Abstract
The authors propose a model of introducing graduate students in the humanities to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). The authors—three of whom were graduate students in a course structured on this model—provide brief case studies of how they successfully conducted SoTL inquiries without abandoning the ways of knowing and doing they value as scholars in the humanities.
“SoTL brings the science. Otherwise it’s just teachers telling stories.” –David

Introduction

A persistent challenge in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is helping instructors unfamiliar with SoTL shift their focus from teacher experience to student learning. Although part of the difficulty might be an egocentric impulse (teachers reflect on their own experiences but don’t think to examine the experiences of students), the greater challenge may be determined by scholars’ disciplinary backgrounds. Scholars from the sciences, Clegg (2008) argues, may find themselves frustrated by the “messy, human stuff which is learning and teaching.” Scholars in the humanities, Chick (2009) notes, may be “alienated” by the “pressure to use pseudo-experimental models of research.” Both of these claims posit, in essence, a genre problem: the ways of knowing, seeing, and doing embodied in and promoted by common disciplinary genres (such as the laboratory report, critical article, conference paper, or poster session) make it difficult for interested instructors to successfully engage in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

We agree with Chick’s claim that the unfamiliar genres and methods typical of SoTL publications can prove a stumbling block for scholars in the humanities. And yet, as the epigram uttered by one of our co-authors during a brainstorming session suggests, the “scientific” approach implicit in much SoTL work provides an important corrective to the teacher narratives that are the default mode of many instructors reflecting on teaching and learning. “The science” that SoTL brings, we argue, is not fundamentally about experimental (or even quasi-experimental) methods. Instead, “the science” lies in methods of inquiry and reporting that provide accounts of student learning that are replicable, aggregable, and data-driven (Haswell, 2005)—methods that are, perhaps surprisingly for some humanities scholars, entirely consistent with methods of data collection and analysis commonly valued in the humanities. Teachers can still “tell stories” in SoTL work, as long as those narratives attend to the experiences of student learners.
Furthermore, consciously wrestling with the challenges of unfamiliar “scientific” genres can provide an important intellectual resource for scholars entering into the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. We advocate a model that strategically deploys familiar and unfamiliar genres to help inquirers shift their focus to student learning.

**Scaffolding a SoTL Inquiry Project for Graduate Students in Literature: Rebecca’s “Vision of the Possible”**

“Rhetorical Theory and Practice” is a seminar required of new teaching assistants—all of whom are pursuing an M.A. or Ph.D. in literary studies—in the First-Year English program at Marquette University. Its goals are to introduce students to the debates over the writing process and theory in Rhetoric and Composition and to help new teachers see the implications of those theories in their own classrooms. Given those goals, the course also provides an opportunity to introduce graduate students to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. In our experience, teacher-scholars in the humanities are often eager to examine student learning but struggle with research design. For this reason, the model we describe immerses humanities scholars in genres associated with the sciences and social sciences in order, paradoxically, to help them more effectively use the methods of data collection and analysis they find familiar and compelling in the humanities.

The assigned readings are unlike the literary and historical essays literature students ordinarily encounter. Although some readings adopt a familiar, belletristic approach (Freire, 2000; Howard, 2000; Williams, 1981), many others are modeled on the genre of scientific report with subsections on methods, results, and discussion (Flower and Hayes, 1981; Somers, 1980). The focus on student learning and empirical methods is explicit; most often these readings present the type of replicable and data-driven research associated with the sciences and social sciences. It is not uncommon—or unexpected—for students to resist these readings: they often look and sound like lab reports, and are decidedly not what these graduate students were planning to spend time reading when they came to pursue advanced studies in literature.

The assignments, too, are unfamiliar. The graduate students are required to compose an “Inquiry Summary;” this assignment (included in Appendix A) is very intentionally not called a “seminar paper” in
order to highlight the ways in which this project differs from the seminar papers literary scholars are accustomed to composing. The assignment criteria (included in Appendix B) encourage authors to clearly distinguish, and perhaps even label, sections that identify the motivating "problem" (Bass, 1999) and discuss prior research in the area, pose the research question, describe methods of data collection and analysis, summarize the results (often, but not always, using charts, diagrams, or figures), and discuss the implications of these findings. Research methods and the ethics of conducting research with one’s own students, in one’s own classroom, are discussed in depth, both in class and in individual conferences.

At the end of the semester, the graduate students at Marquette participate in a poster session with TAs from another local university. To the extent that these literature students are familiar with the genre of poster session (and most of them aren’t), they associate it with the sciences. The cumulative result is the strategic deployment of unfamiliar genres in order to help graduate students in the humanities engage in a type of “not talk” (Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011)—distinguishing the form and aims of a SoTL inquiry into student learning from the teacher narratives that they might otherwise be inclined to compose and the literary analyses that they frequently write for other courses. It’s not enough to simply assign unfamiliar genres; meta-reflection on the affordances and constraints of these new genres—what types of assumptions they make, what types of conversations they foster—is crucial. It is this “not talk,” we propose, that helps graduate students new to SoTL shift their focus to questions of student learning.

Furthermore, exposure to a wide range of data collection and analysis methods enables these graduate students to think creatively about their own methods. As two of the cases described below illustrate, these humanities scholars were able to employ ways of knowing (close textual analysis—in this case of transcripts of student talk) that were familiar and comfortable to them as humanities scholars; the third case illustrates the ways in which two humanities scholars were able to collaboratively employ methods often associated with the social sciences, but in ways these humanities scholars could comfortably and profitably undertake. In the remainder of this reflective essay, we include three accounts of the research process, not to provide the details of their studies or findings, but to illustrate and reflect on the arc of discovery that each of these three humanities scholars went through as they first undertook a scholarly SoTL project.
Keeping the “Science” Simple: David’s Investigation of Writing Conferences

To be honest, I was quite skeptical of several of the readings assigned in the course, especially the most scientific and data-driven ones. This skepticism originated in a belief that many of the conclusions drawn from the studies were obvious, the kinds of conclusions teachers would draw from basic observations and discuss with other teachers. I cynically saw the “science” as little more than providing an avenue for scholars to publish. Determined to not do the same type of thing, I decided to pick a practical project that would directly relate to my teaching and keep the “science” as simple as possible. I chose to analyze conferences I had with students in my First-Year English class.

What prompted my interest in conferences was reading a selection from Laurel Johnson Black’s Between Talk and Teaching. As I conferenced with my students, I noticed how fatigue seemed to make my interaction with students different for later students than early students, a consideration Black does not discuss. I therefore asked myself the guiding “what is” (Hutchings, 2000) question, “Do my conferences change from early in the day, when I’m fresh, to later in the day, when I am fatigued, and if so, in what way(s)?” To gather data, I recorded one round of conferences in one class, twenty students, over the course of two days using Quicktime Pro and my PowerBook’s internal microphone. I then examined early and late conferences from each day to assess any changes.

Overall, I found that fatigue has a negative effect on my conferencing. As I progressed through ten conferences in a row, my responses at the end of each day were more drawn out, full of pauses, and repetitive. Also, I tended to rely more on vague pronouns that hinted, rather than explicitly stated, ideas. Finally, I tended to be much more directive in later conferences, dominating the conversations, rather than letting students work out issues themselves to find their “aha” moments.

Ironically, my project verified through “science” a rather obvious point: after a day’s worth of conferences, any teacher is bound to be less effective. Like the studies in our readings, my project met the aforementioned criteria of being replicable, aggregable, and data-driven. However, unlike some of the studies we read in our class, such as Connors and Lunsford’s “Frequency of Formal Errors in Current College Writing,” any teacher with a voice recorder can easily collect and analyze a class worth’s of data, change methodology, and collect and analyze the data again, comparing the results. Though perhaps not
rigorous enough to hold up in a scientific court, I feel my project still gave me the tools I needed to confirm my suspicions and encourage me to try new pedagogy. This doable aspect of analyzing teaching and learning is perhaps the single most significant lesson I learned through studying SoTL.

Another, but more subtle, lesson I learned through studying SoTL is to be more aware of how my pedagogy and my own limitations intersect. In some subtle way I do tend to view myself differently as a teacher. Though I don’t explicitly ask scientific questions that translate into research, I do create mental distance to meta-analyze my interactions with students, whether in conferences or in class. This hyper awareness can sometimes be frustrating—for instance, when I am tired and am conscious that my responses reflect this fact—but I now also think about my students’ perspectives in these moments and try to compensate somehow. Sometimes I simply take a deep breath, slow down, and refocus so that my feedback can be as consistent as possible. By fostering an awareness of such mental analyses, SoTL has placed the sheen of “science” over my teaching.

**Scientific Genres, Humanistic Methods: Emily’s Investigation of “Risky Reading”**

During my first semester of teaching college English, I realized many challenges stood in the way of the ideal class I had envisioned in my teaching philosophy. My students that first semester were bright, polite, conscientious people. Yet our class discussions felt tentative and forced. It was not only that few students spoke in response to assigned readings. I was also struck that students who spoke during class discussions remained completely detached from all of the questions writers raised, treating assigned texts as sealed packages that should be expeditiously re-sealed and dispatched after their reading.

The problem that most perplexed me in my teaching, then, was that I wanted my students to do risky reading. I wanted my students to experiment with seeing and reading outside of their own subjectivities. Since, based upon their feedback in class discussion, my students did not seem to be reading in this way, I became interested in analyzing the ways in which students initially thought through the texts they read. It was the research design stage of the SoTL inquiry process that first pushed me to change my usual approach to investigating scholarly questions. When working to transform my problem into a series of steps for gathering data, rather than reading my way to an interpretive “answer,” I did feel
that I was stepping outside my usual investigative style. As an English graduate student, I usually rely on my skills of close reading and writing as my resources for drawing meaningful connections and contrasts.

For this project, I needed to change my approach and listen closely in order to better understand my research problem. I gathered about twenty student volunteers from another instructor’s class to participate in my study and asked students to read two short selections from the *New World Reader*, Second Edition, a required text in the university’s First-Year English program. One at a time, I left each student alone with the text and a hand-held audio recorder in my office. I instructed students to narrate their thoughts about the texts into the recorder as they read silently. In other words, I wanted them to voice all of their myriad possible reactions to the text, sympathy, confusion, disagreement, annoyance, etc., as these reactions surfaced. Afterward, as I had hoped, listening to these students’ recordings helped me to better understand the students’ reading processes. I now understand, for instance, that students often ask questions as they read and find connections between the personal narratives of writers from other parts of the world and their personal memories, though they often choose not to reveal these questions and connections in class discussion.

My seminar project persuaded me that data collection is not counter to my identity as an English scholar. Stepping into methodologies—like interviewing a living author or thinker—more common in the social sciences than literary studies does not mean that I am abandoning my attention to nuance or subtlety; and I do not pretend to be a statistician. But I believe that carefully designed, data-driven SoTL inquiry projects can and do help humanities scholars make clearer sense of what is happening in their classrooms and in the minds of their students.

My SoTL research certainly helped me to become a more thoughtful teacher. Through the inquiry project, I sought to better understand the reasons for students’ lack of participation in large group discussion of class readings. After recording individual students speaking their reading responses aloud, I learned that students were more actively engaging with the texts than I had thought. So I remain curious about the numerous elements of classroom dynamics that cause the dialogue of a class to unfold as it does. My SoTL experience heightened my awareness of the complexity of factors that interact to determine whose voices are heard and the depth of the ideas that are shared during class discussion. I am more attuned to the “surroundings” of classroom communication: differences of gender and race,
differences of language and communication style, as well as being situated in a graded system in which I necessarily hold more authority than my students. And I recognize now that these elements constantly interact with students' willingness to share insights in class. Since my SoTL work has made my experience of the classroom more complicated, it has also made me more skeptical of my first perceptions of my teaching. I readily question the effectiveness of specific aspects of my teaching, and I am more open to revision and improvisation in my teaching than I was before I undertook my SoTL research. Recognizing my pedagogy as another field for analysis as complex as my literary studies, I now think more precisely and deeply about the weaknesses in my teaching; and, from this new perspective, I have a fresh interest in discussing my teaching questions with my colleagues.

**Experimenting with “New” Methods: Sarah’s Investigation of Small Group Work**

Shifting the focus from teacher to student can be difficult when considering “what works” (Hutchings, 2000) in the classroom and what does not. While teachers can observe and form their own opinions about the success of their lessons, student responses and involvement are critical to examining students’ classroom experiences. A common classroom experience involves group activities—whether groups complete worksheets, conduct small group discussions, or review their writing—and my inquiry centered on how much time students need for group activities and subsequent classroom discussions about the group activities, as well as whether group activities helped students learn and retain information. Ultimately, I wanted to know how to create time-effective group activities by considering whether or not students need equal amounts of class time allocated for both group activities and post-groupwork discussion, or if the subsequent discussions were repetitive and unnecessary for student retention.

My concerns were echoed by my classmate Karen Zyck Galbraith and we ultimately worked in collaboration to examine students’ experiences with group activities. Individually, we created three different group activities, as well as surveys for our students to complete at the end of each activity. In collaboration, we were able to discuss and formulate our methods, compare our results, and consider a greater number of students’ responses in order to develop a data-driven conclusion about time-effective
group activities. While we individually conducted our class activities and surveys over the course of four weeks, we collectively considered the implications of our data. Ultimately, we hoped to learn about the perceptions and experiences of our students working in group activities and how much time they felt was required to effectively complete the activity. In addition, we considered whether or not they found it necessary to spend more or less time in post-group work class discussion.

The task of creating and implementing methods of data collection was challenging because the research needed to be data-driven and focused on student learning. By employing surveys, we were able to collect, analyze, and interpret the data in order to make conclusions about students’ experiences and their need for both group activities and class discussion. With each activity I varied the time spent on the group activity and the time spent on group discussion, spending more time on the group activity, equal time on both, and finally more time on class discussion. The data collected demonstrates that students clearly appreciate the class dialogue that can come from post-group discussion and look for additional opinions and clarity from both fellow students and their instructor.

Consequently, we concluded that students find post-group work discussions beneficial and even essential to their engagement and retention of the group activity. Our data therefore suggests that post-group work discussions should be, at a minimum, the same length of time as the group work activity. While employing a social science approach can be challenging, we were able to incorporate our students’ responses and move beyond our own observations in order to effectively assess our classrooms.

Moving forward, I have found it imperative to consider my students’ responses as I structure my class and, in particular, group activities. Continuing to ask my students for their feedback—which is often anonymous—allows me to view the class from their perspective and provides them with a greater stake in the class as they offer suggestions for future assignments and activities. While I have yet to pursue another SoTL project, I found the experience valuable because it provided me with different tools to analyze my own classroom and how to consider students’ responses and incorporate them into my lessons and activities. In addition, my SoTL presentation and this collaborative effort have provided me with further opportunities to discuss my research experiences in relation to my composition classroom. This was particularly beneficial to me as I composed my job documents and discussed these experiences during phone and campus interviews. Since the institutions I have interviewed with are considered
teaching institutions, they have been particularly interested in my teaching experiences and any research I have completed in relation to my teaching. I have consequently found this SoTL experience to be advantageous to establishing my career as a teacher and scholar.

Conclusions

These humanities scholars began their SoTL inquiries with a healthy skepticism: were classroom studies of student learning really within the appropriate range of their work as literary scholars? All three scholars, however, were able to gather and analyze information on student learning in ways that were either easily reconciled to their literary studies (David and Emily both engaged in close “reading” of spoken text via transcripts) or that stretched them to expand their notions of the work of literary scholars (Sarah not only used surveys but also co-authored an inquiry with a fellow classmate, when collaborative writing is not the norm in literary studies). And although we did not conduct a formal SoTL inquiry into the effectiveness of this graduate seminar, we can draw on the self-reported attitudes and experiences of the graduate student co-authors of this essay for one gauge of the long-term effectiveness of the course. Although none of these scholars has yet undertaken any additional SoTL inquiries since they completed this course two or more years ago, the experiences and self-conceptions they document in this essay suggest that the capacities they developed—articulating a problem and a research question, conducting careful analysis of student learning, sharing their findings with others—will help them throughout their academic careers, as instructors and perhaps eventually as administrators responsible for making decisions about curriculum design and implementation. SoTL practitioners responsible for graduate education in the humanities at other institutions must, of course, design curricula in ways that are sensitive to the needs of students and the affordances and constraints of local institutional conditions, but the experience of this course suggests that a strategic deployment of familiar and unfamiliar genres may help graduate students in the humanities embrace the scholarship of teaching and learning and is a strategy worthy of systematic inquiry.
Appendix A: SoTL Inquiry Summary and Poster Presentation Assignment

A recurring theme this semester will be the importance of going public with your teaching. Good teachers will (even on their own) reflect on their teaching and their students’ learning, ask questions about teaching and learning, experiment with their teaching, gather information about student learning, and make changes to their teaching in the hopes of improving student learning. But too often teaching is something that happens behind a closed door. Our traditional scholarship is constantly subjected to peer review and critique; our teaching, rarely. If teaching is to be a central part of the work of a college or university, then I believe it must be made available for public conversation as well as personal reflection. Teaching, in short, needs to be thought of and approached in a scholarly way.

Consequently, the central project of the semester is a first engagement with the scholarship of teaching and learning (also known as SoTL). Your task is, in essence, to pose a question about student learning in your classroom and seek to answer that question over the course of the semester. You will go public with your findings in a poster presentation to be held with the new teaching assistants at UWM and in a summary posted on your on-line teaching portfolio. (You might also choose to submit a proposal to the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, which will hold its annual meeting in Milwaukee in fall of 2011.) That summary of your classroom-based inquiry might take the form of a traditional paper-based report of findings (see the Final Reports of Greene and of Feito for examples) or it might take the form of an online project snapshot (see multiple snapshots available via d2l). Either way, you will include a link to your inquiry summary on your online teaching portfolio.

Throughout the semester, I will provide readings about the scholarship of teaching and learning and examples of the work of other SoTL scholars. I hope that you will find some of this semester’s readings helpful in articulating your own questions about and expectations for student learning. But this project is not primarily an analysis or critique of the work of other scholars; it is your scholarly inquiry into the teaching and learning happening in your own classroom.

You may work on this inquiry individually or collaboratively. Either way, I will ask that everyone adhere to the following schedule:
W September 29th  | Submit a one-page idea sheet for your inquiry. You’ve read about SoTL and examples of other scholars’ inquiries. Write down three “problems” in your own teaching that you’d be interested in exploring. For each problem, articulate a tentative research question, and any ideas about what kind of evidence you’d collect and how you’d analyze that evidence.

Early October  | Meet with me to discuss possible project ideas

M October 11th  | Submit a one-page memo (ungraded, single-spaced) describing the problem you intend to explore, articulating the question you’ll be asking about this problem, and your methods of exploration (what kinds of evidence can you gather to answer that question? how will you analyze that evidence?). If you are working collaboratively, you should also outline your plans for collaboration.

M November 29th  | Peer workshop of SoTL inquiry summaries

F December 3rd  | Peer workshop of your polished poster presentation

TBA  | Poster Presentation at UWM / MU’s joint conference

M December 13th  | Final (for now) version of your online teaching portfolio—including SoTL inquiry summary, teaching philosophy statement, and teaching artifact—due by noon.

As this schedule indicates, you will be making an oral presentation of your project at a conference co-sponsored with the writing program at UW-Milwaukee. We will devote some class time to discussing the genre of “poster presentation,” but the basic idea is that you (the presenter) stand by your poster (which summarizes your inquiry project’s fundamental claims) in a room full of people (who informally mill among various presenters) and give a brief (2-3 minute) explanation of your work to anyone who stops by. You should also have a handout for people to take with them. Still not clear on what exactly is involved? Don’t worry: we’ll discuss it in more detail in class.

Ultimately, my evaluations will be based on your inquiry summary. As I read the inquiry summary, I will be looking for evidence of a clearly articulated problem; a clearly defined question; a clear (though perhaps tentative) answer to that question; reflection on specific classroom experiences; thorough understanding of and synthesis with relevant scholarship; appropriate organization and development; clear and grammatically correct prose. As you are writing, think of your colleagues at Marquette and UWM as your audience.
Appendix B: Feedback guide for the Inquiry Project

English 6840 SoTL Inquiry

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<tr>
<th>GRADING CRITERIA</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Competent</th>
<th>Developing</th>
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1. **Problem (70 points)**
   - Inquiry Project Summary makes clear the origin of this problem
   - IP Summary makes clear the significance of this problem
   - IP Summary contextualizes this SoTL inquiry amidst previous inquiries into this problem

2. **Evidence (80 points)**
   - Evidence is appropriate to shed light on the problem
   - Evidence was carefully, appropriately gathered (methodologically and ethically)

3. **Analysis (85 points)**
   - Evidence is rigorously analyzed
   - Results of analysis are clearly presented

4. **Significance (50 points)**
   - Significance of results for future teaching are clearly presented
   - Significance of results for future inquiry are clearly presented

5. **Organization (40 points)**
   - If Inquiry Summary is a snapshot, visual layout and use of links is effective
   - If Inquiry Summary is a traditional document, linear organization is effective

6. **Prose (25 points)**
   - Grammatically correct
   - Clear and graceful
   - Appropriately formal in tone

**SUBTOTAL**

**Comments:**

Was a well-developed draft of the Inquiry Summary brought to peer review? (If not, deduct 40 points.)

**FINAL TOTAL:**
References

(http://doit.gmu.edu/archives/feb98/randybass.htm)


(http://www.issotl.org/International_Commons_4_1.pdf).

http://www.issotl.org/past_issotl/2008proceedings.html


