Designing your SoTL Project

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* Please see the last box*, Ethics of SoTL Research*, for updates to this document specific to this activity.

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| **Research Question**  What are you curious about?  What would you like to know about strategies that might hinder and/or help students to learn, in your course?  Do you want to know if an activity, assignment, or teaching strategy “works?”  Do you have a question about how to help your students learn a particular skill?  I am curious about how to best help students achieve clear English pronunciation in an online environment. Our institution has developed many techniques and strategies for both in person and online environments, but I’m not aware of much research that supports or undermines the use of these techniques. The particular skill that I see some students struggle with the most is stress, particularly word/syllable stress, especially if their first language does not include stress. It impacts students’ ability to communicate, and it impacts their ability to understand spoken communication.  What technologies help EAL students (learn to) produce accurate syllable stress in an online environment? |
| **Identify challenge/outcome related to learning that is related to your question.**  Describe the learning in a way that suggests how you might *measure* it using either qualitative or quantitative methods.  I would like to use several different technologies to measure improved outcomes for producing word stress, especially among students who do not yet speak a language that includes word stress. For example, some technologies that our institution currently uses are: [Clear Pronunciation App](file:///C:\Users\User\Documents\PD\v), [H5P interactives](https://h5pstudio.ecampusontario.ca/?key=stress&h5ptype=&field_tags_target_id=&subject%5b%5d=138&author=&ocl=All), [123apps’ Voice Recorder](https://online-voice-recorder.com/). Students would be measured in their ability to produce appropriate word stress in phrases and/or sentences. This could be accomplished using existing testing materials such as recorded assignments and live presentations. |
| **Describe the instructional activity, assignment, or teaching strategy that will promote student learning on the outcome you identified.**  SoTL projects might investigate the impact of a *modification* to an existing strategy or assignment. Describe how the new approach differs from the old approach and why this modification might change student learning on this outcome.  When teaching syllable stress, we use a lot of listen and repeat and oral practice. If we used three different practice techniques – for example, using the three different technologies, above – we could measure the difference in achievement, if there was one. It would also be helpful to use a control, or a method without interactive feedback such as students recording sentences and the professor giving written/oral feedback.  Wouldn’t it be wonderful if all the methods of practice produced the same outcome? I’m really curious if any of the methods are superior to any other. |
| **Describe the evidence that would persuade an external audience that the new or modified teaching strategy improves student learning on the targeted learning outcome.**  Describe the evidence you would need to collect to answer questions about the impact or value of this teaching strategy. How would you convince others that this approach is better than other approaches? What comparisons should you make? Examine students’ skill before and after the assignment? Compare students who complete the learning activity to another group of students – what comparisons would be meaningful?  We do already include a diagnostic at the beginning of our courses, so we should be able to measure students’ baseline ability. Afterwards, if they all received the same instruction and in-class practice, but were given different technologies to use for homework, we could see any difference in the level of gains made by the different groups of students. In an ideal world, we would control for students who already speak a language with stress, and we could focus on students for whom the concept of stress is new. |
| **How and where would you publish, present, or disseminate this work?**  There are several conferences and workshop series that are appropriate for research into ESL pronunciation techniques. Possible conferences include [CALL](https://www.callontario.org/), [Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching Conference,](https://brocku.ca/psllt-2022/) [TESL Ontario Conference,](https://www.teslontario.org/conference/) and [TESL Webinars](https://www.teslontario.org/webinar-series/upcoming-webinars). |
| **Ethics of SoTL Research**  Professors at our institution have discretion on the kinds of activities assigned to students as homework. In addition, the four practice techniques described above are already being utilized in our classrooms, so there should not be an issue of students given varying levels of quality of education.  Students must be informed of the nature of the study, and be assured of their anonymity when participating. They must be allowed to opt in or out of it without penalty. As the study involves ESL students, the explanation and consent must be clear, to the point, and simple. In addition, students should be provided with a mechanism for withdrawing consent at any time.  The consent that students provide will be kept and a copy of it provided to the participants. |

Adapted from: C. J. Stanny, E. M. El-Sheikh, & H-M. Chung (2009) ***Getting Started with a SoTL Project***

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