Tips for Publishing SoTL Work

Kathleen McKinney, Cross Endowed Chair in SoTL

As a past pedagogical journal editor and member of many editorial teams, I suggest the following tips re publishing SoTL work.

1. Don't assume you have invented the wheel to the SoTL vehicle. There is very likely relevant prior literature on same or related SoTL question; in your and/or related disciplines. You need a useful, relevant, coherent literature review. We often see papers with missing literature reviews or literature reviews about the research on the disciplinary topic not the SoTL project.

2. Make clear, and do so early on in the paper, what your SoTL questions and research purposes are, and how they fill a gap or build on past work (don't just reinvent the wheel). And then stick to them. We often see the questions or purpose shift or change in later parts of the paper.

3. Don't be atheoretical. Too much SoTL work is atheoretical. Are concepts or models from your discipline relevant to the SoTL questions and results? What about concepts, models, theories from other fields and higher education in general? Theory can be deductive or inductive. Theory can be in the literature/introduction and/or in the discussion.

4. Include information about 'context.' By definition, SoTL work is local, context-specific, action research. Thus, readers need to know your context to understand, evaluate, and use your work. Briefly give some information about the institution, department or discipline, class and/or students... Don't make readers guess your context or assume it is similar to theirs.

5. Provide sufficient detail in methods and measures (and appendices) so readers can understand and replicate or adapt (or question or criticize). Such detail is often missing in SoTL papers.

6. Have actual SoTL data (especially on learning; maybe multi-method/measure). Do not submit s "I tried it, I liked it" or "I tried it, my students liked it" papers with no or anecdotal data.

7. SoTL is action, practioner, applied research. Spend time in the discussion section talking about how you have used the results and/or plan to use the results (specific changes and actions) to enhance student learning. Make application suggestions for readers. You would be amazed at how often this area is neglected in SoTL papers.

8. Remember you may have a multi-discipline audience for your SoTL work. Watch use of jargon. Draw on literature from other disciplines. Help reader learn from your results. Discuss applications generally. Suggest adaptations to other disciplines.

9. Be persistent. There are many good SoTL journals in which to publish your work.

10. And, of course, do all the important things you would do submitting any paper for review:

- Know the mission/type of work published in various outlets; select one the paper fits.
- Contact the editor to see whether paper is a fit to journal you are considering.
- Don't miss citing relevant literature published in the journal to which you are submitting.
- Let others read and comment then rewrite before you send it to journal reviewers.
- Give appropriate credit to work you build on or measures you borrow or theory you use.
- Carefully, carefully edit and proof read.
- Take reviewer suggestions seriously and do all that make good sense and are doable.
- When resubmit, include a letter to the editor and reviewers outlining all the changes you made and noting any they suggested that you did not make and why you did not.