The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning paves the way for Educational Improvement in Kinesiology

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ABSTRACT: The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) big tent definition invites us to include unexplored fields. The International Kinesiology College is a worldwide organisation of certified instructors teaching a common curriculum in private colleges. This study examines the impact of introducing SoTL into academic development from 2015 to 2018.

Our SoTL focus was to make teaching and student learning visible, open to peer review and available for others to build on. New initiatives were introduced – search conference (O'Brien 2001), research presentations, instructor hangouts and a professional development workshop. I used an autoethnography methodology (Ellis & Bochner 2000) and conducted a thematic analysis of the reflective journal which recorded my experience, thoughts and emotions. The instructors' voice was gathered by questionnaire and both perspectives were compared to the literature. SoTL 4M framework (Friberg 2016) was used to map projects by organisational level. The impact criteria were changes in the number, frequency and quality of conversations (Mårtensson 2017), changes in the level of awareness/understanding and changes in practice/policy (Hutchings 2000; Stoakes 2013).

The findings show no engagement with the meso level search conference but increases in the number and frequency of meaningful conversations and changes to practice were reported at macro level. A comparison to the literature shows the difficulties of introducing SoTL improvements were consistent over time (Kelly 2000; McCarthy & Higgs 2005; Gibbs 2013; Noorma 2017; Brost 2017) and the importance of working within a community (Cerbin 2000; Duffy 2000; McCarthy & Higgs 2005; Mårtensson & Roxå 2016a). The 4M map highlighted that impact varied by organisational level but analysis relates this variance to the significance of the meso microcultures - dialogical (strong or developing) versus non-dialogical (Mårtensson & Roxå 2016b; Kjær et al. 2017). SoTL is helping the IKC to grow by highlighting both a pathway to improvement and potential challenges.

A limitation of this study is the impact identified refers mostly to teaching and the next phase will explore impact on student learning. The important question that remains is how can we bring the unwilling voices of the non-dialogical meso microcultures into teaching and learning conversations?

1   INTRODUCTION

As academic developers we want to know if our improvement initiatives are meaningful. This requires us to make any impact visible by identifying and naming the changes but Bamber and Stefani (2016) pointed out that we need to move beyond identifying mere *impact* by way of numbers of courses attended to a more real measure of the *value* of academic development to include a much broader range of outcomes such as opinion and judgement.

One of the difficulties with rolling out improvements is that often teachers do not want to change (Kelly 2000; Brost 2017; Noorma 2017) but Brost (2017) also pointed out that it is more than not wanting to change, teachers are resistant to change often displaying hostility, anger and irritation. Gibbs (2013) highlighted the importance of the local culture and advised that "there is a limit to impact of sole individual teachers where the local micro culture is hostile". Another difficulty identified by Duffy (2000) and McCarthy & Higgs (2005) is the issue of time. Teachers have to make time to carry out research, meet and share what they discover and the process of sharing does not happen quickly, it also takes time for results to show. In their 2005 paper McCarthy & Higgs reported that they had been working on developing SoTL at University College Cork for three years and Noorma (2017) reports how things changed in Estonia over a ten-year period.

The literature also highlights the importance of building a community as a support measure in introducing SoTL. Cerbin (2000) reported the key factor that made a difference for him was having like-minded colleagues which encouraged and motivated him while Duffy (2000) talked about how community support helped her to re-group and re-focus especially when things didn't work. McCarthy & Higgs (2005) advised how they built a community in UCC by teachers sitting together and sharing but point out that sharing is a habit and the audience will create the need for more sharing. Additionally, the authors also point to the importance of creating this community within a supportive culture. McCarthy (2007) tells us that at UCC they did not solve problems but rather gave themselves time and space to name, discuss and share problems using an investigative approach. Mårtensson & Roxå (2016a) also pointed not only to the importance of developing a community of practice but also how we must look at teachers within their local contexts, the meso level micro cultures.

The aim of this ongoing study is to examine the impact of introducing SoTL into academic development in kinesiology and this paper presents the emerging results of an ongoing study for the three years from 2015 to 2018.

2 METHODS

2.1 Institutional Context

The International Kinesiology College (IKC) is a worldwide organisation represented in sixty-six countries with around 1500 certified instructors teaching the "Touch for Health" programme using a common curriculum in private colleges. The IKC has a hierarchical structure (Executive Board, School Board, Country Faculty, Instructors) and communication with the instructors is through the country faculty. Instructors meet at country level for a two-day update with their country faculty and peers every three years.

I started this journey mapping educational improvement in 2015/2016 as part of completing a Masters in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education at University College Cork and I have continued to develop, introduce and implement improvement initiatives since then. Initially my studies concentrated on the meso level within the Irish context but then it subsequently developed into a macro level international project.

2.2 Research Questions

The questions guiding my research are:

- How could we improve our teaching and student learning?
- What is the impact/value of our educational improvement initiatives?
- How can we research and evidence this impact and value?

2.3 Improvement Initiatives

I identified the aspects of SOTL of making teaching and learning visible, open to peer review and available for others to build on Shulman (1993) as the main starting point.

I created four new initiatives:

1. Search Conference - a 2015 meeting of Irish instructors to find out what they wanted
2. Research Presentations - from 2017 ongoing dissemination of findings of classroom research at international level, both at Teaching & Learning and Kinesiology conferences
3. Instructor Hangouts - from 2018 ongoing online one-hour bimonthly international meetings, using the ZOOM platform, where instructors get together to discuss teaching and learning topics
4. Professional Development Workshop - started in 2018 "Making the Invisible Visible" which focuses on a developmental model of instructor Continuing Professional Development

2.4 Impact Criteria

The impact criteria I selected were selected as follows:

1. Changes in number, frequency and quality of conversations (Mårtensson 2017 p.6)
2. Changes in thought, awareness and understanding (Hutchings 2000 p. 8; Stoakes 2013 p.37)
3. Changes in practice and policy (Hutchings 2000 p.8; Stoakes 2013 p.37)

2.5 Data Collection and Analysis

A qualitative methodology using autoethnography was employed (Ellis & Bochner 2000). This research method was chosen as it promotes the inclusion of the experience, thoughts and emotions of the teacher as researcher which aligns well with Bamber & Stefani's (2016). This was also an appropriate methodology from which to view impact at different organisational levels. I conducted a thematic analysis of my reflective journal for the period from 2015 to 2018 which recorded my experience, thoughts and emotions. Additionally, the instructors voice was gathered by questionnaire. The results for each of the four initiatives in 2.3 were summarised against the three criteria in 2.4. I also used the SoTL 4M framework as a tool for reflection on organisational impact and value (Friberg 2016). The 4M framework describes SoTL at four organisational levels: micro - own classroom, meso - department, macro – institution, mega - beyond one institution. I re-defined the levels for kinesiology with meso referring to IKC national level, macro being IKC international level and mega level detailing impact beyond the IKC.

3 RESULTS

Using a matrix adapted from Stoakes (2013) the following sections examine each of the four improvement initiatives against our stated impact criteria to determine their impact or value.

3.1 Search Conference

Impact Criteria

Scale of Impact	Number, Frequency & Quality of Conversations	Thought, Awareness & Understanding	Practice & Policy
My own		✓	
Instructors			
Not at all	✓		✓
Evidence	Reflective Journal		

Table 1. Impact/Value of Search Conference

The Irish instructors did not engage with the 2015 search conference invite (1 out of 17 accepted; 3 out of 17 replied) and the meeting did not go ahead. There were a couple of further attempts to set up another meeting in 2016 but there was still little interest (3 out of 17 accepted). While there was no impact on the instructors, this process raised my thought, awareness and understanding as teacher/researcher as it confirmed the lack of engagement at this meso level.

3.2 Research Presentations

Impact Criteria

Scale of Impact	Number, Frequency & Quality of Conversations	Thought, Awareness & Understanding	Practice & Policy
My own	✓	✓	
Instructors	✓	✓	
Not at all			✓
Evidence	Reflective Journal; E mail Correspondence		

Table 2. Impact/Value of Research Presentations

The presentation of my classroom action research findings at international teaching and learning conferences raised my confidence as a teacher researcher and gave me an audience for my work. The presentations at international kinesiology conferences raised awareness of new possibilities with the work I had done so far and what I was trying to achieve. It also identified people who would be interested in getting involved. After my first IKC conference presentation in October 2017 I received emails from four members of the UK team expressing their interest in getting involved with this work, asking what support I needed or how they could help me develop it further. New conversations started from there but it quickly became clear that we needed new communication channels to accommodate and support these conversations.

3.3 Instructor Hangouts

Impact Criteria

Scale of Impact	Number, Frequency & Quality of Conversations	Thought, Awareness & Understanding	Practice & Policy
My own	✓	✓	✓
Instructors	✓	✓	✓
Not at all			
Evidence	Hangout minutes; # Facebook conversations; Reflective Journal		

Table 3. Impact/Value of Instructor Hangouts

In 2018 we held three international hangouts, online conversations bringing together a total of twenty-three instructors from six countries (Ireland, UK, US, Canada, Dubai and Costa Rica). By 2019 these hangouts are now a monthly event aiming to support us to connect, share, build with and from each other. As instructors previously did not have an organisational channel of talking with each other on an ongoing informal basis, the main change was in the number, frequency and quality of conversations. The quality of the conversations was a priority and this was ensured through a focus on teaching and learning topics suggested by both the facilitator and/or the participants. The process of sharing was actively promoted and continued beyond the hangout to engage the wider instructor community via social media in the existing international closed Facebook group. As demand exceeded supply, the new development in 2019 is the upcoming (April 2019) roll out of Hangout Facilitator Training so we will have more facilitators and lots more conversations around the world. This workshop was fully booked once advertised in less than twenty-four hours. As a result of these conversations we have seen changes to practice such as more sharing both of ideas and problems, and building on good ideas with instructors making changes in their teaching practice and being willing to try out new things. This points also to a change in thought and awareness.

3.4 Professional Development Workshop

Impact Criteria

Scale of Impact	Number, Frequency & Quality of Conversations	Thought, Awareness & Understanding	Practice & Policy
My own	✓	✓	✓
Instructors	✓	✓	✓
Not at all			
Evidence	Workshop Evaluation Forms, Questionnaires, E Mail Correspondence.		

Table 4. Impact/Value of Professional Development Workshop

As some of the hangout participants wanted to do a deep dive into more teaching and learning ideas, a one-day CPD workshop based on a developmental model was introduced. During this day we explored our teaching practices and most participants signed up for the assessment which was writing a reflective journal over three months. With this dedicated time to investigate, we saw changes to the level of thought, awareness and understanding and also changes to practice such as a focus on student centred learning, understanding the value of student curiosity and softening the lesson plans. The day provided a unique opportunity for a long conversation at a deep level. There are also early indications of upcoming changes in 2019 to policy at meso level. Participants who completed the assessment requested an Ongoing Inquiry group which was set up and meets every two months.

3.5 Mapping to the SoTL 4M Framework – what does this tell us?

SOTL 4M Map

Micro Classroom	Meso National Level	Macro International - IKC	Mega Beyond IKC
Reach: 7 Fixed	Ireland - Reach: 1 UK Direct Reach: 12+ UK Indirect: 30+ recurring Other Countries: 4	Reach: Estimated 30+ Increasing	Reach: Unmeasurable

Table 5. The SoTL 4M Map showing impact and reach over the four organisational levels

The map highlights that disseminating at macro and mega levels had the greatest impact or potential impact compared to micro classroom level where the reach was restricted to class size. The UK direct reach refers to participants in the hangouts or workshops but the indirect reach which is an estimate, refers to the wider community who took part in the subsequent social media conversations. The actual number reached, but who did not engage in conversation, will be higher.

4   DISCUSSION

This paper describes the preliminary findings from an ongoing study which is examining the impact of SoTL improvements, through qualitative data using an autoethnographic lens, which brings in multiple perspectives. The emerging findings are that impact/value was shown, by research presentations which kick started the process, and more particularly from the Hangouts and CPD workshop, over all criteria categories - changes in meaningful conversations, changes in thinking/understanding and changes in practice/policy.

However, the SoTL 4M map also highlighted that impact varied by organisational level. Reflection suggests that this variance was due to the significance of the meso level micro cultures, whether dialogical or non-dialogical (Mårtensson and Roxå 2016b, Kjær *et al*. 2017). In Ireland there has been little engagement with these improvements so far while in contrast in the UK, instructors engaged with the new initiatives, perhaps pointing to The Market versus The Commons microcultures (Roxå and Mårtensson 2015). I can identify with the feelings expressed by Kelly (2000) "there's an audience for the work beyond the campus, but if my own department isn't affected, it would be a shame". Even though the search conference did not go ahead, the process impacted me as teacher and guided me to take the improvement ideas to a wider audience at IKC international macro level. Mårtensson and Roxå (2016b) recommend consideration of the meso level micro cultures which proved to be important in this case and initial efforts are perhaps best targeted at the existing dialogical meso micro cultures.

Formal communication channels within the IKC are top down through the country head. The new initiatives I introduced provide additional informal communication channels supporting the existing structure and are creating an enhanced sense of sharing, support and community among the instructors on the ground level worldwide who choose to participate.

A limitation of this study is that the impact/value identified refers mostly to teaching and the next phase will explore the impact/value on student learning. Also, we did not conduct an independent verification on the gathering, conclusion and judgement of the evidence and impact assessment, recommended as best practice by Stoakes (2013). This will be incorporated going forward. The important questions that remain are do we concentrate improvements within the dialogical meso micro cultures or is it important to include the voices of the non-dialogical meso microcultures and if so, how do we get them to join in the teaching and learning conversations?

SoTL has great potential in new fields as it can pave the way to educational improvement. SoTL also highlights the challenges that may lie ahead and I think this is one of the most useful contributions to newcomers. What this study has shown is that these challenges, such as resistance to change, do not disappear over the years. They show up again and again, but being aware of them as an academic developer, allows you to seek out a receptive audience with whom you can implement improvements.

5   ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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