Fostering SoTL through community

Jane MacKenzie

Our experiences in doing SoTL

Challenges of SoTL

Glasgow's Faculty Learning Community

Making a Learning Community work for you

Lack of a clear definition:

- A movement

- A revolution

- A tool, model, framework, vehicle, form of professional development, a range of practices

- Often conflated with pedagogical research

- A process (associated with actions, outcomes and outputs?)

In addition to problems around defining SoTL, there are a host of other issues/criticisms including: it favours teaching over learning, it ignores existing fields e.g. adult education, life long learning etc., there are different disciplinary approaches, etc.

- **How best to develop and support SoTL**

- **Lack of rigour**

See for example, Boshier and Huang (2008), Boshier (2009), Fanghanel et al. (2015)

the scholarship of teaching & learning

SoTL

Only allowed 2 minutes on Time!

Developing practice:

An FLC has the potential to bring together a range of experiences, skills and perspectives from which members might learn

Increasing rigour:

Most SoTL happens at the (very) local level – single scholars investigating classroom practices

An FLC has the potential to increase rigour, generalisability and applicability through:

- Multi-classroom/context investigations
- Cross-disciplinary investigations?

Community

The condition of sharing or having certain attitudes and interests in common

Cooperation

The action or process of working together to the same end

Collaboration

Collaboration transcends and includes cooperation in its reliance upon procedural compliance and is distinguished from the 'shared pursuit' of cooperation by the inclusion of collective creation.

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Glasgow was one of the first universities to introduce teaching-focused/only contracts …

"At the outset it was clear that 'teaching only' appointments were unacceptable. Given the research intensive nature of the University, the view from within the institution was that 'teaching only' appointments would imply that these staff would not be exposed to research, far less engaged in any kind of scholarly activity and that this would lead to a significant diminution of the learning experience of students."

"After considerable debate … a way forward was identified. Concepts of 'research – informed' teaching and 'scholarship' activities were introduced as alternatives to 'research – led' and 'research'. The new position of University Teacher was created for those engaged in the former."

Matthew (2009)

- Same contractual conditions as lecturers

- Promotion to professorial level

- Duties include teaching, admin and **scholarship** (rather than research)

Scholarship was defined as: *'maintaining and developing knowledge within an individual's specialism, and academic professional discipline, as necessary to fulfill an effective research-informed teaching role'*
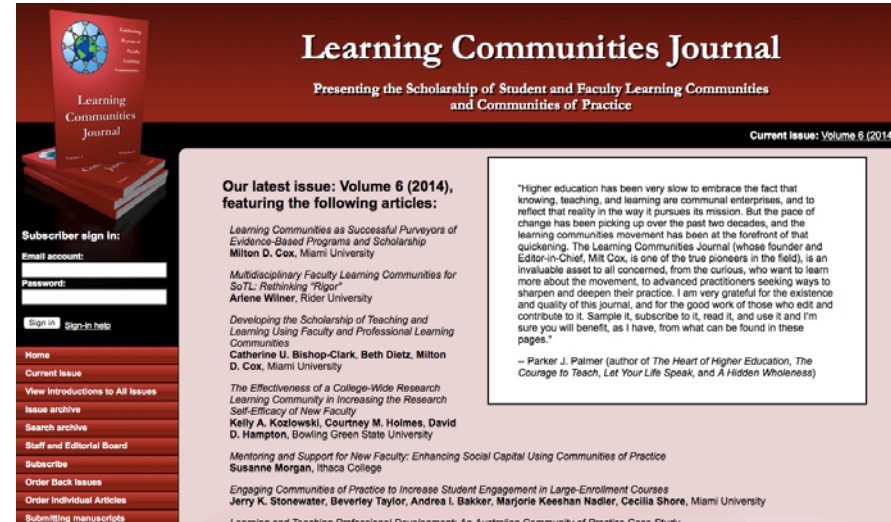
I was an early UT appointment in the Learning and Teaching Centre confused about scholarship – SoTL 'made sense' as did my attempts to support its development at UoG

Originated at Miami University, Ohio in late 70s

Range of topics but many focus on SoTL

Brain child of Milton Cox

Learning Communities, Faculty LCs, Professional LCs are now used interchangeably

- Are made up of cross-disciplinary academic and/or professional staff

- Have 6-15 members

- Are collaborative, negotiated, time-limited (normally year-long)

- Have a schedule of frequent (fortnightly) meetings

- Are cohort or topic-based

- Are grounded in the social
elements of community building

- Are supported by a facilitator

Funded by Learning and Teaching Development fund (£6000) to support UTs

Set up and run following the Miami model:

- Cross-disciplinary (biology, chemistry, education, business, dentistry, psychology, medicine)

- 12 members

- Topic-based (SoTL)

- Supported by a facilitator (me)

- Year-long – starting and closing retreats

- Regular meetings/activities throughout the year

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- Retreat to enable LC to form and begin discussions of SoTL
- Monthly meetings on a range of negotiated topics –with food!
- Some meetings member-facilitated
- Mini-groups to support individual projects
- Collaborative evaluative investigation planned from outset

- Collaborative and negotiated research methodology to investigate participants' experiences of membership of the LC

- Data gathered through participants' written reflections and focus group interviews

- Data analysed using a general inductive approach

- 3 categories of themes emerged: common concerns, community, and empowerment

Confusion about SoTL/UT role

The whole scholarship idea was a bit cloudy in my head really anyway, so I thought it would be a good idea just to come and learn about that and work at it, to seriously engage with it, to see what it really meant.

Desire for community

I am aware of the value – even necessity – of having a community of like-minded individuals with whom to exchange ideas, refine one's thinking, and obtain practical advice.

Finding a safe space

There are issues that you perhaps wouldn't speak about in your own department but you would speak to someone [in the LC] ... knowing it would be confidential

Finding support

To be able to present stuff that I thought was scholarship but was not really sure about and [to] receive feedback ... was great.

Feeling valued

You know, it's just what I do. It's just what I teach. It's just my class. It's just the lab that I've done. It's just the piece of work that I've developed. ... And suddenly you were thinking, well actually maybe I should be writing about this and maybe I should be telling other people about it.

Redefining the issue

I certainly have a slightly clearer notion of what scholarship is, it is still quite fuzzy and grey, but … I think coming to the Learning Community and finding out that it's fuzzy and grey for everybody else … is better [group laughs] … A shared fuzziness.

Moving forward

As a group or a cohort we have a voice.

The LC was effective in:

- Allowing members to share concerns about SoTL and being a UT

- Developing their SoTL expertise

- All members have gone on to publish and/or be promoted and/or move to better positions

- Some members have become local experts

Many individual and collaborative outputs – publications and presentations plus:

- Early peer-reviewed LC article - Bell et al. (2006)
- Collaboratively authored article evaluating the LC - MacKenzie et al. (2010)

Teaching in Higher Education

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

ISSN: 1356-2517 (Print) 1470-1294 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cthe20

From anxiety to empowerment: a Learning Community of University Teachers

Jane MacKenzie , Sheena Bell , Jason Bohan , Andrea Brown , Joanne Burke , Barbara Cogdell , Susan Jamieson , Julie McAdam , Robert McKerlie , Lorna Morrow , Beth Paschke , Paul Rea & Anne Tierney

To cite this article: Jane MacKenzie , Sheena Bell , Jason Bohan , Andrea Brown , Joanne Burke , Barbara Cogdell , Susan Jamieson , Julie McAdam , Robert McKerlie , Lorna Morrow , Beth Paschke , Paul Rea & Anne Tierney (2010) From anxiety to empowerment: a Learning Community of University Teachers, Teaching in Higher Education, 15:3, 273-284

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13562511003740825

What do you want from a your community?

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1. Invest in the social aspects of community

FLCs concentrate less on efficiency and more on the social aspects of building community; off-campus retreats and conferences include times for fun, and some gatherings during the year include family and guests

Cox (2004, p9)

Make time to share food, chat and the occasional gripe
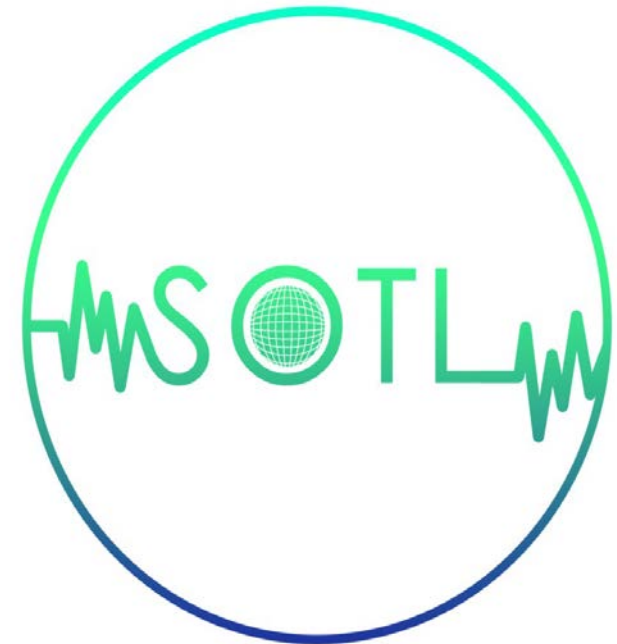
SOTL

2. Take the time to negotiate priorities

What do the members hope to achieve?

How will this be measured?

What is realistic?

Set the ground rules and expectations
 from the beginning

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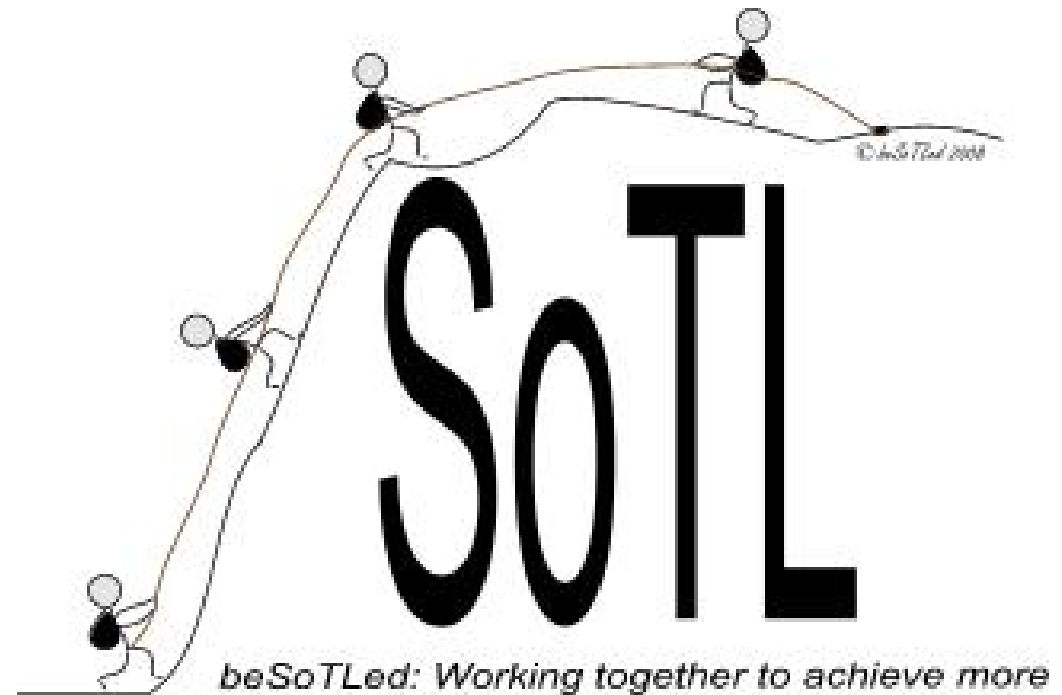3. What roles will people play?

Who sets agendas?

Who is responsible for 'delivery'/organisation?

Sometimes more learning happens with members taking the lead

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beSoTLed

beSoTLed: Working together to achieve more

Questions?

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