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## **Introduction**

In an increasingly interconnected world, fostering intercultural competence is essential for both personal growth and professional effectiveness. The Fulbright-Hays Spanish Language Program, with its immersive approach, aims to transform participants into interculturally competent individuals.

This blog delves into a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) group study with a specific focus on intentional pedagogical practices in an intensive language and culture project in Costa Rica. By examining the experiences and reflections of participants, this study seeks to understand how such immersive programs enhance interactions across cultures and disciplines.

## **Reflection**

Reflecting on the semester-long small group collaboration focusing on the SoTL, it was evident that the diversity of disciplinary perspectives enriched our collective work. Each member brought a unique academic background, from education to the natural sciences. This interdisciplinary nature encouraged us to approach teaching and learning from various angles, enabling a broader understanding of how students engage with content across different fields. Discussions were particularly vibrant when we explored how our disciplines addressed similar educational challenges, such as student motivation or curriculum design, but used different methodologies to approach solutions.

Throughout the project, the blend of perspectives led to transformative insights. For instance, those from data-driven fields emphasized the importance of empirical evidence and quantitative analysis in understanding student outcomes, while I stressed the significance of narrative and qualitative research to capture the depth of the learning experience. The interdisciplinary dialogue allowed us to bridge these approaches, culminating in a comprehensive understanding of SoTL. This synergy highlighted the value of transdisciplinary teaching, where blending multiple perspectives can create innovative strategies for fostering student learning.

The collaborative process itself ultimately strengthened our research projects. Differences in terminology and research priorities required ongoing negotiation and open communication to ensure mutual understanding. However, these conversations helped us to develop a shared framework that respected each discipline's contributions. By the end of the semester, we had created a SoTL project that reflected the strengths of each field, while collectively advancing our understanding of effective teaching and learning practices across disciplines. This collaboration affirmed the power of interdisciplinary work in research and its potential to enrich both scholarship and pedagogy.

### **SoTL Definition**

The SoTL is an evidence-based approach to understanding and improving educational practices through systematic inquiry. It involves educators studying their own teaching methods and student learning outcomes in order to refine pedagogical strategies and share findings with the broader academic community (Boyer, 1990). SoTL integrates both reflective and empirical research methods to assess the impact of teaching, with the goal of enhancing the learning experience across disciplines. This systematic study allows educators to base their instructional improvements on data, rather than intuition alone, thereby elevating teaching to the level of scholarly practice (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999).

**Related Grand Principle #3** *Understand and improve the complex process of learning (“Learning is a holistic experience involving [multiple cognitive and social] processes.”*

The third grand principle of SoTL, as related to intercultural competence, is the commitment to fostering inclusive learning environments. This involves actively incorporating and respecting diverse cultural perspectives, enabling students to engage meaningfully across cultural boundaries, and promoting the development of global citizens. This principle underscores the role of educators in integrating intercultural understanding into their teaching practices, ensuring that students from all backgrounds feel valued and supported in their learning journey. Through this approach, SoTL research aims to explore and enhance the impact of culturally responsive pedagogies on student engagement and success.

SoTL is inherently collaborative, drawing on the experiences and expertise of multiple disciplines to enrich its findings. Faculty members from various fields contribute diverse methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks, allowing SoTL research to be both rigorous and flexible in addressing educational

challenges (Felten, 2013). By combining quantitative and qualitative research, SoTL captures measurable learning outcomes and delves into the complexities of student engagement, motivation, and cognitive development. The interdisciplinary nature of SoTL fosters a holistic understanding of teaching and learning, which is particularly beneficial in transdisciplinary settings where diverse educational contexts and content areas intersect.

SoTL emphasizes the importance of sharing findings with the academic community for peer review and application in various educational settings. The dissemination of SoTL research contributes to the broader knowledge base of effective teaching practices and helps inform institutional policy and curriculum development (McKinney, 2007). This communal approach underscores SoTL's role in advancing teaching as a scholarly and reflective practice, encouraging continuous improvement and innovation across the educational landscape. In this way, SoTL serves as a vital tool for fostering educational transformation and developing effective learning environments.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. In what ways could I further promote intercultural competence within learning communities?
2. What specific methods or strategies from SoTL can I apply to assess and enhance intercultural competence? How can I adapt these strategies to create a more inclusive and globally minded learning environment?
3. In what ways has collaboration with colleagues from different disciplines influenced my understanding of intercultural competence and its role in fostering student engagement and learning? How can I continue to integrate interdisciplinary insights into my teaching and SoTL research?

### **Suggestions**

#### **Fostering intercultural competence within the framework of SoTL**

1. *Incorporate Diverse Perspectives into Curriculum Design:* Develop course content that reflects a wide range of cultural viewpoints and experiences. This approach can help students engage with global issues and perspectives, promoting a deeper understanding of intercultural competence as a core learning outcome.
2. *Use Reflective Practices to Assess Cultural Assumptions:* Encourage students to reflect on their own cultural assumptions through assignments, discussions, and projects. These reflective exercises can be paired with pre-

and post-assessments, such as the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), to track growth in intercultural competence.

3. *Collaborate Across Disciplines for a Holistic Approach*: Engage in interdisciplinary collaboration with colleagues from fields like anthropology, language studies, and sociology to integrate diverse research methods and teaching strategies. This collaboration can enrich SoTL research by exploring the intersection of intercultural competence and effective teaching practices across different subject areas.
4. *Create Culturally Responsive Learning Environments*: Foster an inclusive learning environment by using culturally relevant teaching strategies and being mindful of the diverse cultural backgrounds of students. Providing opportunities for students to share cultural experiences can lead to more meaningful engagement and build their intercultural skills.

## References

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