TLA Students*

One of the largest themes I uncovered in the students' surveys is an increased sense of power within the university, which I identified as consisting of two major sub-themes: first, an increased sense of equality (or a decreased sense of hierarchy) with more powerful others in the university, like faculty, staff and administrators; and second, an increased sense of opportunity and ability to create change within the university. This theme of empowerment in the university is an outcome of the TLA's work being a PAR process. PAR practitioners have noted that for those participants who are typically subjugated as "the researched" (as students typically are in SoTL), that one of the outcomes of participating in PAR is an increasing sense of empowerment.

In TLA, as in PAR, power is shared with all participants, which is a vast cultural shift from the typical arrangement of power within higher education. As Martin (1998) discusses in his book, *Tied Knowledge: Power in Higher Education*, higher education is an incredibly hierarchical institution where faculty members and administrators are in positions of power over students in a number of different ways. Faculty members and administrators hold credentials that signify their expertise and authority within the university, and they hold the power to confer credentials on their students. Credentials also confer power to the faculty to create new legitimate knowledge through scholarship, and scholarship contributes to and

reinforces power of the faculty. One way to break down the hierarchical relationship between teacher and student is to legitimize students' knowledge and share the power to produce new knowledge with students. This is precisely what occurs in the TLA; the typical marked hierarchy of higher education is decreased:

The TLA strives to create a space that values all participants equally... Regardless of rank or position within the university, each stakeholder has expertise based on unique educational experiences. At the beginning of every term, participants agree to shared ground rules, which aid in ensuring equity among participants... Students are able to voice their opinions to faculty, administrators, and staff members more openly knowing their ideas won't be graded... titles are deemphasized, and students facilitate the dialogue in small groups, a role typically filled by their professors. (Otis and Hammond 2010:40)

Then faculty, staff, administrators and students can work together on equal footing – where faculty and staff learn from students, as well as the reverse.

Community and relationship-building are key values in PAR: “Not only do research participants acquire the individual capacity to engage in systematic research... but they also build a supportive network of collaborative relationships that provides them with an ongoing resource” (Stringer 2007:21). The PAR outcome of community-building is shown clearly in TLA students' surveys, and as I said earlier, research has shown that being involved in a scholarly community increases student engagement.

In PAR, as in TLA, each step of the inquiry process – from developing a research question to planning and carrying out action – is *participatory* which cultivates an increased sense of power or agency:

To the extent that people can participate in the process of exploring the nature and context of the problems that concern them, they have the opportunity to develop immediate and deeply relevant understandings of their situation and to be involved actively in the process of dealing with those problems. The task in these circumstances is to provide a climate that *gives people the sense that they are in*

*control of their own lives* and that supports them as they take systematic action to improve their circumstances. (Stringer 2007:32, emphasis mine)

In TLA, students (as well as faculty and staff) have expressed a sense of powerlessness within the university; they “think they do not have a voice in how their classroom or school operates” (Otis and Hammond 2010:43). But TLA offers participants an opportunity to create change that truly matters to them, which makes their experiences as teachers and learners even better. By participating in each step of the research process, especially in identifying the research question, PAR participants gain a sense of responsibility, ownership or investment over the research and the issue under investigation. As seen in the context of TLA, students are prompted to take more responsibility in their learning, and gain a greater sense of ownership of their university by using the PAR process to study teaching and learning.

The same argument I used to validate my legitimacy as a “native” researcher on the TLA can be used to validate students’ legitimacy as “native” researchers on teaching and learning. As I discussed earlier in the methodology section, anthropologists have been involved in an ongoing insider/outsider debate over the politics of representation; when describing and understanding a culture and the problems those in that culture face, whose explanation is the truth? Can an outsider (for instance, a faculty member) investigate his or her students’ learning, use his or her students only as objects of the research, then conclude that they have uncovered the truth of what is happening in their classroom? I argue no. Postmodernists say there is no one single truth and multiple perspectives are needed, both insiders and outsiders, in order to truly understand and address a complex cultural process like teaching and learning. In the culture of higher education, students are learning

“insiders” and faculty are learning “outsiders,” and the faculty are teaching “insiders” and students are teaching “outsiders”. In order to fully understand the process and the problems faced in teaching and learning, both insiders’ and outsiders’ perspectives are necessary to see the full picture. Therefore, the scholarship of teaching and learning is best done, not just by faculty, but in collaboration with *all* of those affected by the problem, especially with students.

In his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (2000[1970]) examines the modernist construction of the teacher-student hierarchy in terms of the banking metaphor of education; a student is an empty account to be filled by the teacher. The student in this metaphor is a passive object, the subordinate in the knowledge hierarchy. Instead, Freire advocates for a blurring of the lines between learners and teachers and creating teaching-learners and learning-teachers. This helps to transform students into active participants in the teaching-learning process which empowers students on a deep level to see that they are capable of constructing and using their own knowledge. This consciousness raising is what Freire calls *conscientization*, and he argues it is an educational imperative.

Paulo Freire and Ira Shor (1987, 1996) describe the “culture of silence” in the traditional classroom where students internalize the passive role imposed on them, and withdrawal from the activities in the classroom. However, passivity is not a natural condition of humans and imposing passivity and silence on students, “symbolic violence” is being committed on them students. Simply by inviting students into dialogue (as opposed to the oppressive monologue of the traditional classroom) and giving students a chance to talk (as happens in TLA) is one step towards ending the culture of silence and symbolic violence



and helps to empower students. Paulo Freire (1997) also argues that in doing PAR, subjugated people are participating in the production of their own legitimate knowledge, which is one more step in breaking out of their proscribed silent, passive role (2000[1970]). In education, when students produce and act upon their own ideas rather than consuming the ideas of others, they become more active in their learning (this is exactly what research in student engagement shows as well). These same results that Freire describes in PAR, I have found among student members of the TLA: when students are involved in the creation of new legitimate knowledge on teaching and learning, in dialogue with others (especially those in positions of power like faculty and staff), they gain a deeper understanding of the university power structure and their role within it and are empowered to become more active as learners and as agents of change in their universities.

### *Implications for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning at WWU and Beyond*

The scholarship of teaching and learning takes many different shapes at different institutions; at Western Washington University, SoTL takes form primarily<sup>vi</sup> in the Teaching-Learning Academy. My thesis research, while focusing solely on one case study, does have implications outside of the TLA, and WWU. Those that advocate for involving students in the scholarship of teaching and learning have thus far have had little evidence to support their assertions that participating in SoTL has beneficial outcomes for students. My investigation has added additional evidence to back up the assertions that student participation in SoTL is beneficial for the students. My hope is that with this thesis and the additional evidence of the benefit of doing so, that even more faculty and staff SoTL

scholars will partner with students in this scholarship. Though, as with most research, more new questions are generated than answers and I certainly recommend additional research assessing the impact of student SoTL scholars in the future.

My first recommendation for future research would be to find out more about the students themselves because in order to truly gauge the impact of their experience in TLA (or in SoTL more generally), you have to know where they started from to understand how far they go. I cannot and do not wish to convey the belief that my research shows that *all* students can, and do, step foot in TLA and miraculously transform into perfectly engaged, active learners. My research identified several types of benefits that students (who participated during 2007-2010) said they gained during their participation in the TLA. An individual student's written response many have only identified one or more of the themes. I do not know which of the students whose responses I analyzed were first-time or one-off participants, and which participated repeatedly (which I believe would definitely affect their responses) as their names were removed from their surveys before I analyzed them. I hypothesize that the more students participate in TLA, the more they would gain from their experiences (definitely another research topic for the future) but I do not have much evidence to support this claim other than my own experience and a small study done by TLA student Cora Thomas (Werder et al. 2010:24-27). However, I do not want to ignore student agency in this equation, because I believe that participating in TLA is much like any educational experience: students get out of it what they put into it.

As I identified earlier in this thesis, TLA students primarily come from social science programs (either an interest in, or an already declared major in, a social science discipline).

Does this factor, or another student “input” factor (for example, the student’s favored learning style, his or her high school performance, his or her gender, or some other factor), impact their outcomes? TLA director Carmen Werder, and former TLA student Luke Ware (Werder et al. 2010) discuss the importance of including a broad-based representation of students in SoTL, not just the traditionally high achieving students (who Ware calls the “keeners”) or those who are already actively involved in their university, such as members of student government (20-21). So I would definitely recommend making concerted efforts to invite lots of different kinds of students into TLA (students from different majors and backgrounds). Additionally, I recommend more thoroughly documenting students experiences in TLA (and in other SoTL projects) over time, including well after the study has concluded and after the student has graduated – especially with students in TLA who participate repeatedly. One potential method for documenting students’ SoTL experiences over time would be to conduct interviews with researchers before, during and after the experience, and/or ask them to journal throughout the process. I think more detailed, longitudinal qualitative data (taking into account where students start) would increase our understanding of the impact on students of being involved in the SoTL research process.

I was able to analyze only a small portion of the TLA student survey data available, and I recommend expanding the analysis to include *all* student surveys from all quarters and years in the TLA archives. In this way, we can further understand TLA student experiences over time. Further research will also test the themes I discovered to see if *theoretical saturation* is reached, where the list of themes is thorough and exhaustive, and

new thematic categories are not being discovered among the survey data (Bernard 2006:501).

The students are not the only ones to benefit from student involvement in SoTL. As Sublett et al. (2010) discovered in their research on the SoTL Grant Program at Illinois State University, faculty co-researchers benefit as well, and the research benefits from the students' involvement as well. But here again, this is another aspect of this research that ought to be investigated more thoroughly in the future. My recommendation (for the TLA, as well as other SoTL scholars investigating the impact of partnering with students) is to explore with the non-student research participants what they believe they've learned or gained from their student partners, and how the research itself is benefitted by the involvement of student co-researchers.

I also recommend further investigation of the impact of student SoTL scholars on the context or focus of the SoTL study, such as the learning culture of the classroom, or the institution. While institutional impact is perhaps more difficult to categorize and challenging to track, I think it is important to investigate how WWU has changed/benefitted from students involvement in SoTL at the institution. Here is an example from other CASTL Student Voices colleagues: at Elon University, faculty have been partnering with students to redesign courses (e.g. Delpish et al. 2010; Holmes 2009; Mihans et al. 2008; Moore et al. 2010). But Elon faculty member Jessie Moore has taken it a step further by investigating the impact on the students' learning in the redesigned course (Moore 2009). That is the kind of further research which I wish to see more of at WWU and beyond. The TLA action projects and proposals have prompted some specific concrete changes, such as the creation of a

campus-wide online forum Viking Village (as I discussed earlier). But I wish to see more attention given to tracking the impact of those proposals and projects on the campus, as well as attempting to gauge the less concrete changes, such as how changes in attitudes affects the campus culture.

### *Conclusions and Implications for Teaching and Learning at WWU and Beyond*

Students often remark both in the TLA, and on their surveys, that what they experience in TLA is unique compared to their other educational experiences at Western and elsewhere. I am sure the staff in the TLA, and the administrators who keep supporting this unique, notable program (especially in a stressful political climate rife with budget cuts, staff layoffs and unprecedented tuition increases) are pleased that they are providing an engaging, one-of-a-kind learning experience to Western students. However, I find it troubling that such a valuable opportunity is not more widely available, both at WWU and beyond. Given the overwhelmingly positive feedback from student SoTL collaborators at WWU (and other universities) why is this experience (or these types of experiences) not available to *more* students? How are, or why aren't students benefitting in these same ways from their other educational experiences?

This is not to say that in order to enjoy the same benefits, other institutions must create exactly same kind of SoTL program seen at WWU. Earlier in this thesis, I identified the TLA's underlying research process is the applied social science research method participatory action research. PAR is an adaptive, exportable framework for SoTL (or for that matter, for teaching and learning more generally) that can be utilized in other contexts and

still retain the positive impact on student participants. There is some evidence that utilizing participatory pedagogies provide for transformative learning experiences for students (Simmons et al. 2011). So how might other members of academe translate and incorporate the PAR model in order to more positively impact other aspects of students' educational experiences in college?

There has been a recent deep concern within higher education for enhancing student engagement. Student retention researcher Vincent Tinto (1993) has argued that the best thing institutions can do to increase student retention is to actively involve students in their own learning and "participate in the intellectual life of the institution" (210). I argue that *scholarship* (and not just doing research, but going public with the results through either presentation or publication) is a major component of the intellectual life of any institution, and that becoming involved in the scholarship of teaching and learning is a great way to involve students in their own learning.

But getting students involved in learning is no simple matter... If we wish to have our students become actively involved in their own learning, we must first be involved in their learning as well as in our own. And we must provide them with meaningful ways of becoming involved in learning, both inside and outside the classroom. If we want students to become committed to the goals of education, we must first demonstrate a commitment to those goals and to the students we serve. (Tinto 1993:210)

The way I interpret what Tinto is saying is this: If faculty and staff throughout an institution demonstrate their commitment to learning and show that students' engagement and learning *really matters* to them, then students are more apt to demonstrate their commitment to learning as well. This is one of the major outcomes for students who

participate in TLA; they walk away with the realization that faculty and staff members really do care about their learning and their positive engagement at WWU.

In higher education, there are numerous ways to “get more bang for your buck” so to speak, and enhance students’ engagement and students’ learning. Involving students in the scholarship of teaching and learning, particularly using a participatory action research process like the Teaching-Learning Academy, is one positive way to help engage and empower students in the culture of higher education.

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### Notes

<sup>i</sup> In 2009, the CASTL program was concluded and is no longer “an actively supported program at the Foundation” (Anthony Ciccone, CASTL Director, personal communication, May 2009).

<sup>ii</sup> A handful of long-time TLA student participants, including Erik Skogsberg in 2006, and Luke Ware, Cora Thomas, Rachel Christman, and myself in 2007, conducted inquiry projects using the TLA survey data for independent study credit, but the research results were not made public widely outside of WWU.

<sup>iii</sup> As seen in Appendices A1 through A8, the wording of Question 1 varies slightly from quarter to quarter, but remains essentially the same and asks respondents to describe the features of the TLA that they felt they benefitted from most.

<sup>iv</sup> At first glance, this response seems more likely to have come from a TLA *faculty* participant, not a student. However this assumption could be faulty in that among the students who participate in the TLA, there are a number of different kinds of students who teach as well. As I discussed in the methods chapter, some of the TLA student participants are graduate students, many of whom also teach, and there are also a very large number of education majors, who also do student teaching.

<sup>v</sup> As seen in Appendices A1 through A8, the wording of Question 2 varies slightly from quarter to quarter, but remains essentially the same and asks respondents to list their suggestions for improving the TLA.

<sup>vi</sup> Though the TLA is the primary hub, it is not the only SoTL initiative being undertaken in partnership with students at WWU. For several years the Writing Instruction Support program has offered a Writing Research Fellowship to faculty-student teams to investigate the impact of specific writing instruction practices on learning. Additionally, in the Summer of 2011, WWU launched a small SoTL grant program in order to support additional SoTL work outside of TLA.

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## **Appendix A – Teaching-Learning Academy (TLA) Closing Surveys**

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### Teaching-Learning Academy Closing Survey for Fall 2007

To assist in planning for the future, would you please take a few minutes to complete the following survey.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Position: Administrator\_\_\_ Faculty\_\_\_ Staff\_\_\_ Student\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
2. What feature(s) of the TLA this quarter **benefited you individually**? Why?
3. Do you have any suggestion(s) for something **to change/add/delete** for next quarter? How do you think this change would help TLA dialogue?
4. What **specific ideas/projects from this quarter's legacy dialogue** would you most like to see advanced next quarter? How come?
5. We rely on your recommendations. Do you have any **colleagues** (students/faculty/ staff/ administrators) **to recommend** for participation in the TLA? If so, please include their name(s) and contact information.

Name:

Contact Information:

6. Will you be **participating in the TLA next quarter**? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Maybe \_\_\_  
(Students, please note: There is an opportunity to continue participating in TLA and earn credit through Communication 339, a practicum in applied Communication. If interested, contact Carmen)

If so, please circle the day and time you prefer.

**W@12**

**W@2**

**W@4**

**R@12**

**Other: \_\_\_\_\_**

➤ Please submit your completed survey by Monday, Dec. 3.

\*\*\*Thanks so much for your contributions to the TLA. \*\*\*

**Teaching-Learning Academy - Spring 2008 – Closing Survey**

1. Your Name:
2. Your e-mail address:
3. Position (circle all that apply):  
Administrator    Faculty    Staff    Student    Other (please specify)
4. What feature(s) of the TLA most benefited you individually this quarter?
5. Do you have any suggestion(s) for something to change/add/delete for next fall?  
How do you think this change would help TLA dialogue?
6. Next fall, the TLA will be choosing a new question to study for the 2008-09 school year. **Are there any topics/issues/initiatives from this quarter, or any new topics, you would like to see addressed or included in next year's study question?**
7. Do you have any colleagues (students/faculty/staff/administrators/community members) to recommend for participation in the TLA? If so, please indicate their names and contact information (e-mail is preferred).
8. Will you be participating in TLA next fall?    Yes    No    Maybe
9. If so, please indicate the day and time you prefer.  
W@12 W@2            W@4            R@12            Other (please specify)
10. The Associated Students club Student Voices in Teaching & Learning is looking to add members. Are you interested in learning more about the club's activities and possibly joining?

### Teaching-Learning Academy - Fall 2008 Closing Survey

1. Your Name:  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Your E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Position (check all that apply):
  - Administrator
  - Faculty
  - Staff
  - Student
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
4. What feature(s) of the TLA most benefited you individually this quarter and why?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Do you have any suggestion(s) for something to change/add/delete for next quarter? How do you think this change would help TLA dialogue?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. Since two main strands have emerged around our BIG question this year, we are interested in how you would define these two words:
  - What do YOU mean by "diversity" in terms of teaching and learning?

- What do YOU mean by "sustainability" for teaching and learning?

7. Besides next quarter's TLA participants, what other audience(s) do you recommend receive our findings from this quarter?

8. We are always looking to invite new people to participate in the TLA and we rely on your recommendations. Do you have any colleagues (students, faculty, staff, administrators, or community members) to recommend for participation in the TLA? If so, please indicate their names AND contact information (e-mail is preferred).

9. Will you be participating in TLA next quarter?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

10. If so, please indicate the day and time you prefer.

- W@12
  - W@2
  - W@4
  - R@12
  - Other (please specify)
-

### TLA Winter 2009 Closing Survey

1. Your name:

2. Your e-mail address:

3. Position:  Administrator       Faculty       Staff       Student       Other\_\_\_\_\_

4. What feature(s) of the TLA this quarter benefited you individually as a student/faculty/staff/ administrator? Why?

5. Do you have any suggestion(s) for something to change/add/delete for next quarter? How do you think this change would help TLA dialogue?

6. What specific ideas/projects from this quarter's legacy dialogue would you most like to see advanced next quarter? How come?

7. We rely on your recommendations. Do you have any colleagues (students/faculty/staff/administrators) to recommend for participation in the TLA? If so, please indicate their names and contact information (e-mail is preferred).

8. Will you be participating in the TLA next quarter?

Yes       No       Maybe

9. If so, please indicate the day and time you prefer.

W@12       W@2       W@4       R@12       Other \_\_\_\_\_

10. TLA ACADEMY AWARDS: Every year, members of the TLA nominate individuals and groups who embody one or more of the features of the BIG question we have been studying all year. This year we wish to recognize individuals or groups who work to advance our university values of sustainability and/or diversity in a time of budget cuts; work to create a sustainable future at Western; help sustain us as teachers and learners; or build, cultivate, and embrace, diversity at Western. **Our goal is to recognize widely, so everyone who is nominated with an appropriate rationale statement receives an award.**

Are there any individuals or groups (inside OR outside of the TLA) you wish to nominate to receive an academy award? Please include the name of the individual or the name of a contact person for the group, e-mail address AND rationale why they should receive an award. Nominations without an appropriate rationale will not be accepted.

### TLA Spring 2009 Closing Survey

1. Your name:

2. Your e-mail address:

3. Position:  Administrator       Faculty       Staff       Student        
Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. What feature(s) of the TLA this quarter benefited you individually as a student/faculty/staff/administrator? Why?

5. Do you have any suggestion(s) for something to change/add/delete for next fall? How do you think this change would help TLA dialogue?

6. Next fall, the TLA will be choosing a new question to study for the 2008-09 school year. **Are there any topics/issues/initiatives from this quarter, or any new topics, you would like to see addressed or included in next year's study question?**

7. We rely on your recommendations. Do you have any colleagues (students/faculty/staff/administrators) to recommend for participation in the TLA? If so, please indicate their names and contact information (e-mail is preferred).

8. Do you plan to participate in the TLA next fall (or sometime else in the future)? Why or why not?

~ Thank you for filling out the closing survey. Please leave it in your dialogue group or return to MS 9093. ~



### TLA Fall 09 Closing Survey

1. Name:
2. E-mail address:
3. Position:  Administrator  Faculty  Staff  Student  Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_
4. How do you think TLA benefitted you individually this quarter? Please check all that apply:
  - Increased personal understanding of myself as a teacher/learner.
  - Gave me a new practice(s) or technique to try.
  - Made me feel more connected to WWU.
  - Made me care more about other teachers/learners.
  - Made me feel heard and that my ideas matter.
  - Other:

Comments:

5. Do you have any suggestions for something to change/add to the format to make the TLA dialogue better?  
If so, please say how you think the suggested change/addition might help.

6. This quarter, TLA participants developed this BIG question:

What do WE mean by a sustainable, reflective learning culture? And how might we use that shared understanding to strengthen connections:

- between existing resources and members of the campus community to provide individualized guidance & co-mentoring?
- between the lived experiences of teachers and learners outside of the classroom and what is happening in the classroom to provide engaging learning experiences?
- across borders within WWU and between WWU and external communities to provide interdisciplinary/ community-based learning experiences?

What activities related to this question would you urge TLA to do next?

Appendix A6

7. Do you have any colleagues - students/faculty/staff/administrators/community members - to recommend for TLA? If so, please note their names AND contact information (e-mail preferred).

8. TLA group options for Winter 2010 remain the same: W@12, W@2, W@4, or R@12. Are you planning to continue participating?

Yes

No

Maybe

\*\*\*\*\*Thanks so much for your contributions to making TLA as productive and enjoyable as possible.\*\*\*\*

### Teaching-Learning Academy – Winter 2010 – Closing Survey

1. Name:
2. Position:  Student     Faculty  Staff     Administrator  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_
3. What have you gained from your participation in TLA this quarter? Has this gain changed your teaching-learning practices? Please explain.
4. Do you have any suggestion(s) for something to change/add/delete for next quarter? How do you think this change would help TLA?
5. What specific ideas/projects from this quarter's dialogue would you most like to see advanced next quarter? How come?
6. We rely on your recommendations. Do you have any colleagues to recommend for participation in the TLA? If so, please give their name and department or e-mail address.
7. Will you be participating in TLA next quarter?     Yes  No  Maybe
8. TLA ACADEMY AWARDS: Every year, members of the TLA nominate individuals and groups who embody one or more of the features of the BIG question we have been studying all year. This year we wish to recognize individuals and groups who work to sustain a reflective learning culture at WWU - who bridge disconnects such as between individuals & resources, between the curricular and co-curricular, across borders within WWU or between WWU and the wider community. Our goal is to recognize widely, so everyone who is nominated with a rationale statement (based on the TLA big question) receives an award.

**Which individuals or groups (inside OR outside of the TLA) would you nominate to receive an academy award?**

Please include the name of the individual or the name of a contact person for the group, e-mail address AND a short rationale why they should receive an award. Nominations without an appropriate rationale will not be accepted. Note: Rationale statements will be printed on the back of the award certificates.

**Teaching-Learning Academy – Spring 2010 – Closing Survey**

1. Name:
2. TLA Group:  W@12  W@2  R@12  R@2
3. Position:  Student  Faculty  Staff  Administrator  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_
4. What have you gained from your participation in TLA this quarter? Has this gain changed your teaching-learning practices? Please explain.
5. Do you have any suggestion(s) for something to change/add/delete for next quarter? How do you think this change would help TLA dialogue?
6. Next fall, we will be choosing a new question to study for the 2010-11 school year. Are there any topics/issues/initiatives from this quarter, or any new topics, you would like to see addressed or included in next year's study question?
7. We rely on your recommendations. Do you have any colleagues to recommend for participation in the TLA? If so, please give their name and department or e-mail address.
8. Do you plan to participate in the TLA next fall (or sometime else in the future)? Why or why not?

## **Appendix B – Text Analysis**

Appendix B1 – Themes and Percentages by Quarter for Question One.....	78
Appendix B2 – Themes and Percentages by Quarter for Question Two.....	79
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Appendix B1 - Themes and Percentages by Quarter for Question 1  
 What feature/aspect of the TLA benefitted you most individually?\*

Question 1 Themes	F07	W08**	S08	F08	W09	S09	F09	W10	S10	Totals
Increased opportunities for self-awareness and self-expression	13 32%		3 17%	6 20%	2 9%	9 23%	1 4%	4 19%	5 17%	43 19%
Increased awareness/ understanding of the diversity of ideas/ perspectives	16 39%		7 39%	12 40%	8 36%	7 18%	3 12%	0 0%	4 13%	57 25%
Increased pedagogical intelligence & learner autonomy	10 24%		5 28%	3 10%	5 23%	4 10%	7 27%	8 38%	20 67%	62 27%
Increased sense of power in the university	4 10%		6 33%	13 43%	5 23%	22 56%	5 19%	5 24%	11 37%	71 31%
Increased sense of equality/decreased sense of hierarchy	4 10%		3 17%	9 30%	3 14%	7 18%	4 15%	3 14%	5 17%	38 17%
Increased opportunity/ability to make change in the university	0 0%		3 17%	7 23%	3 14%	17 44%	1 4%	2 10%	8 27%	41 18%
Increased sense of belonging and community at WWU	14 34%		3 17%	12 40%	11 50%	15 39%	14 54%	5 24%	11 37%	85 37%
Total Responses	41	0	18	30	22	39	26	21	30	227

\* As seen in Appendices A1 through A8, the wording of Question 2 varies slightly from quarter to quarter, but remains essentially the same and asks respondents to list their suggestions for improving the TLA.

\*\* The TLA staff were unable to send the survey responses for this quarter.

Appendix B2 - Themes and Percentages for Question 2  
 What changes/additions/suggestions do you have for next quarter?\*

Question 2 Themes	F07	W08**	S08	F08	W09	S09	F09	W10	S10	Totals
No suggestions/no changes	5 13%		7 44%	5 22%	7 33%	8 22%	18 33%	0 0%	10 56%	60 28%
More talk/more interaction	13 33%		4 25%	6 26%	6 29%	11 31%	13 24%	2 20%	1 6%	56 26%
More (diverse) participants	2 5%		1 6%	4 17%	5 24%	5 14%	10 18%	3 30%	3 17%	33 15%
More clarity	7 18%		1 6%	2 9%	0 0%	5 14%	1 2%	0 0%	1 6%	17 8%
Less facilitation/structure	5 13%		0 0%	1 4%	1 5%	4 11%	2 4%	1 10%	0 0%	14 6%
More creativity/variety	1 3%		0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	1 3%	6 11%	2 20%	3 17%	13 6%
More action (less talk)	0 0%		2 13%	2 9%	3 14%	2 6%	2 4%	1 10%	0 0%	12 6%
More facilitation/structure	6 15%		0 0%	3 13%	0 0%	2 6%	1 2%	0 0%	0 0%	12 6%
Total Responses	39	0	16	23	21	36	55	10	18	218

\* As seen in Appendices A1 through A8, the wording of Question 2 varies slightly from quarter to quarter, but remains essentially the same and asks respondents to list their suggestions for improving the TLA.

\*\* The TLA staff were unable to send the survey responses for this quarter.

### Appendix B3 – F09 Responses and Percentages

How do you think TLA benefitted you this quarter?

Increase personal understanding of myself as a teacher/learner.	40	54%
Made me feel more connected to WWU.	69	93%
Made me care more about other teacher/learners.	52	70%
Made me feel heard and that my ideas matter.	62	84%
Gave me new practice(s) or technique to try.	19	26%
Total number of respondents	74	