

SoTL worksheet: How do I design my SoTL project?

- 1. Think about a teaching and/or learning issue, problem or question that you have about your students, a course, an assignment, a pedagogical strategy, your programme, etc. Briefly state the issue, problem. What is the issue related to your teaching and learning?**

I am interested in how to better promote student engagement in the discipline of sociology and, thus, in sociology courses, the major, and so on. I view engagement as not merely behavioral but also as an affective and cognitive process. Based on my interactions with and observations of sociology students, I believe they are not sufficiently engaged. I believe this is related negatively to learning through a variety of intervening processes (e.g., motivation, time on task). I am also curious about the role of social demographics in these processes.

- 2. What do you know about this topic and about ways to study this question from the extant literature in your discipline and in higher education more broadly?**

So far, I have found the literature on engagement per se quite limited, especially in terms of my discipline. I know about the National Survey of Student Engagement. I have found research on related topics such as participation or interest in a course or the major. I am thinking about different conceptualizations of engagement. Based on an examination of the literature, survey research seems to be the most common method used in past research. I need to do more searching of related work.

- 3. Identify the objectives of conducting your SoTL project?**

To explore the extent of sociology students' engagement in the sociology courses;
To explore the relationship between level of engagement and learning

- 4. Identify the research questions/hypotheses**

Thus, my questions—at this point—are the following:
How engaged are sociology students in the sociology courses? Is level of engagement related to learning?

- 5. Given your research questions, what other types of information or artifacts will you need (and from what sources) to answer these questions?**

I need more information on how engaged my students are and why, on factors that relate to or encourage engagement, on connections between engagement and learning, on processes that might mediate the relationship between engagement and learning, and on students' understandings of engagement. Thus, I need responses from students on these issues and, perhaps, copies of student work.

- 6. What do you know about the topic and ways to study the question from extant literature in your discipline and in higher ed? What research methodology might you use: Quantitative Vs Qualitative ? (Survey, Correlational, Ex-post facto, Experiments and Quasi-experiments, Case study, Action research)**

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- 7. Given your question(s) and the information/data you need, what research strategies or methods (e.g., student reflections, assignments, interviews, focus groups, questionnaires/tests, observations, quasi-experiments, and so on) might you use to obtain the information/data need to answer your SoTL question(s)?**

To answer all the questions posed, I would probably need at least interviews and self-administered Questionnaires with students. A reflection assignment on interest, passion, motivation, etc. in the course or major could also be designed. I think I need both quantitative and qualitative data.

- 8. What are some potential practical problems you might face in conducting this SoTL study? Limited time? Limited funds? Lack of expertise for part of the project? Limitations to using the best design? No available co-researchers? How will you deal with these practical problems? What faculty support units and internal pots of funds could you apply for/use?**

There would be time constraints and costs (though this project should not be too costly and there are small grants available on campus). I would also like to involve a student researcher for pay or credit—maybe a sociology major or an honors student. Creating good conceptual and operational definitions of my variables could be a bit of a challenge. What is engagement?

- 9. What time frame is a good fit with your SoTL project? One semester or multiple semesters?**

One semester would be adequate

- 10. What ethical issues should you consider in doing this study?**

I need to obtain informed consent and be sure to keep everything confidential. If I use my own current students, they must know they really have a choice to participate and not feel coerced. I should use a colleague or research assistant to collect data in this situation. If I use student work, I need

permission for that and I need to keep it confidential. I must consider whether the project could somehow negatively affect engagement or learning. I will, of course, apply for ethical clearance from JKEUPM.

Acknowledgement:

Questions and answers in the worksheet were adopted and adapted from McKinney, K. (2007). *Enhancing learning through the scholarship of teaching and learning*. San Francisco: Anker Publishing Company. Refer to pp. 80-82.