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Catching the SoTL Bug: An Interview with Librarian Lauren Hays

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CATCHING THE

WHEN, IN FALL 2017, I DECIDED TO UP MY LIBRARIAN GAME AND ESTABLISH A PROFESSIONAL TWITTER ACCOUNT, ONE OF THE FIRST PEOPLE I STARTED FOLLOWING WAS MY FORMER MLS PROFESSOR, LAUREN HAYS. I QUICKLY GATHERED FROM HER TWEETS THAT SHE WAS DEEPLY INVOLVED WITH A MYSTERIOUS ACRONYMIC PURSUIT: THAT OF SoTL. THIS CAUGHT MY

ATTENTION AND I THOUGHT,

I SHOULDN'T JUST LIKE HER TWEETS AND FOLLOW HER LINKS, I SHOULD TALK TO HER ABOUT SoTL.

LAUREN WAS BUSY WRAPPING UP HER DISSERTATION WHEN I REACHED OUT TO HER, BUT SHE KINDLY TOOK THE TIME TO SPEAK WITH ME AND IMPART HER WISDOM.

SOTL BUG

AN INTERVIEW WITH LIBRARIAN LAUREN HAYS

INTERVIEW BY KELLY HANGAUER



LAUREN HAYS Ph.D. is the Instructional and Research Librarian at MidAmerica Nazarene University in Olathe, KS. She co-presented on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) at Library Instruction West, 2016, and was the 2017 speaker on SoTL for the Association of College and Research Libraries' Student Learning and Information Literacy Committee's Midwinter Discussion. Currently, she is co-editing a book on SoTL for academic librarians. Her professional interests include teaching, SoTL, information literacy, educational technology, Library and Information Science education, teacher identity, and faculty development. On a personal note, she loves dogs, traveling, and home.

This conversation took place on Friday, February 23, 2018 at 9:00 am PDT and has been edited for clarity.

Hi Lauren, thank you for being here. Why don't you go ahead and introduce yourself.

Certainly. Well, as you know, I am Lauren Hays and I work full time as the instruction and research librarian at MidAmerica Nazarene University. I am finishing up a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and should graduate this coming May. So I am really excited about that. My primary areas of research have been around the scholarship of teaching and learning and that is what my doctoral research is on. I am specifically looking at academic instruction librarians' involvement in the scholarship of teaching and learning, and how it affects their teacher identity as well as their instructional strategies. So the scholarship of teaching and learning has been an interest of mine for many years now, and I have really enjoyed digging into it more in this doctoral program.

That's awesome. It's perfect because I am a new academic librarian and I've been doing a lot more instruction, and so a lot of these things are new to me. Coming into it last semester, I didn't have much of a background in issues of pedagogy and active learning techniques—I had experience with it, but I didn't understand it on a theoretical level. And so now at Humboldt State, where I work, there is a new journal, as you are aware, the *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and*

Innovative Pedagogy, and this conversation is meant to contribute to that.

I want to get your perspective on what you have found as far as the relationship between academic librarians and how SoTL can influence their teaching—or how it *has* influenced their teaching. I mean, are there already examples of that?

Yeah—so let me back up a little bit and set the stage for this answer. So you mentioned that just coming in as a new academic librarian, you didn't have a lot of theoretical grounding in pedagogy or—and I don't want to speak too much, or speak too strongly about this—but you didn't have a lot of experience or understanding of how to teach. Is that correct?

Right, yes—just from a little bit of experience, but not actually studying it.

Certainly. And so, while I think that Library and Information Science programs have gotten a lot better in the last decade or two with more emphasis on teaching, there are certainly examples of how that is not happening enough and there is more room for growth. And I think you speak to the need for continued growth, because instruction is so much of what we do as academic librarians. Even if we are not standing up in front of a classroom, which I'll say a lot of us do—whether it's in a one-shot instruction session, or maybe we're working with a class a bit longer—we are still teaching when we are working individually with students at the reference desk and when they're coming into our office asking questions. And so I think

it's really important that we understand pedagogy.

My undergraduate degree is in Education and so I had a pretty good understanding and feel for teaching when I started working as an academic librarian. I was really just passionate about teaching and education in general. I knew about educational psychology, and I knew that there was a lot of research that happened in that area in Higher Ed—but I then realized that there was also this whole world of the scholarship of teaching and learning where faculty members study the teaching and learning that's occurring in their own classrooms, and look at it from their own disciplinary expertise, which I think is really interesting.

I also think this is really helpful for librarians who might not have that education background; that they know that they can delve into teaching and learning, instruction, and readings from a librarian perspective.

So back to your question about how the scholarship of teaching and learning is impacting academic instruction librarians. I am still working on the last little bit of analyzing my data—I am really close to being done, but still working on it. But to give you a preview of what will be coming in that dissertation,

the scholarship of teaching and learning does certainly seem to impact academic instruction librarians in their teaching, particularly in the areas of active learning. Not so much in their use of technology or assessment, but in the way they interact, and in their attitude towards thinking they can get better, and wanting to get better. I feel like the scholarship of teaching and learning has an impact most on, again, just their attitude. They want to improve more because they realize they can, and there are new ways that they weren't aware of before that can help in a class setting.

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So do you feel like the premise of SoTL is to offer practical techniques, or practical advice, in teaching and learning? Is that what differentiates it from other that would cover

journals similar topics?

There's a lot of discussion in the SoTL field about its purpose and its goals, and so I don't want to speak too narrowly about its purpose.

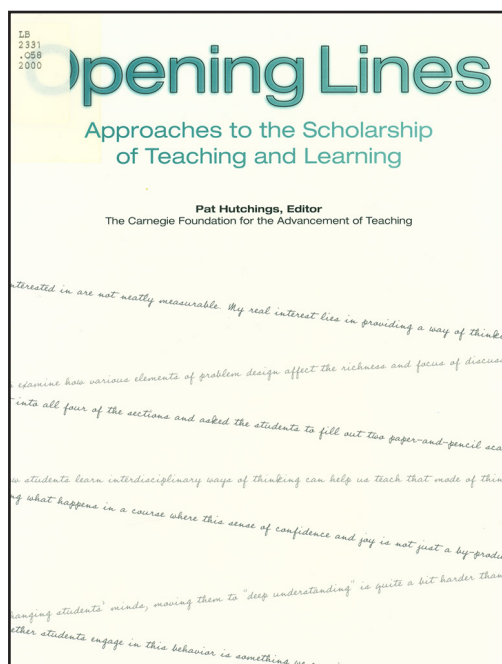
Sure.

But I will say that there is a lot of room for practical advice that can be learned from conducting a SoTL study. And I know a lot of SoTL studies that I read practically impact what I do. In many ways, I think it's good to

think about it as praxis—the reflection and the theory impacting our practice of teaching. I think praxis is really important for all of us as educators—that we engage in praxis and in being reflective practitioners.

And SoTL really helps me think about that, because the way the framework—and I'm thinking about Pat Hutchings' work—she has four questions. I feel like every time I talk about SoTL, I am always referring back to her four questions. There are certainly other ones, O'Brien's compass for example, which I find really helpful as well. But it helps me think about what's happening in the classroom and what I'm curious about, and gives me some frameworks for organizing questions I have about what's happening in my own teaching, and in my students' learning.

And so Pat Hutchings is someone who is influential in the field?



Certainly, yes. Pat Hutchings wrote a book called *Opening Lines*—I have it in my office here—where she introduced a taxonomy of four questions that you could ask about teaching and learning in your classroom.

I'll have to check it out! You mentioned collecting data in your own research, and I was wondering if you could share more about it. You might be publishing it later and so you probably don't want to divulge too much—

Well, I certainly hope to be able to publish it, but I am okay sharing some of the basics of what I've learned. So, as I mentioned earlier, I am completing a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership. It was an explanatory sequential mixed-methods study where I surveyed academic instruction librarians to get a better understanding of their involvement, even who is involved, in the scholarship of teaching and learning—how many academic librarians would say that they have some involvement in this. And then I followed up that survey with interviews of seven academic instruction librarians to delve deeper and to help explain those quantitative survey results. I was specifically looking at the reasons academic librarians are involved in SoTL, the impact of SoTL on academic instruction librarian teacher identities, and then the impact of SoTL on the instructional practices of, again, academic instruction librarians.

So that's what I am finishing up right now. I am working with a librarian, Lindsay McNiff. She works at Dalhousie University, and she and I recently had an article published in *Communications in Information Literacy*. It was about teaching SoTL, introducing LIS students to SoTL. It was a lot

of fun working with her, and we had such a good working relationship that we are planning to conduct a SoTL study this fall with some masters of library science students.

You're doing exciting work it sounds like.

Yeah, I really enjoy it! It's fun for me, I find it exciting and just really like everything that I get to do. And one thing I feel like I should also say about this is that a group of us who were at the International Society for the Scholarship for Teaching and Learning Conference back in October in Canada met together and were talking about ways that we could connect information literacy more with the scholarship of teaching and learning. Recently we had an information literacy special interest group approved by the ISSoTL board—ISSoTL is the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. And so ISSoTL now has a special interest group on information literacy within their organization.

So SoTL started off as something that was not necessarily meant for librarians, right? Or is it a librarian creation?

No, it really has its roots in the work of Ernest Boyer. He wrote a book called *Scholarship Reconsidered*. I think it was in 1990 that it was published—maybe it was '91, but I believe it was 1990—about areas of scholarship for faculty. The scholarship of teaching was one of the four areas that he proposed. Out of that, the scholarship of teaching grew

- **“What works?”**: These are questions that seek “evidence about the relative effectiveness of different [teaching] approaches.”
- **“What is?”**: These are questions that seek to describe, but not evaluate the effectiveness of, different teaching approaches. These are also questions that seek to describe how students learn.
- **“Visions of the possible”**: These are questions related to goals for teaching and learning that have yet to be met or are new to the faculty member asking the questions.
- **“Theory building”** questions: These are questions designed to build theoretical frameworks for SoTL similar to frameworks used in other disciplines.

into the scholarship of teaching and learning with the work of CASTL out of the Carnegie Academy¹. There's a lot of work that grew out of that group led by Lee Shulman and some other core individuals. And so SoTL has really grown as this area of research and study in academia broadly. I would say that librarians haven't been as quick to jump into it as other fields in higher education.

My first real introduction to the scholarship of teaching and learning was made by Margy MacMillan², and she is fantastic. At the time she worked at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Canada. We got to know each other online before we met at an ACRL Conference for the very first time, the one in Portland, and she was my first introduction to SoTL. Her enthusiasm for it was contagious.

And so I feel like I kind of caught the SoTL bug from her. Then she and I teamed up on a conference presentation at Library Instruction West a few years ago. From there I feel like I just can't get enough – I just get

¹ <http://archive.carnegiefoundation.org/scholarship-teaching-learning>

² <http://www.projectinfolit.org/margy-macmillan.html>

³ Image retrieved from <https://my.vanderbilt.edu/sotl/doing-sotl/getting-started/>

really excited about every opportunity I can get to think more about connecting SoTL with librarianship and information literacy, and just everything that we do. I think there are a lot of good synergies there that can be further explored.

And do you feel like the future of academic librarianship is—I mean, it's already established that instruction is a big part of it, but do you feel like it will be even more so ten years from now?

Predicting the future is hard—

Well, that's why we are here. We are here to predict the future.

[Laughs]

You know, I would love to see that. I would love to see the scholarship of teaching and learning

grow in librarianship because I think that it is a really good fit. I'll only speak for what I do, but in many ways, I feel like some of my job—I certainly still teach information literacy and work a lot with students—but I also have found myself in the past few years working a lot more directly with faculty. I have been working to help them think about ways to embed information literacy into their curriculum, and helping them think about

ways to use library resources more effectively in their curriculum. I sit on the faculty development committee at my university and so that's part of how that connection has been made.

But overall, I am only one person and we are a small school. We have four librarians, and I can't work with all the students on campus. And so I found that I am in some ways more effective when I am working more with faculty to help them think through using some of what we can offer in the library. Be-

cause of that, I often find myself, or see myself, in the role of an educational developer or, certainly still a librarian—I own that identity and like it—but I see a lot of adjacencies between what Centers for Teaching and Learning

do and what librarians do. There are many types of librarians and so this might not be as good of a fit for librarians who work in other areas, but for me, when I am focused on instruction and research—again, that Center for Teaching and Learning connection—that educational developer connection makes a lot of sense to me and seems to work really well with how I work with the faculty and students at my institution. If other librarians are experiencing some of the same things

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that I am—and I won't speak for them—but if they are, I think SoTL is a really good fit and connection to what we do.

So it's a way to connect librarians with other faculty in the university?

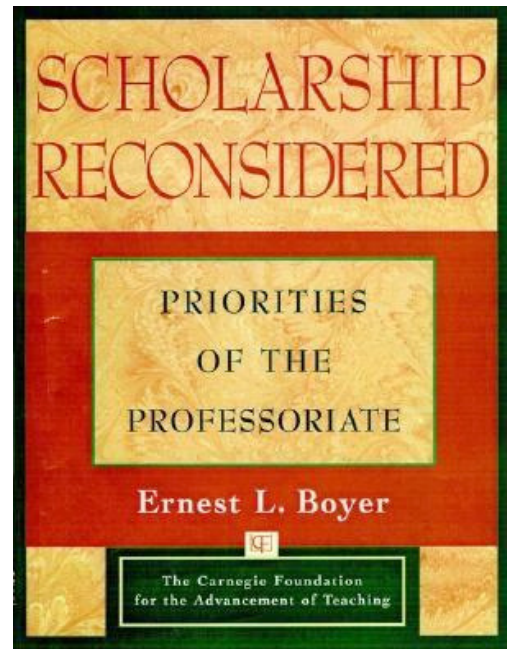
Certainly. And also that librarians can take the lead in their own research in teaching and learning. I think SoTL is excellent for partnerships, I also think it's excellent for individual studies. Even just reading the teaching and learning literature to get a better sense of what are some—I don't really like the term best practices, but maybe for a lack of a better term off the top of my head—what are some best practices or—

Why do you not like that term?

I think the reason I don't like the term best practices is—I might regret saying this, but I don't think I will—is that—

[laughs]

—because I have said it before. I think it implies, at least, that there are certain things that are always going to work. Certainly there are some strategies that will work more often than others. I think active learning, relationship building between students and faculty, peer-to-peer interaction, and experiential learning—all of those things are incredibly important and do work well and could be considered best practices. But I also tend to think that each student population is different, and we really need to understand our students to know what will be best in that setting. I also think there are some disci-



plinary differences in how we teach, so I am certainly not going to teach nursing students about evidence-based practice the same way I might approach a history course where we need to think about primary sources in an archive. I am going to use some different teaching strategies in those class settings just because of the disciplinary nature. I just think that using the term best practices implies something that is a little too generic.

I'm sold—I won't use best practices anymore.

You certainly can, I am not trying to change anyone here, but I've just tried to avoid using that term in my own conversations lately.

Is there a connection between SoTL and open access?

I would definitely say so. I think there's probably a lot of room in the literature for

studies on open pedagogy—the use of open educational resources in teaching and learning. That’s not something that I’ve done a lot of research on, so I can’t say—and when I say research, I mean literature research. I don’t know how many studies or articles have been written on that, but I certainly imagine there is room in the literature still for comments on that. I know there is one librarian who had a poster presentation at the ISSoTL on OER, and so I know he’s been doing some work in that. His name is Erik Christiansen⁴ and he works at Mount Royal University. They do great work in Canada.

Yeah, they do.

Especially around the scholarship of teaching and learning. And so he might honestly have—

Why is that? Why are they so on top of this?

I am not Canadian, as you know, and I don’t really know enough about their higher education system to know why they have such a focus on the scholarship of teaching and learning. But they just do an excellent job.

Right on. Well, are there any other comments you would like to make?

I guess maybe one thing I’ll just add is that, as I said earlier, I really enjoy talking about the scholarship of teaching and learning and thinking about how it can look in librarianship and information literacy in particular. Even as you mentioned, there are other areas of librarianship, like OER, where I think

there could be some good work done. I am really interested in connecting those two and I am very open to having conversations with people and brainstorming ideas for new projects. I guess what I’m saying is this is an open invitation for future conversations with anybody you might share this with.

Great! Well, I appreciate you taking time to talk about SoTL and your work with it. Sounds like you are doing an awesome job, so keep it up. Also, looks like the end is in sight for your dissertation.

Yeah, my defense is April 3rd, so it is right around the corner.

Wow, I look forward to reading what you publish. Well thank you so much, Lauren. This has been a fantastic conversation and I appreciate you doing this.

Thank you! ■

Some recommended SoTL journals from Lauren Hays:

- *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning*
- *Journal on Excellence for College Teaching*
- *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*
- *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*
- *Teaching in Higher Education*

⁴ http://library.mtroyal.ca/prf.php?account_id=109305

PARTING THOUGHTS

BY
KELLY
HANGAUER



MY CONVERSATION with Lauren opened my eyes to not only the history and mission of SoTL, but also the opportunities for education and collaboration inherent in the SoTL platform. For new instruction librarians without an education background, like myself, SoTL provides numerous opportunities to explore pedagogies, active learning techniques, and methods of assessment. And, what's more, SoTL keeps it fresh by staying relevant to today's learners and exposing librarians to new experimental techniques. I feel that I would have benefitted from learning about SoTL during library school, and it is encouraging to hear that Lauren and Lindsay McNiff are striving to make this happen

I also appreciate how SoTL invites collaboration. When so much of our work as librarians is centered around relationship-building with teaching faculty, it is incredibly beneficial to have a sense of what our colleagues are teaching, and how they are teaching it. This awareness is beneficial for any liaison librarian, and helps foster productive conversation and partnerships. As librarians, we can utilize SoTL to encourage teaching faculty to try something new, reflect on their teaching, and publish their findings through an open source channel. Furthermore, SoTL encourages teaching librarians to come together and discuss all things information literacy. Judging by Lauren's enthusiasm for the professional connections she has made, the SoTL community seems like an exciting one to join!