

# The Grounded Instruction Librarian: Participating in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, edited by Mallon, Melissa, Lauren Hays, Cara Bradley, Rhonda Huisman, and Jackie Belanger

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## Book Review: *The Grounded Instruction Librarian: Participating in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*

Mallon, Melissa, Lauren Hays, Cara Bradley, Rhonda Huisman, and Jackie Belanger, eds. *The Grounded Instruction Librarian: Participating in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2019, 356pp, \$76.00

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*The Grounded Instruction Librarian: Participating in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* was designed to “explicitly [recognize] the deep connections between the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and the scholarly work of librarians” (ix). At its heart, the book encourages librarians to engage in SoTL while simultaneously validating our right to contribute to the SoTL field. An explicit invitation is prudent considering the complex relationship between librarianship and teaching; many academic librarians are not recognized as teachers by other instructional faculty, not sufficiently trained to teach, and not comfortable embracing teaching as part of their professional identity. All the book’s contributors are academic librarians with backgrounds that fit squarely under the SoTL umbrella (e.g., assessment, teaching practices, learning outcomes, and instructional design).

In defining SoTL as a discipline, the book borrows a definition from the Mokakiiks Centre for SoTL at Mount Royal University: SoTL is “original research and scholarship about teaching and learning practice specifically in the context of higher education” (xiii). Although the book’s scope is SoTL in academic libraries, it still gives a clear description of the current state of the SoTL field. Perhaps the most pressing issue is the multidisciplinary nature of SoTL. A significant amount of research that could now be classified as SoTL traditionally comes from other disciplines (e.g., education, psychology), and this impacts the coherency of SoTL as an emerging field (especially around theoretical foundations). Researchers have either used a theoretical framework from their home discipline or commandeered a theoretical

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framework from a discipline in which they were not enculturated. For many SoTL scholars, the challenge becomes merging these distinct voices into a coherent and unique discipline that is recognizable as such from the outside.

The book considers SoTL from four angles: pedagogical content knowledge and signature pedagogy, theory, research, and professional development. Although the editors welcomed submissions from North America and Europe, authors from the United States of America are by far the loudest voice. Each section includes an introductory chapter explaining key concepts and themes followed by chapters exemplifying SoTL in practice. Although the editors refer to these practical chapters as *case studies*, they do not have a standardized structure; instead, they are a mixed collection of essays, critical reflections, and local cases of SoTL in practice. The research and professional development sections make up the bulk of the book. The section on theory is the least cohesive, which is unsurprising considering the multidisciplinary nature of SoTL. The section on pedagogical content knowledge and signature pedagogies introduces critical questions about the nature of information literacy as either a separate discipline or cross-disciplinary behaviour. The answers to these questions will impact our ability to match “*what* is being taught and *how* it is being taught” (10, emphasis in text). Finally, despite a foundational chapter that touches on a variety of ways in which SoTL can enhance professional development, the case studies almost exclusively explore collaboration as a method for growth.

The book touches on a variety of topics being considered both within and beyond the academic library context. All chapters include well-developed bibliographies, and the concluding chapter offers a recommended reading list. The book will serve novice SoTL scholars best; the foundational chapters provide an excellent introduction to the current state of SoTL as a discipline. Because the field is inherently multidisciplinary, authors borrowed material from outside the LIS field, providing a much more realistic representation of the discipline. Additionally, the book consistently prompts critical reflection that will benefit both early career and established librarians. Librarians will appreciate that the book is predominantly focused on teaching information literacy and references the newest Association of College & Research Libraries' *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*.

Considering the multidisciplinary nature of SoTL research, the book is surprisingly unified. In some ways, overly so. There is substantial uptake of O'Brien's SoTL Compass (2008) in the case studies. The editors are aware that her work dominates (they mention it specifically) and claim that “there is overlap among the sections in terms of many key themes and discussion of foundational work in SoTL,” but they argue that “each section engages SoTL through a different lens and provides readers with a sense of the varied ways SoTL is currently being ‘done’ in

academic libraries” (xiv). It is unclear if the editors intentionally chose submissions that referenced O’Brien’s work, or if O’Brien’s work simply dominates SoTL thinking in the LIS field. Seminal work or not, the underlying message seems to be that O’Brien’s Compass is either the only way, or the preferred way, that SoTL is being done in academic libraries. I do not think the editors were successful in showcasing the variety of theoretical foundations and methodological choices possible in SoTL research. I am also aware that this may not be for lack of trying. I think that in this case, the narrow scope (i.e., SoTL in academic libraries) did not allow the editors to do justice to the true variety of lenses and methodologies available to SoTL researchers.

#### REFERENCES

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