Impact of interdisciplinary communities of teachers on enhancing the scholarship of teaching and learning

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Background

An important aspect of making SoTL an integral part of a learning culture within universities is a sustainable change owned by the teachers[1]. Engaging teachers in SoTL, making SoTL an integral part of their approach to teaching, often means that they have to move beyond disciplinary research boundaries and get familiar with more social science research methods[2,3]. SoTL- communities, where teachers collaborate with colleagues, and peer review each other's projects, can be a driving force to support teachers in getting familiar with the approaches and methods of SoTL[2,3]. Within Utrecht University, until now, very few teachers are involved in SoTL, and no institutional support or teacher development programs involving SoTL are offered. This research describes the results of two pilots with interdisciplinary communities of teachers[2] who performed a SoTL-project.

Pilot 1

- Organised by the Teaching Academy Utrecht University (TAUU)
  TAUU is a network of teachers that meet online as well as face-to-face
- Voluntary basis
- SoTL projects of own choice
- One year (2016-2017)
- 15 participants, 6 faculties
  Five participants completed the programme
- 6 meetings of two hours
- Used book: Engaging in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning – Bishop-Clark and Dietz-Uhler (2012)
- Mainly (guided) peer discussion, some course elements (e.g. statistics, qualitative research)
- On request some participants received individual guidance from facilitator(s) or other experts
- Public final presentations (three participants) at a TAUU-meeting

Pilot 2

- Organised by the faculty of Science
  Project 'Community of Expertise: student-activating teaching methods in a blended environment'
- SoTL projects related to an IT-question
- Participants received 100 teaching hours (which some departments converted into € 5000,-)
- One and a half year (2016 – 2018)
- 11 participants faculty of Science, 5 different departments – All participants completed the programme
- 10 meetings of two hours, one introductory meeting of three hours (with diner)
- (Guided) peer discussion, good practice examples, course elements (e.g. qualitative research), workshop and guidance in making knowledge clips, presenting own work within course group
- Two to three individual meetings with facilitator(s)
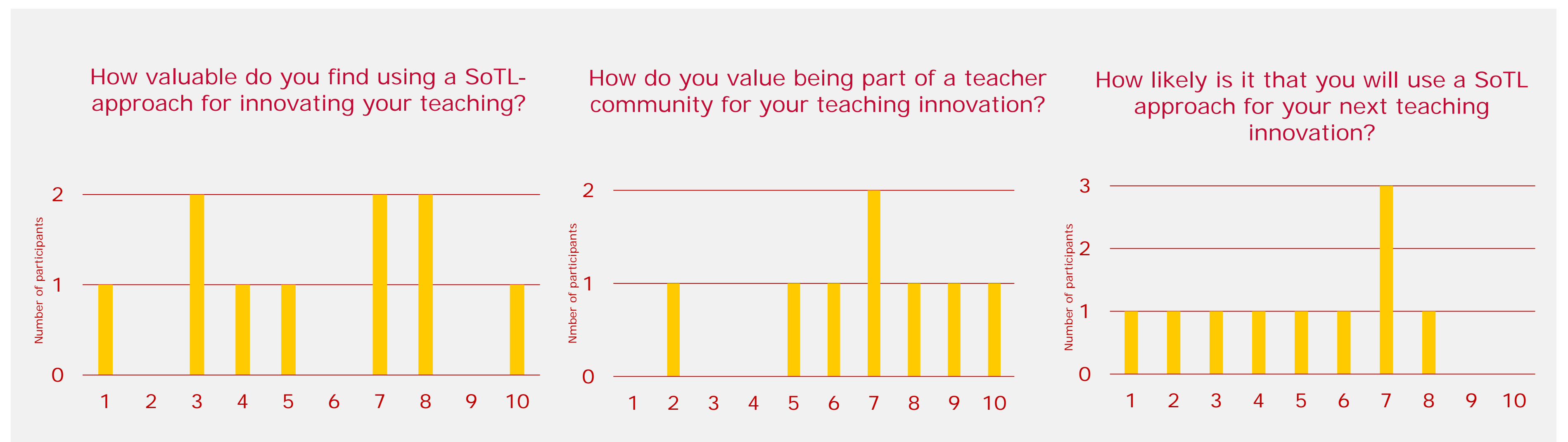- Public final presentations (posters) at education symposium faculty of Science

Method

Questionnaires

Participants of pilot received an online questionnaire at the end of their SoTL-project with questions about their views, behaviour and attitude towards SoTL.

Interviews

Three participants of pilot 1 and five participants of pilot 2 were interviewed. Online questionnaire for participants of pilot 1 who stopped with the course (three responses). The interviews were recorded and analysed for motivation, achieved goals, learned content, guidance, appreciation and tips for future courses.

How valuable do you find using a SoTL-approach for innovating your teaching?

How do you value being part of a teacher community for your teaching innovation?

How likely is it that you will use a SoTL approach for your next teaching innovation?

Conclusion

- **Combination of a community and individual guidance by experienced SoTL facilitators**
- **Community for sharing experiences, methods and building a network outside one's own department**
- **(Individual) guidance with theoretical part, research methods and focus of study**
- **Structured course with guided discussions, assignments and deadlines**
- **Encourage working together on (shared) projects in subgroups**
- **Support of the institute by providing dedicated time and finance for SoTL.**

How did you present and share your SoTL-project?

	Pilot 1 (n=3)	Pilot 2 (n=11)
Talk to other participants of the community	3	6
Talk to colleagues in the corridor	3	7
Talk to colleagues during meetings	1	7
Presentation at department	0	2
Presentation outside department	3	2
Presentation at conference	2	0
Publication in a peer-reviewed journal	1	0

SoTL

"This SoTL-programme has encouraged me to experiment with my teaching methods. I have lost the 'fear of the unknown'"

- Lack of theoretical knowledge and guidance (literature search, research, methods, dissemination)
- Need more structure, guidance and deadlines
- Projects too big, need more focus
- Difference SoTL-DBER unclear
- Time intensive

Community

"This programme has provided me with an extensive network of teachers with whom I can share valuable experiences in teaching"

- Drop-out participants - decreased motivation other participants
- Feeling 'alone' in executing project
- More 'Pizza-moments' – strengthen community
- Expected more interaction within community outside scheduled meetings

- Individual guidance by experts
- Good Practice Examples
- Final presentations
- Learned new research methods
- Stimulates (evidence based) thinking about teaching and set-up of teaching projects
- Interest teaching innovations increased

SoTL-programme

- Share experiences
- Learn from each other – different ways of teaching
- Building an (interdisciplinary) network with other teachers
- Being part of a community is infectious

Appreciation

"My manager just said: I have no interest in those teaching innovations of you" and "it will not support your career"

- Support: financial and time
- Management
- Colleagues
- Career perspectives

- Management
- Colleagues
- Students
- Self-esteem and pleasure in teaching

References

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3. Gibbs, G., Coffey, M. (2004) *The impact of training of university teachers on their teaching skills, their approach to teaching and the approach to learning of their students.* Active Learning in Higher Education 5(10): 87-100