

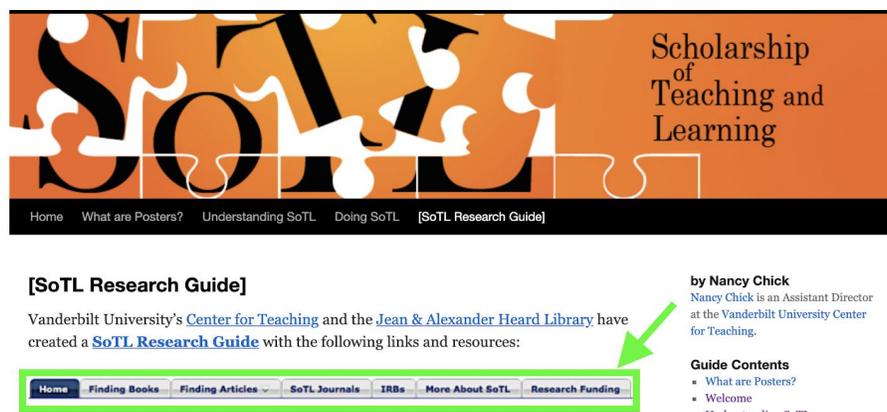
Best Practices in SoTL Research

[\[Link to performance-support resource\]](#)

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Problem/need

The interactive *SoTL Research Guide* tabs on the [Vanderbilt University](#) website seems to be broken, and I will let them know. It gave me the idea, though, to try and create my own SoTL Research Guide. The media support I create will be useful to anyone in higher education who needs to start professional research and might feel intimidated about the approach. When I learned about Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, it made me more at ease finding a professional framework that says it's ok to find your project topic during the process of doing research.



Learning Objective

Learning objectives for the research are listed below.

- Learners will be able to define scholarship of teaching and learning
- Learners will be able to start doing SoTL research themselves
- Learners will be able to identify an [example](#) of the SoTL method in use

Method and Rationale

The design method I aim to adhere to is [Universal Design for Learning](#). In the design of this instructional content I represent the information in three parts; engagement, representation, and action. This research guide will hopefully answer the questions “why SoTL,” “what is SoTL,” and “how do I start?”

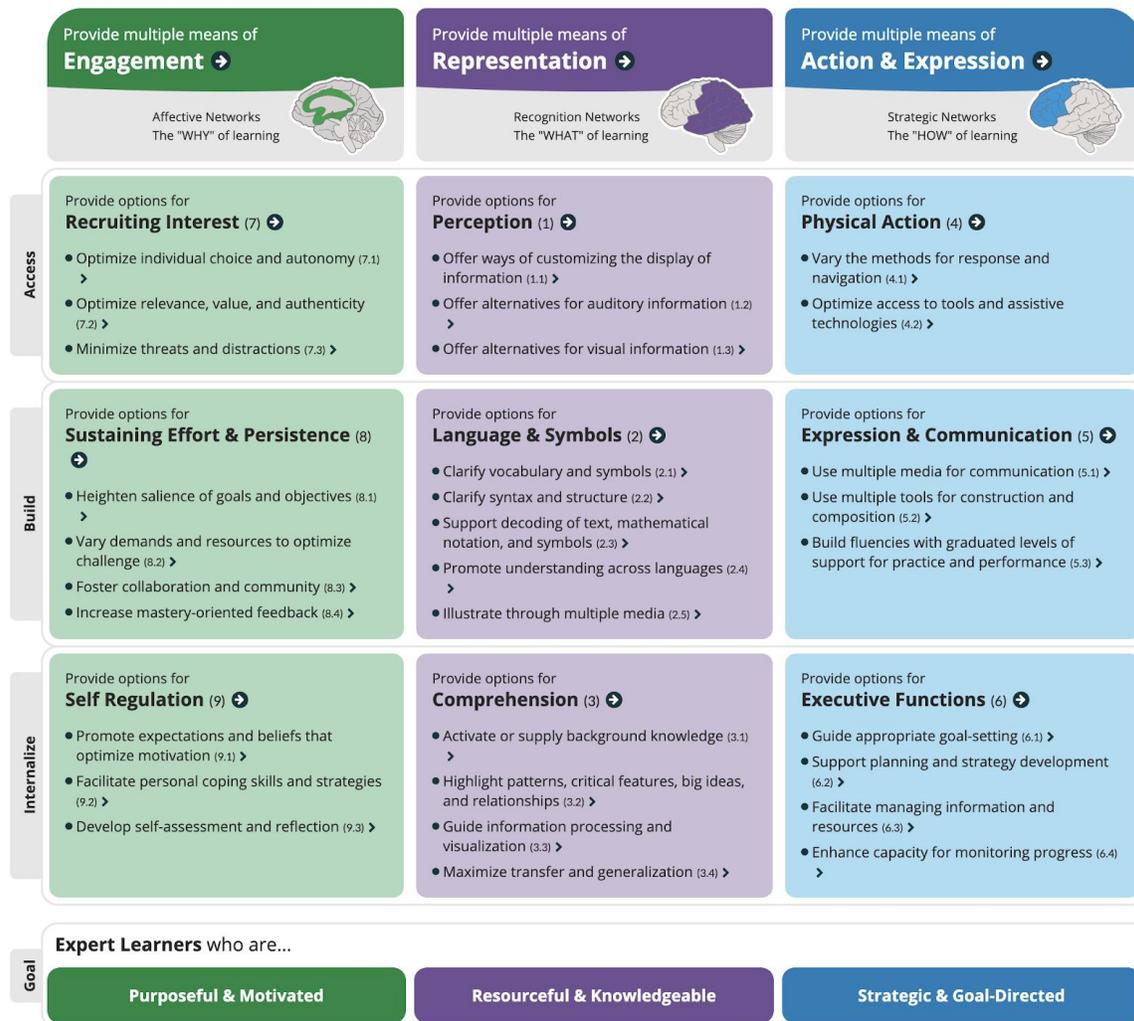
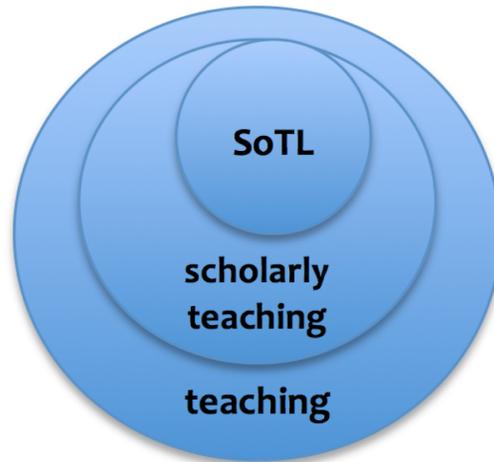


Table source: <http://udlguidelines.cast.org/>

1. Why SoTL? → Engagement

- a. [Ernest Boyer](#) developed a model expanding on the traditional definition of scholarship in 1990. He proposed that scholarship include four categories:
 - i. Application - translating knowledge to problems and needs in the world
 - ii. Teaching - teachers studying their own practices to improve learning
 - iii. Integration - pulling knowledge together to yield fresh understanding and perspective
 - iv. Discovery - traditional ways of doing research and finding out new things
- b. The lesson here is that SoTL is helpful for professional inquiry, whether it be at school or at work and ultimately knowledge can be acquired in many different ways.



[Image Source](#)

2. What is SoTL? → **Representation**
 - a. “The overall goal of SoTL research is to enhance teaching practices and thereby, improve student learning outcomes by researching alternative teaching methods and learning environments.” -[Center for Innovation in Research & Teaching \(CIRT\)](#)
 - b. In order for this type of research to be considered scholarly, it must be public, it should be critically reviewed by peers, and the results should be made available and communicated to others in the scholarly community.
 - c. The overall intention of SoTL is thus to improve student learning and enhance educational quality. <https://www.stlhe.ca/sotl/what-is-sotl/>
3. How to Start Doing SoTL → **Action & Expression**
 - a. Keep in mind this scholarship will need to be made public and it will be shared with audiences that don't share your disciplinary background
 - b. Try beginning with brainstormed lists, annotations of an article, sketches, or mind maps
 - c. Flex your brain muscles by doing an exercise: What five words do you associate with the kinds of research you most like doing? (Chick, 2019)
 - d. Consider the following research guide:

SoTL Research Guide

1. Getting started
 - a. What is the problem?
 - b. Foster sense of curiosity, investigation, inquiry
2. Conducting a literature review
 - a. Begin browsing books, articles, and journals by typing in keywords. Your topic will come naturally through browsing.
3. Consider ethics
 - a. Apply some fundamental ethical practices
 - b. Follow Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines
 - c. Do no harm

4. Identify valuable evidence
 - a. Collect direct evidence gathered from your research
 - i. textual, oral, visual
 - ii. Quantitative and qualitative data
 - iii. Formative and summative assessments
5. Plan the project design
 - a. “What is...?” projects are detailed analyses
 - b. “What works?” projects assess the effectiveness of or change caused by an activity, tool, or other intervention.
6. Analyzing evidence
 - a. Think about the kinds of answers your research question seeks and which of these bits of data would be most useful to attain:
 - i. Frequency (how many students who did x, number of instances of y in the data or high grades or “strongly agree” responses, number of attempts at z, etc)
 - ii. Change in numbers (increase in high grades, number of students retained, decrease in affirmative responses to a survey question, etc.)
 - iii. Description (what moments of learning or the lack thereof look like, emerging patterns of behavior, responses in a survey)
 - iv. Interpretation (what the student text means, often grouped in themes; analysis of quality)
7. Go Public
 - a. Allow others to review and contribute to the body of knowledge
8. Consider quality
 - a. Peter Felten’s [“Principles of Good Practice”](#) (2013) outlines some widely accepted benchmarks (see box below).

<i>Principles of Good Practice in SoTL</i>
Inquiry focused on student learning
Grounded in context
Methodologically sound
Conducted in partnership with students
Appropriately public

- i. Learning should be understood broadly to include not only disciplinary knowledge or skill development, but also the cultivation of attitudes or habits that connect to learning.
- ii. Good practice is grounded in both scholarly and local context. Scholarship of any type builds on what is known, using relevant theory,

practice-based literature, and prior research to establish a firm foundation for inquiry.

- iii. Good practice in SoTL requires the intentional and rigorous application of research tools that connect the question at the heart of a particular inquiry to student learning.
- iv. Good practice requires that inquiry into learning be conducted in partnership with students. At minimum, SoTL must follow the basic tenets of human subjects research, ensuring that students are not harmed and that participants understand their rights.
- v. Finally, good practice involves “going public”- the most appropriate ways to go public should reflect the evolving nature of this form of research. The more collaborative, the better the outcome.

Assessment

Access and use of this media resource will lead to measurable workplace benefits by serving as a job aid for developing and refining both individual SoTL inquiries and larger SoTL initiatives.

Reflection/Evaluation

Through this project I was able to gain a better understanding of what SoTL is and how to use it while at the same time getting a chance to practice the Universal Design for Learning framework.

References

- Chick, N. (2019). How to start doing SoTL. *The National Teaching & Learning Forum*, 28(2), 10-11. doi:10.1002/ntlf.30189
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- Felten, P. (2013). Principles of Good Practice in SoTL. *Teaching & Learning Inquiry: The ISSOTL Journal*, 1(1), 121-125. doi:10.2979/teachlearninqu.1.1.121