

*"It's a great idea, we should  
publish that!" ... or should we?*  
A SoTL Survival Guide for Curious  
Educators

**Marie-Laurence  
Tremblay, PhD.**

Associate professor  
Université Laval

For the AFPC Research  
Committee

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# Why this webinar?

Great teaching deserves to be seen! But turning classroom innovation into scholarship isn't always straightforward.



# Why me?

**Marie-Laurence Tremblay, PhD.**

Associate professor Université Laval

For the AFPC Research Committee



# Learning objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Distinguish SoTL from education research to better situate teaching innovations.
2. Identify and avoid common pitfalls in SoTL by applying evidence-informed and rigorous approaches.
3. Apply ethical and scholarly frameworks to transform innovations into disseminatable contributions.



1

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Entrez le code d'événement  
dans le bandeau supérieur

Code d'événement  
**OBGDFE**



Activer les réponses par SMS

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What school are you from?



1

UBC

17%

3



7

University of Ottawa

11%

2



2

UofA

22%

4



8

UdeM

17%

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3

University of Saskatchewan

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9

Laval

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4

University of Manitoba

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St-John's

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UofT

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Dalhousie

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Waterloo

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Cliquez sur l'écran projeté pour lancer la question



Allez sur **wooclap.com** et utilisez le code **OBGDFE**



Do you intend to submit an abstract (SoTL or education) for CPERC 2026?



1

Yes

53%

8



Cliquez sur l'écran projeté pour lancer la question

3

Maybe

40%

6

wooclap



100%



15 / 23



Allez sur [wooclap.com](https://wooclap.com) et utilisez le code **OBGDFE**



Ever had a great teaching idea that stayed in the drawer instead of getting published?



1

Yes — guilty as charged!

65%

11



2

No — not yet, but maybe one day.

0%

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3

I'm still trying... fingers crossed!

12%

2

4

I never thought of publishing, but now I'm curious.

24%

4



SoTL vs. Education  
Research vs. “A cool  
thing we tried”



The great debate: Is SoTL really the same as educational research... or something different?



# Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

- Systematic inquiry into teaching and learning in one's own context
- Grounded in evidence and connected to prior scholarship
- Ethically conducted and methodologically rigorous
- Disseminated for review, critique, and use by others

Glassick, C. E., Huber, M. T., & Maeroff, G. I. (1997). *Scholarship Assessed: Evaluation of the Professoriate*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

# SoTL vs. Educational Research

Dimension	SoTL (Scholarship of Teaching & Learning)	Educational Research
Starting point	Practitioner-driven; arises from classroom or teaching practice	Researcher-driven; arises from educational theory or broad research agenda
Primary goal	Improve teaching & learning in one's own context; share lessons learned	Advance knowledge & theory in education; generate generalizable findings
Nature	Pragmatic, context-specific, often small-scale	Theoretical, large-scale, often multi-site
Approach	Systematic, evidence-informed inquiry; may use diverse methods	Formal research designs; strong theoretical framing
Dissemination	Innovation reports, short communications, conference presentations, blogs, open platforms	Peer-reviewed journals, books, theory-driven articles

Boyer, 1990  
Hutchings & Shulman, 1999  
Glassick et al., 1997  
Felten, 2013  
Potter & Kustra, 2011.

Ok, but is there a difference between SoTL and an evaluation of an education initiative?



# SoTL and Education Initiative

## **Go back to the purpose!**

- Description (What was done?)
- Justification (Did it work?)
- Clarification (Why and how it work?)

**Interventions or initiatives often describe what was done, sometimes with « some » evidence of effectiveness, but without a systematic or evidence-informed inquiry.**

Cook DA, Bordage G, Schmidt HG. Description, justification and clarification: a framework for classifying the purposes of research in medical education. Med Educ. 2008 Feb;42(2):128-33.

# Pragmatic implications for you

When you submit to CPERC or journals, *situate* your project:

- If your primary aim is improving *your* course with systematic reflection and evidence → likely SoTL.
- If your aim is testing or building theory, across contexts → likely education research.
- If it's a local quality improvement with limited method and no theoretical anchor → submit as innovation/brief, or consider bolstering it into SoTL.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding several maps. The top map is a road map with a scale bar and a compass rose. Below it is a topographic map with green and blue terrain. The background is a blurred green field. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

# From Missteps to Milestones: Navigating SoTL Wisely

Five traps... and better moves

*"My students don't seem engaged in class. A colleague told me his students loved having extra group projects... Perfect! I'll just add more group projects to my course."*



*"My patient's diabetes remains uncontrolled despite treatment. A colleague said his patient improved after starting vitamin supplements... Perfect! I just recommend supplements too."*

**AVOID  
HUNCHES-AND-  
GUESSES  
APPROACH**



# Why trials and errors are not the way to go?

Trying out new methods by hunches and guesses can sometimes spark ideas... but it rarely leads to meaningful, sustainable improvements in teaching.

## Why?

- Changes remain **unsystematic** and may not address the real problem (doesn't take context into account).
- Success is often **not transferable** to other contexts or colleagues.
- Missed opportunity to build on what the **learning sciences already know**.

# Don't start from scratch — start from the evidence.

## **Learning sciences offer proven strategies for engagement and learning**

- Effective approaches are already documented in the literature
- No need to “reinvent the wheel” through trial-and-error
- Building on existing evidence strengthens both teaching and scholarship

## **Where to look:**

- *Twelve tips in Medical Teacher (or equivalent), PubMed, Google Scholar, ERIC, etc.*
- *AMEE Guides*
- MedEdPORTAL / MedEdPublish

*"This is such a new idea. Surely no one has done it before."*



# Reality check: You're Probably Not the First!

- Great ideas often feel unique... but rarely are
- Risk of **reinventing the wheel**
- May miss opportunities to **build on existing work**
- Leads to wasted effort and weaker scholarship

# Build, Don't Duplicate

## **Do a quick scan before you start**

- Search education-focused databases:  
ERIC, PubMed (education subset)  
MedEdPORTAL, MedEdPublish
- Look for similar contexts or adaptable innovations
- Use Google Scholar alerts to track topics
- Remember: building on prior work strengthens both teaching and scholarship

*“Let’s do an RCT! That’s the gold standard to see if it works!”*



# Why RCTs Fall Short in SoTL?

“Gold standard” in clinical trials → tempting to copy in education

But in SoTL, often **impractical** and **misleading**

Teaching ≠ drug trial: context matters

Students and teachers can't easily be “blinded” or randomized

Outcomes often **complex, long-term, social**

Ethics concerns: do we really withhold an innovation from half the class?

# Smarter alternatives

**How/why questions?** Qualitative designs, case studies, or design-based research.

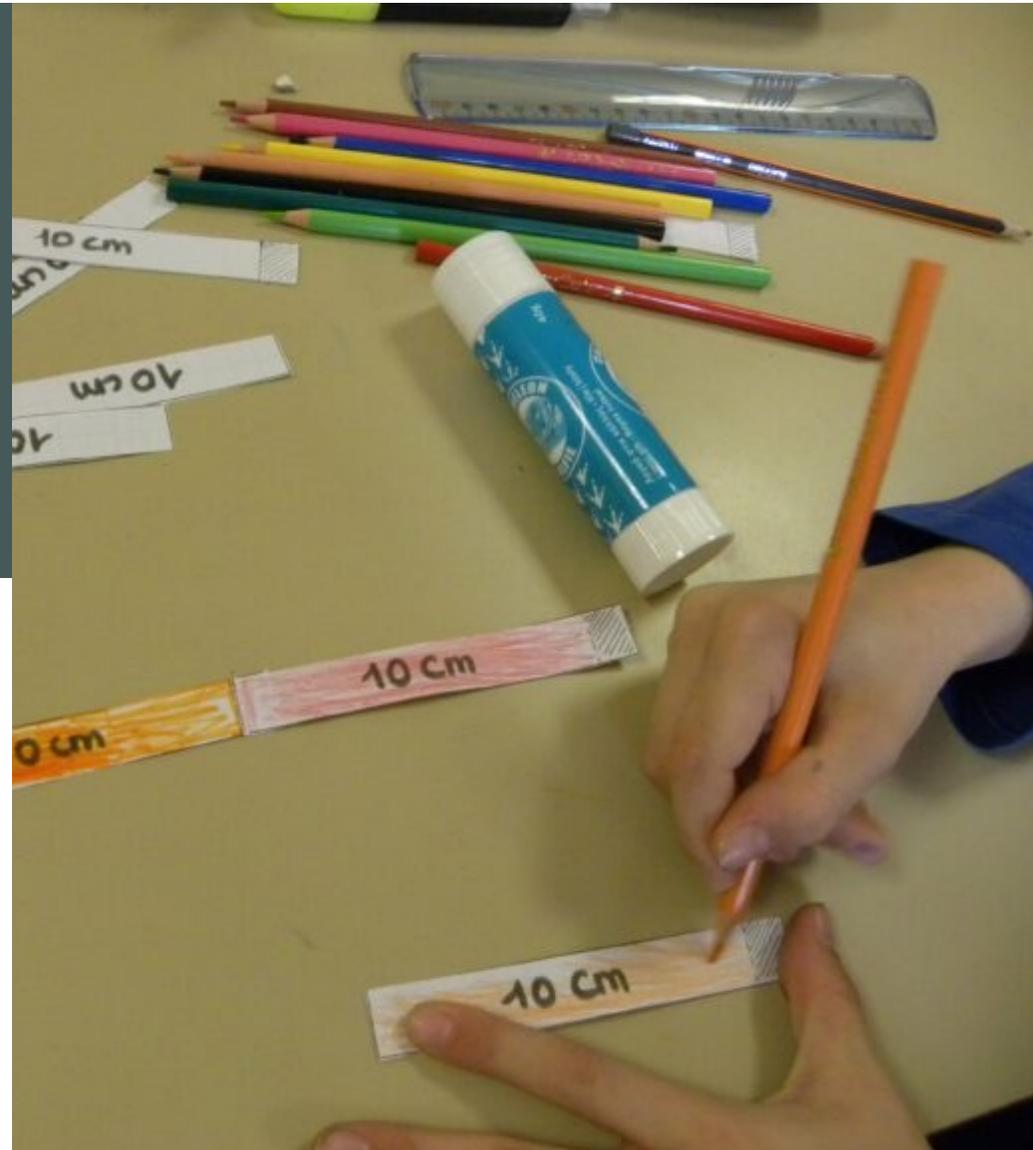
**Does it work here?** Cohort or mixed-methods designs with rich context description.

**Iterative improvement?** Design-based cycles documented transparently.

**Pro tip:** Always ask, "What *inferences* will this design legitimately support?"



*"We'll throw in a pre/post and a home-made questionnaire—easy win!"*



# Pitfalls to Watch Out For

Pre/post projects → weak evidence, superficial measures

Surveys gone wrong → poor design = invalid data (Rickards et al., 2012; Sullivan & Artino, 2017)

Small class sizes = underpowered studies

*“So what? Who cares?”*

- Ask questions that matter: *How does it work? Why does it work?*
- Don't aim for Kirkpatrick level 4 in SoTL

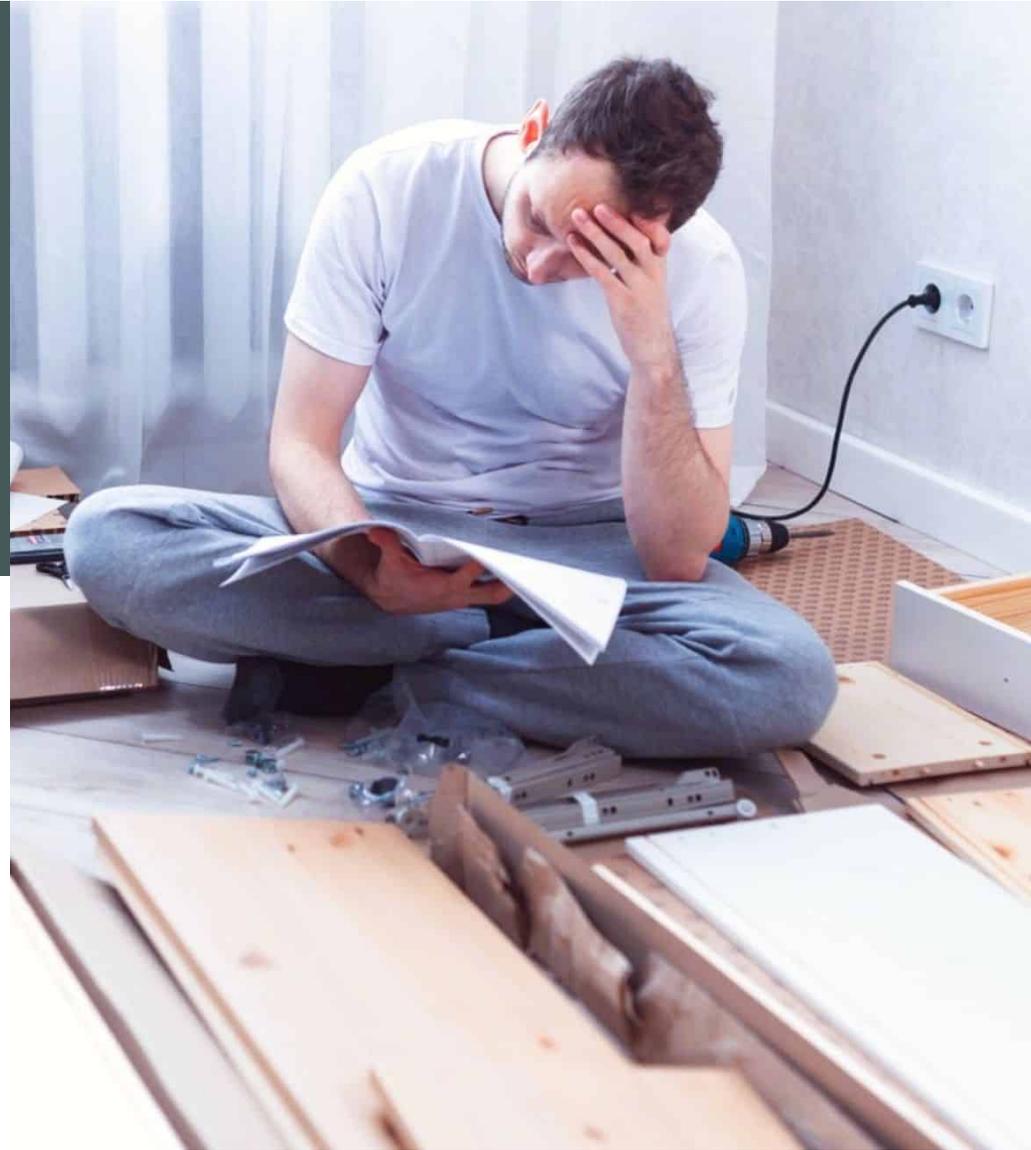
# Better moves

- Use/adapt validated tools where possible
- Follow contemporary validity frameworks
- Pilot your instrument, and report reliability/response process
- Triangulate with qualitative data to add depth



Sullivan GM. A Primer on the Validity of Assessment Instruments. *J Grad Med Educ.* 2011;3(2):119-120.  
Sullivan GM, Artino Jr AR. How to Create a Bad Survey Instrument *J Grad Med Educ.* 2017;9(4):411-415.  
Magee C, Rickards G, Byars LA, Artino Jr AR. Tracing the Steps of Survey Design: A Graduate Medical Education Research Example. *J Grad Med Educ.* 2013;5(1):1-5

*"Let's publish! This should be easy,  
it's just education."*



# It's Just Education... Right?

**Myth:** Publishing in SoTL is easier than clinical research

**Reality:** High expectations in health professions education journals

- Strong **theoretical grounding**
- Rigorous **design & analysis**
- Clear **contribution to the field**

Take-home: Good SoTL = **serious scholarship**

# Pick the Right Outlet

Different formats for local projects:

- **Innovation Reports** → describe new approaches
- **Implementation Briefs** → share how it worked in context
- **Teaching Tips / Short Communications** → concise, practical insights

Match the format to your project's scope

# Share Beyond Journals

## **Peer-reviewed but flexible:**

- *MedEdPORTAL* (AAMC - peer-reviewed teaching resources)
- *MedEdPublish* (post-publication peer review, now hosted by AMEE)
- *The Clinical Teacher* (practice-oriented scholarship)

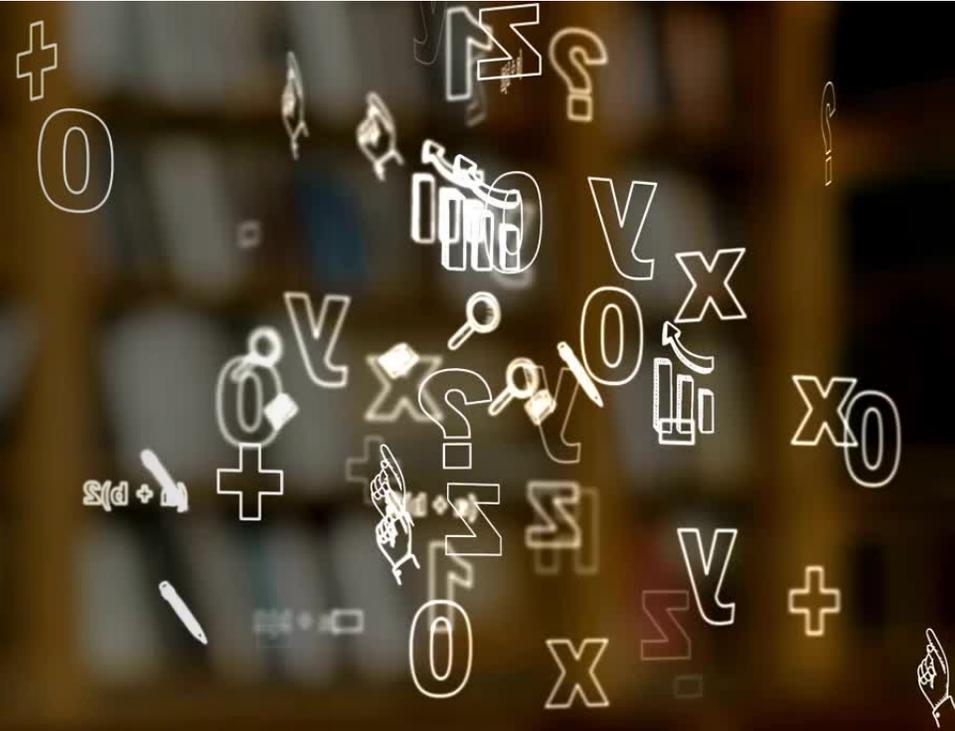
## **Blogs & professional platforms:**

- AMEE Blog, ICE Blog (International Clinical Educators)
- The Learning Scientists Blog (teaching & learning science)

**Social channels:** Podcasts (*KeyLIME*, *AMEE Live*), Twitter/X for community exchange, Youtube, etc.

# SoTL: From Idea to Publication

Ethical and scholarly  
considerations



# QI or Research? Know the Difference

- **Quality Improvement (QI):** Internal focus, aims at local improvement, may be publishable but usually in brief formats, often not considered “original research”
- **SoTL/Research:** Systematic, generalizable, intended for dissemination, requires ethics approval, evaluated as scholarship (rigor + contribution)
- Use institutional checklists (BREC, local REB guidance)



# What Counts as Good Scholarship?

**Glassick's Criteria** as a quick framework:

1. Clear goals
2. Adequate preparation
3. Appropriate methods
4. Significant results
5. Effective presentation
6. Reflective critique



Glassick, C. E., Huber, M. T., & Maeroff, G. I. (1997). *Scholarship Assessed: Evaluation of the Professoriate*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

# Take-Home Messages

## **SoTL Survival Guide**

- ✓ Start with a real, grounded question
- ✓ Check the literature—someone may have tried it before
- ✓ Match the method to the question (not the reverse)
- ✓ Be ethically and methodologically rigorous
- ✓ Share your work—in journals, but also beyond

The background of the slide is a dense, overlapping collage of colorful sticky notes. The colors include shades of blue, green, yellow, pink, and purple. Each sticky note has a large, black, hand-drawn question mark on it. The notes are scattered across the entire frame, creating a textured and busy visual effect.

**Merci!**

**Questions?**