Plan for a SoTL Project

by Susan Wilks

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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 what post-graduation supports for Indigenous Language Teachers in the public school system would improve retention rates beyond the first few years of service. I would like to know which post-graduation strategies are most effective in retaining teachers in the early years of service. I would also like to know if there are further supports we can provide as a Post-Secondary Institution to facilitate professional longevity for our graduates.  The shortage of Indigenous teachers in the schools of our province and country is well documented. Initiatives are currently in place to address this shortage by providing culturally relevant teacher training programs to potential candidates. As important as this is, it is also important to ensure that Indigenous teachers have the ongoing support they need in their early years of service. Many of the few Indigenous teachers that enter the public school system remain beyond their first two or three years of service. Not only must we attract new teachers to the system, we must also ensure retention. |
| **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.  The challenge here is that there is a shortage of Indigenous Language Teachers across Canada. Beyond initial teacher training, many language teachers are isolated and working without the necessary support.  This question of which post-secondary supports are most effective in teacher retention could be pursued using mixed-methods approach, incorporating both a qualitative and a quantitative approach. Tracking of graduates working in the field could identify the number of Indigenous grads still teaching one, two, three, four or five years after entering the field. Qualitative data could be provided by the grads in terms of the types of supports they have accessed, the ones they found most beneficial, and identify any gaps – supports they wish they would have had.  Ethical consideration include prior informed consent and confidentiality, data security, and ethics review by our Institution. Participants would review data prior to finalization, and understand that they can withdraw their consent to participate at any time. |
| **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.  Conducting a long-term study of graduates of our program to determine the factors that lead to longevity, or, conversely, lack of longevity in the field would provide us with the opportunities to develop and/or refine the post-graduation supports we, and others, offer.  Step 1 – Define the purpose and objectives of the survey. Identify target audience (alumni)  Step 2 – Choose the survey method – take into consider Indigenous ways of knowing and relating. Virtual interviews, F2Finterviews, phone calls, online tools, participants should have a choice.  Step 3 – Develop the survey questions  Step 4 – Pre-test the survey in house, revise as necessary  Step 5 – Conduct the survey, collect responses  Step 6 – Analyze the data, interpret the findings  Step 7 – Act on the insights gained from the survey responses  Throughout – maintain ethical standards. Protect participants’ privacy, obtain informed consent. We will ensure that the survey is conducted under the Indigenous Research Ethics Guidelines of our Institute. Ethical consideration include prior informed consent and confidentiality, data security, and ethics review by our Institution. Participants would review data prior to finalization, and understand that they can withdraw their consent to participate at any time.  Step 8 – Reflect on the process. Identify strengths, areas for improvement in the future. |
| **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?  Evidence that would persuade an external audience, such as funders, accreditation boards, regulatory bodies, etc., could include personal testimonials and first-person accounts from our graduates. Completed surveys and questionnaires could also be used. Combining data from both qualitative and quantitative sources will provide credibility to the research information. All data gathered will be completely anonymous. All identifying markers will be deleted prior to dissemination of results. |
| **How and where would you publish, present, or disseminate this work?**  We could share this information with our department, with our Professional Learning Community, with the Indigenous Leads in District School Boards, and with Teacher Unions. It could be shared in Indigenous Teaching & Learning conferences and also with relevant regulatory bodies. Sharing could be done through data-driven presentations.  To begin with, I would share the results of this project with the participants, then with our department, and then with the whole stand-alone team. We would take time to discuss the results, reflect on the ramifications, and plan for research based next steps. Once we had the next steps identified, we could share with the rest of the institute, our partner institutes, the College of Teachers, district school boards and the relevant teachers unions, if applicable. In short, we would start sharing in a small circle, and gradually expand the circle through the dissemination process. |

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

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