

## Original Paper

# Strategic Approaches to SoEL Inquiry Within and Across Disciplines: Twenty-year Impact of an International Faculty Development Program in Diverse University Contexts

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### **Abstract**

*Educational leaders on university campuses around the world are increasingly required to account for the effectiveness, efficiency and quality of their undergraduate and graduate degree programs. The Scholarship of Educational Leadership (SoEL) in higher education is a distinctive form of strategic inquiry for educational leaders with an explicit transformational agenda of educational practices within and across the disciplines in diverse university contexts. This paper examines complex institutional challenges and strategic approaches to SoEL inquiry. In an international faculty development context, data suggests that educational leaders from a variety of disciplines face significant challenges when undertaking SoEL inquiry. Strategic institutional supports and customised professional development are key to facilitating SoEL inquiry in higher education. Further, SoEL is inherently situated, socially mediated, and responsive to the professional learning needs and circumstances of educational leaders within and across the disciplines in diverse university contexts.*

### **Keywords**

*international faculty development, scholarship of educational leadership, scholarship of teaching, research methods, appreciative inquiry*

### **1. Introduction**

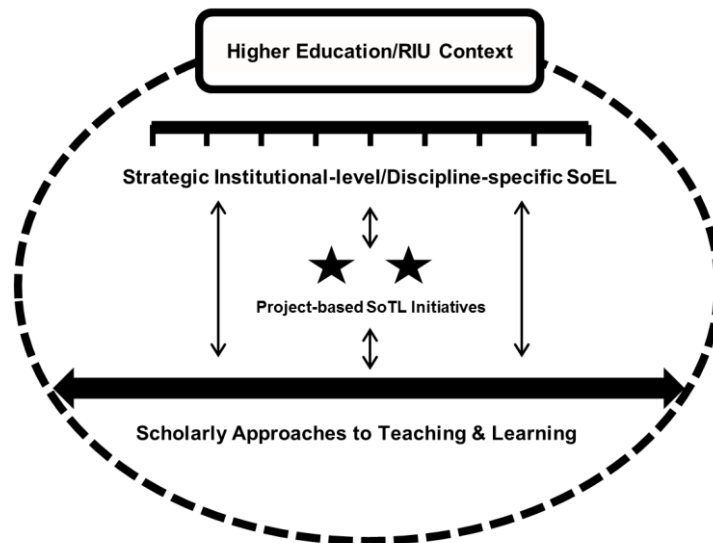
In a global higher education environment of unprecedented competition, rapid technological change, increasingly diminishing resources, increasing student diversity, and demands for local and internationally-responsive undergraduate and graduate degree programs, the quality of higher education

practices is being scrutinized as never before. Educational leaders around the world across a variety of university campuses are increasingly required to account for effectiveness and efficiency of their practices. However, ad-hoc faculty development initiatives (often with neither specialist leadership expertise nor track-record of published research in higher education) aimed at enhancing teaching, curriculum practice, and/or educational leadership, have often paid scant attention to educational research, dissemination and implementation (Hubball, Clarke, Chng, & Grimmett, 2015; Myatt et al., 2018). For example, the Scholarship of Educational Leadership (SoEL) is a distinctive form of strategic inquiry for educational leaders with an explicit transformational agenda of educational practices within and across the disciplines in diverse higher education contexts (including colleges and Research-Intensive Universities (RIUs)). Thus, SoEL has unique benefits for universities and educational leaders (e.g., senior administrators, associate deans, program directors, curriculum leaders, program and teaching evaluators, teaching award winners, and tenured instructors and professors) with particular roles and responsibilities for quality assurance, educational reform, and curriculum and pedagogical leadership in such contexts. Clearly, the strength of educational leaders lies in their understanding of the complexity of their teaching and learning contexts; their vested interest with practice-based issues under investigation; and their related experience is critical to assess change in these settings (Alexander & Hjortsø, 2019; Hubball, Clarke, & Pearson, 2016; Putman & Rock, 2017). More often than not, however, educational leaders from a variety of disciplines, especially those unfamiliar to social science research methodologies and methods, do not have the appropriate methodological expertise or strategic support and thus find it significantly challenging to conduct SoEL research in complex institutional/curricula/classroom settings (D'Andrea, 2006; Hubball & Clarke, 2010). This paper examines strategic challenges and approaches for facilitating SoEL inquiry for educational leaders within and across diverse disciplinary settings. The following insights are grounded in the SoEL literature and twenty years of experience in facilitating and guiding a specific international faculty leadership development program, focussing on SoEL (<https://international.educ.ubc.ca/soel>) with over 550 cross-disciplinary and multi-institutional faculty member graduates.

### *1.1 Theoretical Underpinnings of Institutional SoEL Inquiry*

Best practice for educational leadership typically refers to non-context-specific educational leadership with general criteria or principles for effectiveness that are largely based upon experience in leadership contexts. While a useful guide and starting point for many novice educational leaders with responsibilities for quality assurance and enhancement, these “What Works” tips do not necessarily align well with distinct research cultures, disciplinary complexities, strategic institutional initiatives, or rapid changes in the use of technology that occur in current university settings. In contrast, the educational leadership research literature in higher education is more nuanced and enlightening, and makes useful theoretical and practical distinctions between scholarly approaches to teaching and learning, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and the scholarship of educational leadership (Boyer, 1990; Hutchings, Huber, & Ciccone, 2011; Hubball, Clarke, & Pearson, 2017). Figure 1 illustrates an

institutional model for these unique and overlapping processes with implications for customised faculty development initiatives and strategic supports.



**Figure 1. Situating SoEL to Support Teaching and Learning Excellence in Diverse University Contexts**

This integrated bidirectional (top-down and bottom-up) model illustrates the strategic role of SoEL in diverse university contexts.

#### 1.1.1 Higher Education/Institutional Context

This element at the top of Figure 1 represents both internal (e.g., institutional strategic planning documents, collective agreement expectations, criteria for promotion and tenure) and external forces that impact SoEL. For example, regional, national, and/or professional accreditation agencies in many areas of the world are working more closely than ever with universities to anchor their activities in institutional mandates that better support educational practices, leadership, and scholarship. Scholarly organizations in higher education such as the International Consortium for Educational Development (ICED) and the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) attest to the increasing receptivity towards SoEL submissions in such forums as academic conferences, peer-reviewed journals, and granting organizations.

Scholarly approaches to teaching and learning. The broad horizontal arrow in Figure 1 reflects a foundational institutional expectation that high-quality teaching and student learning experiences are grounded in reflective inquiry and/or professional development in order for continual improvements to curriculum and pedagogical practices.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). The central stars in Figure 1 refer to strategically coordinated SoTL initiatives and projects related to curricula and pedagogical approaches. Essentially, SoTL builds on scholarly approaches to teaching and learning, however, greater attention is placed on grounding best practices in the scholarly literature, methodological rigour, evidence-based monitoring and dissemination in peer reviewed contexts such as disciplinary journals and also extends to funding organizations and conference presentations (Hubball & Gold, 2007; Hutchings, Huber, & Ciccione, 2011).

Scholarship of Educational Leadership (SoEL). This element in Figure 1 reflects professionally prepared educational leaders (e.g., associate deans, program directors, curriculum leaders, teaching evaluators, teaching award winners, and tenured instructors and professors) with SoEL expertise. SoEL builds on and extends SoTL whereby professionally prepared educational leaders play a critical role in implementation of quality assurance or enhancement, program renewal, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) activities, and faculty development across various levels, as well as dissemination of these educational leadership practices in peer reviewed contexts.

In diverse faculty development contexts, the term SoEL is defined as a distinctive form of strategic inquiry for educational leaders with an explicit transformational agenda of educational practices within and across the disciplines in diverse university contexts. Essentially, SoEL

- 1) is grounded in networked improvement communities;
- 2) situates educational practice within the research literature and focuses on systematic rigorous inquiry (e.g., clear rationale and objectives/goals for SoEL inquiry, ethical considerations and aligned data collection methods and analysis methods for leadership, adequate preparation and reflective critique);
- 3) is symbolic of the normative context that governs educational leadership work; and
- 4) disseminates theory and practice in this domain in appropriate peer reviewed settings (Bryk et al., 2011; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2004; Glassick, Huber, & Maefoff, 1997; Green, 2008). In sum, diverse perspectives of SoEL inquiry are shaped by context-specific frameworks, including ontological (e.g., constructivist, post-positivist, pragmatist, critical perspectives), cultural (i.e., global, regional), institutional (i.e., university-specific), disciplinary (i.e., signature practices), epistemological (i.e., how we know what we know), and ethical (i.e., confidentiality, professionalism) considerations.

We argue that SoEL inquiry is based on three underlying assumptions about knowledge: (1) it is inherently situated, (2) it is socially and culturally mediated, and (3) it is responsive to the diverse (local and international) needs and circumstances of learners (Hubball, Clarke, & Pearson, 2017). These principles are interconnected and dependent on the unique context to which they are associated. Each assumption provides directions and cautions for facilitating SoEL inquiry in diverse university contexts. For example, the first assumption cautions that SoEL inquiry is inherently situated within disciplinary traditions, learning environments, and political landscapes that frame the particular institutional contexts in which pedagogy takes place. For example, strategic institutional supports are key to effectively supporting SoEL inquiry on university campuses. Thus, facilitating institutional

SoEL inquiry must have regard for the historical, political, and social factors that characterize SoEL inquiry. In short, SoEL inquiries and contexts are inter-linked and determine each other in significant ways. Honouring the situated nature of knowledge is, therefore, a recognition that SoEL inquiry exists within broader communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Davis & Sumara, 2006). The socially and culturally mediated dimension of knowledge construction speaks to the importance of arriving at a shared understanding and values of SoEL inquiry that are pivotal in fostering a culture of educational scholarship in higher education (Houston & Lebeau, 2006; Hutchings, 2002). Coming to a shared understanding of values and beliefs, as part of a networked improvement community that is grounded in inquiry, requires open dialogue and active participation by key stakeholder representatives. The co-constructed knowledge that arises from such engagement is essential to implementing SoEL that upholds and honours knowledge as being always complex and dynamic. For example, strategic engagement of administrators, faculty members and students in opportunities for discourse and peer-review activities, which critique common teaching and learning issues, goes a long way to enhance issues of validity, reliability, and practicality of SoEL research. Finally, conceptions of ‘responsiveness’ of SoEL inquiry within and across diverse disciplines will always be part of its perceived impact and how it is framed and supported within university contexts. In sum, these three interconnected characteristics of knowledge construction are essential to facilitate SoEL inquiry for educational leaders in their specific contexts.

In complex university contexts with diverse stakeholders, and varying levels of support, SoEL is aimed at sustaining high quality, strategically-aligned, research-informed, and evidence-based educational practices. Specifically, SoEL provides a strategic foundation for both quality assurance and quality enhancement activities; SoEL is strategically aligned with university mandates for sustained and productive scholarly activity; SoEL fosters an institutional culture of educational scholarship aimed at enhancing undergraduate and graduate level degree programs; and SoEL provides an avenue for universities to become better known for valuing educational excellence and its strategic contribution to such markers as regional, national, or international rankings. Thus, the importance of SoEL in diverse university settings is compelling, especially when one considers that educational leaders are expected to respond to strategic priorities with evidence-based curricula and pedagogical practices within and beyond the communities they serve. Very little research has examined the strategic impact of institutional SoEL inquiry in diverse university settings. The following research question was designed to guide this investigation in a specific international faculty development program which has been implemented annually since 1998 at The University of British Columbia, Canada.

Within the context of an international faculty development program:

- (1) What is the strategic impact of institutional SoEL inquiry in UBCs diverse research-intensive university context?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Appreciative Inquiry

In order to gather evidence for the above research questions, our investigation employed Appreciative Inquiry (AI) research methodology over a ten-month period to gather relevant program impact assessment data which included a review of historical program data (1998-2019), as well as current SoEL cohort data (May 2018-August 2019). AI is a systematic form of practice-based research methodology with an explicit transformational agenda (Breslow, Crowell, Francis, & Stephen, 2015). Traditionally AI has been used to identify good practice and we are using it to begin with good practice, then evaluate a program and suggest ways forward (Shuayb, Sharp, Judkins, & Hetherington, 2009). For example, AI research methodology places emphases on the strategic engagement of key stakeholder representatives (administrators, curriculum and pedagogical leaders, educational developers, faculty members, instructors) within and across the disciplines related to specific educational issues under investigation and change. In this context, appreciating and valuing one's practice include appreciating the context which allows this investigation to take place.

AI begins with the identification of current best practices and then connects those attributes with the community's vision and action for change (Cockell & MacArthur-Blair, 2012). Thus, AI research methodology is highly generative in nature and consists of four phases (commonly known as the 4D-Cycle): Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny or delivery.

- Discovery: appreciating, valuing the best of SoEL inquiry in the organization; strengths, best practices, and peak experiences.
- Dream: envisioning what the ideal future might be for SoEL inquiry, and what the organization may look like in its fullest level of potential.
- Design: dialoguing about what processes and pedagogical experiences would enhance SoEL inquiry and deciding about the desired changes moving forward.
- Destiny or delivery: innovative pedagogies and how SoEL inquiry can be taught, assessed and implemented.

### 2.2 Data Collection

A purposeful sample of contextually-bound program data sources (including current program cohort data 2018-2019, and historical program data 1998-2019) were gathered from key program stakeholder representatives in order to address each specific research question:

- Relevant documentation from UBC strategic planning documentation (Place & Promise, 2010; Strategic Plan 2018-2028);
- Samples of blended program (online and face-to-face) materials including syllabi, podcasts, video recordings, guest speaker sessions, worksheets;
- Reflective field notes from the program instructional team;
- Review of samples of cohort SoEL ePortfolio materials including educational leadership dossiers, thematic literature reviews, pilot study reports, manuscripts and presentation slides which

were published in local contexts;

- Historical program data including a review of program graduate numbers, disciplines, foci for SoEL inquiries; focus group interviews with educational leaders cohorts, UBC SoEL Program advisory board, and external reviewers.

Qualitative data sources were analyzed using the constant comparative method through categorization, and finally to thematization (Coe, Waring, & Hedges, 2017; Friedman, 2008). Next, member checking was utilized to establish major themes, data patterns, and to discern complex commonalities, contradictions, and interactions with respect to SoEL inquiry practices. The use of iterative and multiple data sources established the trustworthiness of the research findings through triangulation.

### 3. Results

The focus of this study was examining the strategic impact of institutional SoEL inquiry in UBC's diverse research-intensive context over the last twenty years. Therefore, the results are divided into two sections. The first section explains the evolution of institutionally supported scholarly teaching/scholarship of teaching and learning/educational leadership (discovery, dream, and design), while the second section focuses on the delivery of an international faculty development program with strategic impact in diverse institutional contexts.

#### *3.1 Discovering, Envisioning, and Designing the Strategic Impact of Institutional SoEL Inquiry in UBC's Diverse Research-Intensive University Context*

Initially, UBC did not have a twenty-year plan to support the development of educational leadership. As a research-intensive university in the early 1990s, UBC focused almost exclusively on research, often at the expense of priorities toward excellence on teaching or international/community engagement. A change in leadership in 1997 and the launch of TREK 2000 sought to build on this position but be more strategic in its vision as a world class university; including contributions to research, teaching and service. In 2006, President Stephen Toope built on President Piper's legacy and recognized that more needed to be done to incentivise faculty through the promotion and tenure process. In a bold statement, President Toope declared that no faculty members would be promoted or tenured without evidence of effective teaching. As a result, significant resources were allocated toward the Institute for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (launched by Professor Gary Poole) and strategic visioning documents included explicit language around research-informed teaching and learning practices. Like many research-intensive universities, the institutional focus was to build and support a cutting-edge integrated research and program development agenda including high quality teaching. Funding for the program was on a one to two-year cycle of limited renewal until proven efficacy lead to more secure funding from the Provost, in collaboration with the Faculty of Education. Additionally, the university created and supported the rank of Professor of Teaching. This promotion and tenure stream explicitly requires excellence in research-informed teaching and learning, in addition to educational leadership and service. These strategic, institutional decisions are the backdrop for the

scholarly approaches to teaching, SoTL, SoTL Leadership and now SoEL program over 20 years. Located in UBC's Faculty of Education, the International Program for the Scholarship of Educational Leadership (SoEL) is a customized faculty development program for nominated multidisciplinary educational leaders at UBC and in partner universities around the world. This cutting-edge inquiry-based faculty development program (1998-present), offered annually, focuses on the scholarship of teaching, learning, and educational leadership within and across the disciplines, as well as customized program offerings in international university contexts (including locations in Australasia, China, Europe, Middle East, North America, South Africa, UK, The West Indies) (<http://international.educ.ubc.ca/soel>).

### 3.1.1 Program Design to Support SoEL Inquiry

Based on program research and developments in the field since 1998, the UBC SoEL program has evolved from a focus within and across the disciplines on scholarly approaches to teaching (1998-2000), to the scholarship of teaching and learning (2001-2005), to the scholarship of teaching and learning leadership (2006-2010), to the scholarship of educational leadership (2011-current) (Hubball, Clarke, Webb, & Johnson, 2015). Over the past two decades, significant research has been conducted that has influenced the design of the program (Burt & Hubball, 2014; Hubball & Clarke, 2010; Hubball, Clarke, & Pearson, 2017; Hubball & Gold, 2007; Hubball, Pearson, & Clarke, 2013; Hubball & Poole, 2003; Webb, 2019), which focused on a learning-centred approach to developing educational leadership through diverse inquiries.

### 3.2 *Delivering Strategic Impact of Institutional SoEL Inquiry in UBC's Diverse Research-Intensive University Context*

The strategic impact of the international faculty development program is delivered through the creation of an institutional culture that recognises and supports this work; key internal supports, including Dean's nominations and a critical mass of program graduates who have moved into administrative positions, and a program designed to align with and support current institutional initiatives.

#### 3.2.1 Contextual Factors Influencing the Strategic Impact of Institutional SoEL Inquiry

Multiple institutional factors have influenced the foci for SoEL inquiry in the international faculty development program at The University of British Columbia (UBC). For example, UBC is routinely ranked among the top 20-30 universities in the world and is among the top 3 universities in Canada (Times Higher Education, 2018). The University's Place and Promise 2018-2028 strategic visioning document professes a commitment to strengthen UBC's presence as a globally influential university:

UBC is locally integrated and globally connected. Indeed, global perspective is embedded in the histories and communities that have shaped the local context in British Columbia and at UBC. The balance of Canadian perspective and geographic diversity across our student population is critically important. UBC's global networks open new vistas for research and education, and they enable UBC to help mobilize positive change across the world. Strengthened engagement requires an outward



orientation and enhanced accessibility for partners, as well as structures and processes to support reciprocity and co-ordination. It also demands the capacity to listen and adapt to the evolving needs and dynamics of the world beyond the university.

UBC educates a student population of more than 50,000 and offers over 250 graduate degree programs through 12 faculties, 1 college, and multiple schools (see <http://www.ubc.ca/>). Institutional level learning outcomes, for example, include local, international, and global objectives: “Through collaboration, at home and abroad, we will help students, faculty and staff broaden their perspectives, learn from peers and colleagues around the globe, and contribute to a shared positive impact” (UBC Strategic Plan, 2018).

### 3.2.2 Key Supports to Enhance the Impact of Institutional SoEL Inquiry for Educational Leaders in an International Faculty Development Program

Data suggest that regional, national and/or professional accreditation agencies in many regions of the world are working more closely than ever with universities to anchor their activities in the needs of institutional priorities to better support and enhance educational practices, leadership and their related scholarship. At the institutional level, data suggest that universities around the world are busily engaged in significant educational reform activities with mixed success regarding implementation (e.g., budget allocations reflecting institutional priorities, leadership expertise for research informed and evidence-based educational practices). For example, many universities, fueled by strategic recruitment and the rapid growth of international student enrollment have developed strategic mission statements with explicit commitments to high quality and cutting-edge (local and international engagement) educational experiences for their ethnically diverse and international student body. In conjunction, some universities are reconsidering strategically-aligned criteria for merit, tenure, and promotion, for example educational leadership tracks that are rooted in the scholarship of teaching and learning. At our own university, under Article 4.03 of UBC’s Collective Agreement and the definition of “Scholarly Activity”, the scholarship of teaching and professional contributions rank equally with traditional scholarly research. Criteria for the scholarship of teaching, for example, are evidenced by factors such as originality or innovation, demonstrable impact in a particular field or discipline, peer reviews of scholarly contributions to teaching, dissemination in the public domain, or substantial and sustained use by others. Similarly, criteria for professional contributions can include evidence that might be viewed as demonstrating leadership, rare expertise, or outstanding stature expected in a professional contribution. Furthermore, in parallel to the professorial research stream, examples of criteria for educational leadership in the Professor of Teaching rank can be evidenced by leadership taken at UBC and elsewhere to: advance innovation and excellence in teaching; contributions to curriculum development and renewal within the unit/Faculty; scholarly teaching with impact within and outside the unit; and, applications of and contributions to the scholarship of teaching and learning (The University of British Columbia, 2018, Sections 3.1.6 to 3.2.6, 3.4.1, and 4.4). However, although

contested, the criteria for promotion to Professor of Teaching does not include an explicit requirement for scholarship. Nonetheless, aspiring candidates in the educational leadership stream for the rank are often nominated and supported by their Dean to undertake SoEL at UBC, which explicitly has as part of it curriculum, research into educational leadership.

Key to strategic institutional support structures, and aligned with strategic visioning documents and collective agreement contracts, are customized and adequately resourced professional development programs (including leadership expertise, budget allocation) in order to meet the diverse educational needs and circumstances of the institutional context. Customised professional development is therefore a key enabling factor for institutional SoEL inquiry. At our own university, the SoEL Program has been developed and implemented to meet the diverse educational needs and circumstances of multidisciplinary educational leaders at UBC and faculty members in partner universities around the world. This program is administered through the Faculty of Education, and is led by senior professors, scholars, and National Teaching Fellows with a track record of higher education scholarship, in local and international settings. Therefore, SoEL programs focused on the scholarship of teaching, learning, and educational leadership (including strategic development, implementation and impact assessment of undergraduate and graduate degree programs) within and across diverse disciplines, is enacted within the UBC context.

It is interesting to note that professional experience with partner universities and multinational SoEL cohorts revealed, however, that most research institutions do not have senior academics within Faculties or Colleges of Education who provide active leadership and educational inquiry contributions regarding the scholarship of teaching, learning and educational leadership on their campuses.

#### 3.2.2.1 Impact of Institutional Educational Leaders for SoEL Inquiry

Since 1998, over 550 educational leaders at UBC and institutional nominees at universities in 20 different countries (including Australia, Bahrain, China, England, Iceland, Iran, Japan, New Zealand, Qatar, Scotland, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Thailand, UAE, USA, and The West Indies) have graduated from this program with significant SoTL/SoEL experience.

**Table 1. Program Graduates Within and Across Disciplines at UBC and International University Settings**

| UBC Faculty/Discipline                              | Number of faculty graduates |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Applied Sciences                                    | 48                          |
| Arts  | 43                          |
| Commerce  | 14                          |
| Dentistry   | 24                          |
| Education   | 40                          |
| Forestry  | 12                          |
| Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies                     | 6                           |
| Instructional Development / Student Services        | 11                          |
| Land & Food Systems                                 | 4                           |
| Law   | 5                           |
| Medicine  | 71                          |
| Pharmaceutical Sciences                             | 30                          |
| Science   | 21                          |
| External (Canadian / International) Faculty Members | 189                         |

Program graduates include senior administrators, associate deans, department heads, program directors, curriculum leaders, teaching award winners, tenured faculty members/professors of teaching, and P&T committee personnel. Consistent with the theoretical rationale for institutional SoEL inquiry, program graduates have made significant leadership and scholarship contributions to educational practice in a wide range of university contexts around the world. For example, more than 50 peer reviewed articles have been published and an equal number of invited international presentations have been given on SoEL Program processes and impacts at universities around the world (<https://international.educ.ubc.ca/soel/research-activity/>). Twenty-one years of full enrolment and sustained program implementation (including changes in university presidents, provosts, senior advisors for teaching and learning, deans, directors of centres for teaching, and department heads, and multiple funding models) at a world ranked university is testimony to the leadership, quality, and impact of the program, as well as on-going program research and development. Indeed, it is the scale and combination of high levels of multinational and multidisciplinary collaborations, networked improvement communities, creativity, professionalism, and sustained impact and program-level scholarship that are the hallmarks of the International Program for the Scholarship of Educational Leadership.

### 3.2.3 Common Practices for SoEL Inquiry in UBC's Diverse Research-Intensive University Context

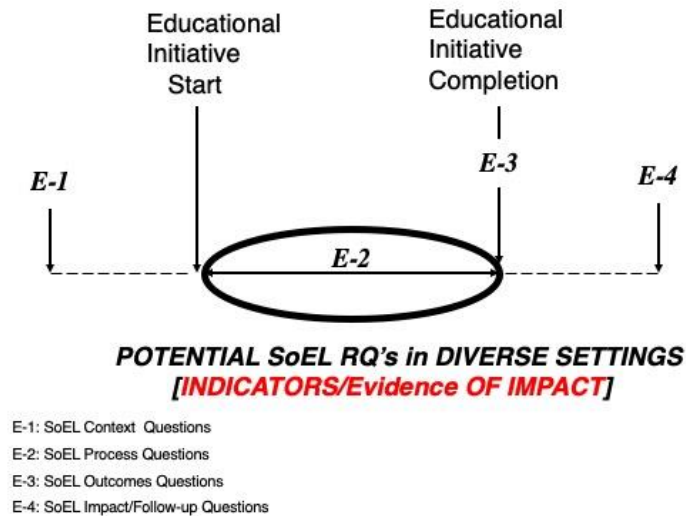
Data revealed a wide range of best practices, centred on alignment of SoEL inquiry questions with appropriate research methodology, data collection and dissemination processes in UBC's international SoEL program.

#### 3.2.3.1 Foci for Institutional SoEL Inquiry

Coupled with ongoing institutional support for educational leadership, there has developed a culture of institutional SoEL inquiry (Place & Promise, 2010; Strategic Plan 2018-2028). For example, currently, although educational leaders tend to engage in SoEL inquiry to examine issues pertaining to strategic development, implementation, and impact of educational initiatives, they engage in such inquiry from diverse ontological (i.e., world view) and epistemological (i.e., theoretical framework for knowledge construction) perspectives (Creswell, 2013; Pratt, 2016). For many faculty members from multiple disciplines, undertaking SoEL inquiry to enhance practice was both epistemologically challenging and empowering. SoEL inquiry, for example, very often required educational leaders to move beyond disciplinary research boundaries, embrace broader social science methodologies, and collaborate with students, colleagues and stakeholders (Webb, 2019).

Various types of SoEL inquiry questions have been investigated in diverse institutional/curricula/classroom contexts over the past 20-years, using varied methodologies and methods commensurate with the scholarly and institutional contexts. Based largely on institutional or disciplinary leadership roles and programmatic priorities, SoEL inquiries, developed within the UBC SoEL Program, focused on organizational (e.g., fostering an institutional culture for educational scholarship within and across multidisciplinary contexts), programmatic (e.g., innovative graduate program development, program-level outcomes assessment, and curricula integration) or pedagogical leadership (effective faculty development, flexible learning, and evaluation of teaching) practices. A starting point for formulating preliminary SoEL questions emerged from participants problematizing their institutional/ curricula/ classroom practice. Thus preliminary SoEL inquiry questions typically focused around "What is going on here?", "What is the effectiveness or impact of 'X'?", "What are the strengths and further developments of 'X'?", "What improvements can be made to 'X' and can these improvements be made?", "Why is 'X' happening?".

Thus, preliminary questions point to the central intent of the SoEL inquiry and the sorts of insights sought to enhance specific practices. Further to important preliminary questions, educational leaders were challenged to consider broader and inter-connected factors (e.g., theory-practice integration, process-outcome relationships) about their practice in order to formalize their SoEL inquiry questions for investigation. Thus, strategic SoEL inquiries were situated in particular context, process, impact, or outcome phase of an educational initiative. The following framework (Figure 2) was employed to document and assist educational leaders to prioritize and formulate their SoEL inquiry question(s) in diverse higher education settings.



**Figure 2. A Heuristic Model for Investigating Potential SoEL Inquiry Questions in Diverse Higher Education Settings**

This framework takes into account complex higher education contexts and reflects a wide range of potential time-phased SoEL inquiry questions.

SoEL context questions. These questions focused on critical structures that shape educational initiatives. For example, SoEL context questions included: To what extent do institutional strategic planning documents and Promotion and Tenure (P&T) criteria enhance faculty engagement in educational scholarship at a Singapore and Canadian research-intensive university? (Hubball, Clarke, Chng Huang Hoon, & Grimmett, 2015); what are strategic approaches for entrenching a culture of innovation in teaching and learning at a UAE research-intensive university? (Selim, & Hubball, 2017). What needs further development, why, how?

SoEL Process questions. These questions focused on periodic assessments of issues of importance that arise throughout the educational initiative (formative). For example, what are strategic approaches to enhance undergraduate program reform within and across the disciplines at a South African research-intensive university? (Van der Merwe, Schoonwinkel, & Hubball, 2017); What are strategic approaches to enhance student engagement and retention in a 4-year languages program in a Canadian and S.E. Asian research-intensive university context? What needs to be further developed, why, how?

SoEL Impact questions. These questions focused on issues of importance that occur as a result of the educational initiative (summative). For example, how do students effectively demonstrate learning outcomes on completion of a four-year undergraduate pharmaceutical sciences program at a Canadian research-intensive university? (Burt & Hubball, 2016); To what extent are undergraduate programs informed by and shaped by research-informed and evidence-based curriculum renewal practices in a Swiss university context? What needs further development, why, how?

SoEL Follow-up questions. These focused on issues of importance which arise as a result of the longer term (e.g., months, year) impact of educational initiatives. For example, what is the impact of a SoTL-based faculty development program on institutional peer review of teaching practices/educational scholarship practices at a Canadian and Gulf State university context? (Hubball, Clarke, Webb, & Johnson, 2015; Hubball, Clarke, & Pratt, 2013); To what extent did institutional program leaders apply learning to enhance research-informed and evidence-based curriculum practices within and across the disciplines in a UK university context? Generally speaking, to whom and to what extent, if at all, did the educational initiative make any difference? If at all, how did the educational initiative contribute to further development?

SoEL inquiry questions, therefore, were contextualised within each unique institutional/disciplinary practice setting, and grounded in the scholarly literature and best practice for dissemination of educational initiatives in a wide range of peer-reviewed fora.

### 3.2.3.2 Methodological Approaches to SoEL Inquiry

Consistent with common educational research methods texts (Arthur et al., 2012; Cresswell, 2013), a wide range of methodological approaches that were rooted in particular ontological, epistemological assumptions and situational practicalities (e.g., numbers of people involved, duration and types of data collection, and under what conditions), were employed to investigate SoEL inquiry questions in diverse higher education settings. Action research, appreciative inquiry, phenomenological inquiry, self-study, and case study research methodologies, for example, were particularly prevalent across diverse SoEL inquiry projects. Further emerging technology-enabled inquiry methods such as curriculum analytics were increasingly being used to mine data and support effective decision-making for quality enhancement and curriculum renewal (Dawson & Hubball, 2014). However, educational leaders were initially more likely to select familiar inquiry questions and methodological approaches (i.e., ontological and epistemological assumptions) that were common to their disciplinary field. Supervision and mentoring opportunities by program leaders assisted education leaders to think critically about the formulation and alignment of their SoEL inquiry questions, research design and data collection methods. The following table reflects alignment examples of methodological approaches with particular practice-based SoEL inquiries in multidisciplinary settings (Table 1).

**Table 2. Alignment Examples of Methodological Approaches with Particular Practice-Based SoEL Inquiry in Multidisciplinary Settings**

| SoEL Inquiry Research Question  | Methodological Approach   | Data Collection Methods   |
|---|---|---|
| Strategic Approaches for Entrenching a Culture of Innovation in Teaching and Learning in an Arabian Gulf Research-intensive University Context: Impact of the Scholarship of Educational Leadership (Selim & Hubball, 2017).  | Appreciative inquiry. Intervention orientation (e.g., strategic development, program impact assessment) and examination of context-specific best practices and structural supports. | Qualitative and mixed methods approaches (e.g., focus group interviews, strategic planning documentation analysis, examination of program materials, student assessment methods, students' academic work, teaching practices, field notes, historical program data, external review reports). |
| The Scholarship of Educational Leadership in a South African Research-intensive University Context: Strategic Approaches to Undergraduate and Graduate Degree Programme Renewal (Van der Merwe, Schoonwinkel & Hubball, 2017); The scholarship of curriculum leadership: The art, science and politics of faculty engagement (Burt & Hubball, 2014; Putman & Rock, 2017). | Action research. Intervention orientation (e.g., implementation analysis) and examination of context-specific program effectiveness, barriers, improvements, ongoing monitoring.    | Qualitative and mixed methods approaches (e.g., video analysis, focus group interviews, examination of program materials, student assessment methods, students' academic work, teaching practices, field notes and observations, external review reports).                                    |
| Case study methodology: Flexibility, rigour, and ethical considerations for the scholarship of teaching and learning (Pearson, Albon, & Hubball, 2015)  | Case study inquiry. In-depth baseline data (e.g., current practices) regarding rich understanding of context-specific norms, barriers, actions.                                     | Qualitative and mixed methods approaches (e.g., focus group interviews, strategic planning documentation analysis, examination of program materials, student assessment methods, students' academic work, teaching practices, field notes, historical program data,                           |

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| Internal departmental/program review (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Clarke & Erickson, 2004; Drevdahl, 2002).  | Self-study inquiry. Preliminary baseline data (e.g., current practices) regarding context-specific norms, barriers, actions and rationale, as well as perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis). | external review reports).<br>Qualitative and mixed methods approaches (e.g., focus group interviews, strategic planning documentation analysis, examination of program materials, student assessment methods, students' academic work, teaching practices, field notes, historical program data, external review reports). |
| Phenomenology as a methodology for SoTL research (Webb & Welsh, 2019).  | Phenomenological inquiry. To understand lived experience from participants/group perspective of specific group and Exploration of students' perceptions of life-long learning in multidisciplinary settings.                      | Qualitative and mixed methods approaches (e.g., focus group interviews, individual interviews, student journals, and student self-assessments).  |
| Curriculum analytics:<br>Application of social network analysis for improving strategic curriculum decision-making in a research-intensive university (Dawson & Hubball, 2014). | Experimental design (e.g., Quasi-experimental design to assess student grades, quality of students' work and assignment submission practices).  | Quantitative and mixed methods approaches (e.g., curriculum analytics, numeric evaluations of teaching, student grades, learning management system analytics).   |
| Impact of assignment submission practices on the quality of students' work (Steele & Hubball, 2014).  |   |  |

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Data collection strategies for SoEL inquiries tended to be qualitative in nature (i.e., iterative and seeking to explore, describe or explain complex phenomena in educational settings), or a combination of both qualitative and quantitative (i.e., numeric instrumentation designed to confirm hypotheses about phenomena in educational settings), methods (i.e., a mixed-method approach). Quantitative data sources for SoEL inquiries, for example, tended to include a variety of survey instruments (e.g., numeric performance and participation records, check-lists, use of on-line learning tools, rating and rank-order preference scales). On the other hand, qualitative data sources for SoEL inquiries tended to include a variety of open-ended sources (e.g., teaching and learning observations, semi-structured and



structured focus group interviews, internet searches, student response feedback forms, audio-video recordings, examination of course syllabi, curriculum documentation and teaching journals, participant narratives, etc.). Appropriate mixed methods and combinations of qualitative and quantitative data sources provided reliable and critical information to enhance SoEL inquiries in diverse practice settings. In summary, multidisciplinary cohort members tended to adopt the following sequential strategies for dissemination of their SoEL inquiries (including collaborative contributions):

1. Strategic situational analysis: Identify rationale, purpose and/or incentive for SoEL inquiry.

For example:

- a. Level of institutional practice contribution: University-wide, program-level, curriculum-pedagogical level?
  - b. Level of scholarly contribution: International, regional/national, professional, discipline-specific?
    - i. Which journal(s) and type of submission (e.g., higher education/discipline specific education journal, research-based articles, instructional articles, essays, reviews)?
    - ii. Which invited presentation(s) (e.g., departmental, institutional, national Organization)?
    - iii. Which conference presentation(s) (e.g., International Consortium for Educational Development, International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning)?
    - iv. Which funding source(s) (e.g., national funding, institutional funding, discipline-specific funding, individual professional development funding)?
    - v. Other?
2. Prioritize, formulate and refine SoEL inquiry question(s)/objectives.
  3. Develop strategic alignment of SoEL inquiry, research methodology, research design, data collection and analysis in order to achieve goals.
  4. Targeted writing (fora-specific) and progressive writing goals with timelines, consider appropriate co-authorship team.
  5. Purchase useful higher education research methods text/online resource and seek guidance of expert for advice and review opportunities.

Therefore, in order to maximize the institutional impact of SoEL, these data suggest that attention must be given to the art, science, and politics of SoEL program implementation. For example, there are clear implications in terms of the need for:

- strategic institutional vision for SoEL that includes customized supervision and professional development for educational leaders, as well as related workload expectations and P&T criteria, and that is consistent with institutional priorities and resources;

- strategic engagement and mobilization of educational leaders and key stakeholder representation in order to foster networked improvement communities within and across the disciplines around rigorous educational inquiry; and
- strategic visible communications (e.g., noticeboards, unit meetings, publications, data analytics, newsletters, and/or websites) and dissemination of SoEL progress, challenges, and goals in peer reviewed contexts.

#### **4. Key Challenges and Cautionary Lessons for Facilitating SoEL Inquiry in Diverse University Contexts**

While there are encouraging signs of progress toward support for enhancing the impact of SoEL inquiry for educational leaders in this international faculty development program context (e.g., the development of an Educational Leadership track at the university), data suggest that a myriad of related challenges exists on university campuses that can result in a “management” (versus scholarship) orientation to educational leadership (Geertsema, Chng, Lindberg-Sand, & Larsson, 2017; Grimmer, 2015). Even under supportive institutional conditions in this context, it was far from easy for many educational leaders to engage in independent or collaborative SoEL inquiry. Nonetheless, longitudinal data and practical experience on university campuses suggest SoEL or other dimensions of scholarship for academic leadership practice within the academy are more likely to be taken up in substantial ways if senior administrators are similarly engaged in the scholarship of institutional practices such as implementation of strategic planning goals, strategic hiring practices, strategic program budgeting, or effective faculty supervision for tenure and promotion (Hubball, Clarke, Chng, & Grimmer, 2015). Specific examples of strategically supported SoEL initiatives from the authors’ experiences include programme renewal at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa involving the Vice-President Teaching & Learning, Senior Advisor for Teaching & Learning, and selected Vice-Deans from across six Faculties; institutional capacity building for educational scholarship at the National University of Singapore; and involvement of senior professors, curriculum leaders, program directors, and institutional quality assurance faculty in SoTL efforts related to innovations at the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) supported by the UAE National Innovation Strategy.

Key challenges in diverse university contexts included a lack of resources (e.g., financial, supporting literature, expertise and role models to lead institutional and discipline-specific supports for SoEL), and misaligned institutional visioning documentation and P&T criteria that hinder educational leaders from engaging in SoEL. Several respondents commented that frequent and significant changes in senior administration on their campuses created continual uncertainty about the importance given toward strategic institutional initiatives (e.g., curriculum renewal, strategic development of new undergraduate courses and programs, impact assessment of educational innovations). Others raised concerns about the extent to which institutional budget allocations reflected strategic educational priorities. On our own campus, for example, changes in senior administration, including significant growth of

middle-management, and funding priorities in recent years have revealed competing institutional priorities (e.g., technology, curriculum renewal, peer review (formative and summative) of teaching practices, service units, and optional scholarship expectations for educational leadership) and budget allocations, which often constrained efforts to adequately support SoEL.

In addition, and exacerbated by already-heavy workloads, notable challenges for many educational leaders to fully engage in SoEL within and across disciplines included the time and effort to develop a new form of inquiry in higher education. These challenges often involved overcoming disciplinary biases for particular research methodologies, and related scholarship issues such as quality, quantity, authorship contributions, and sustained dissemination (Webb, 2019). Further, while there is no shortage of scholarly literature and criteria to describe educational scholarship, currently there is a lack of agreed standards (e.g., does not meet expectations, meets expectations, exceeds expectations) that define expected levels for SoEL contributions for particular academic ranks in specific university settings (e.g., required evidence of impact for instructor, associate professor, professor, etc.) (Rawn & Fox, 2017). As with other forms of scholarship in university contexts, for example, at the professor level in a particular discipline, an expectation to demonstrate “outstanding” impact within and beyond the host university might include dissemination of SoEL in local (e.g., program-level leadership, evaluation of teaching reports, campus-wide faculty development), national, and international peer reviewed contexts. These findings reinforce that SoEL inquiry is shaped by many factors and is impacted by people at various institutional levels (e.g., administrators, curriculum and pedagogical leaders, instructors, and learners) in complex university settings. Despite significant challenges and barriers to SoEL inquiry on university campuses around the world, increasing institutional support is testimony to the growing value placed on SoEL at these campuses.

## 5. Conclusion

On a global scale, educational leaders from a variety of disciplines face significant challenges when undertaking SoEL inquiry in diverse university contexts. This paper provides critical insight to strategic institutional supports and customised professional development for facilitating SoEL inquiry within and across the disciplines. No one size fits all. For example, we have provided a theoretical framework for enhancing institutional SoEL inquiry, as well as practical examples for its strategic use and support drawn from our professional learning experiences with academics in Canada and multi-national settings. Although programmatic examples are ongoing works-in-progress, significant developments and commitments to enhance institutional SoEL inquiry practices have been made. Preliminary findings from this study in the international SoEL Program at UBC indicate that strategic institutional supports (e.g., visioning documents, criteria for tenure, promotion and re-appointment, customized professional development) are key to enhance institutional SoEL inquiry practices. Further, SoEL inquiry is inherently situated; socially and culturally mediated; and, is responsive to the professional learning needs and circumstances of educational leaders in diverse institutional contexts. Essentially, SoEL

inquiry questions and methodologies should be tailored to the needs and circumstances of the institutional/curricula/classroom research context. It is important to note, however, that SoEL inquiry is not value-free. Further, it reflects approximations of the truth (acknowledging that there are multiple truths about SoEL inquiry from multiple perspectives). Thus, similar to all forms of research, interpretations of SoEL outcomes requires a healthy skepticism, analysis of methodological rigour, and an openness to alternative critique and analysis. While there are still many challenges and areas for improvement in the international SoEL Program at UBC, an institutional commitment can be the basis for facilitating the art, science, and politics of SoEL inquiry within and across the disciplines in diverse university contexts.

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