

Module 4 - A Chemistry academic's perspective of SoTL

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Hi! My name is Daniel and I'm both a researching and teaching chemist.

Like most academics, what I love about my work is that I get to do both - I get to work at the cutting edge of my research area and, at the same time, to help inspire the next generation to find the same wonder in the sciences that I've found.

I thoroughly enjoyed teaching from the moment I first started, and like all of us, I naturally wanted to make my units better every time I teach them. From here, you might say that - like many people - I did things a bit backwards. I tried lots of different things to improve student learning and the whole experience, and some of them may even have been successful.

However, it's strange that as someone in research, spending a large amount of time buried in the scientific literature, I didn't stop to think that there might indeed be thousands of other people publishing their great ideas and research in the learning and teaching arena.

I was encouraged by my university to undertake a Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching, and it was here that I starting getting some real exposure to the learning and teaching literature. It is amazing to see some of the ideas that people have. It's also really interesting reading about the evolution of some methods of teaching. Who knew that before electronic student polling, some lecturers simply handed out coloured flash cards?! Easy!

Additionally, I personally found it very rewarding to read studies that explained the philosophy behind why things did and didn't work. Some publications set you to re-thinking the way you do things, while others help you better understand why you do the things you already do.

If you think that you have ideas about different ways of reaching your students, the literature can be useful in showing you how others have progressed in the area, or considerations that you may wish to take into account before launching your new endeavour.

In doing all of this, as a part of my Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching, my final research project was on the implementation and assessment of a simple means of increasing student engagement and knowledge retention, based on the typical behaviour of human memory. The simple approach that I've taken has been strongly supported and taken up by students, and successful in motivating students to study early and often during the semester. In fact, this year, I've had another academic discuss using my approach in their class.

I was encouraged by my university to use this learning and teaching research as grounds to apply for awards, and was successful in obtaining L&T awards at both a faculty and national level. Details of these awards, publication and teaching practice have also been a major component in a successful promotion application too. So, being encouraged to spend time with the learning and teaching literature has informed my teaching, caught my interest, benefited my university, been recognised, and best of all, helped my students!.

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