The Learning Curve

Episode 1: The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning with Dr. Elif Gokbel

Presented by the Academic Commons

[00;00;00;01 - 00;00;13;09] **Jacob Santos:**

 Welcome to The Learning Curve, a podcast hosted by the Academic Commons.

 [00;00;13;11 - 00;00;27;05] **Jacob Santos:**

Your hosts for today are Demi and Jacob. I am Jacob, I am an instructional designer here at Thomas Jefferson University. I transitioned out of K-Through-12 teaching into instructional design, and I'll let my co-host Demi introduce herself.

[00;00;27;08 - 00;00;39;18] **Demi Harte:**

And I'm Demi, also an instructional designer, and I have a background in arts and creative digital media. And yeah, excited to co-host with Jacob for this first episode.

[00;00;39;21 - 00;01;07;22] **Jacob Santos:**

We are very excited to be recording our first official podcast episode. Our mission is to illuminate higher education, teaching and learning through the power of shared experiences and research from informed practices through engaging discussions and expert insights. We aim to empower educators to transform their teaching practices, enrich student learning experiences, and contribute to a culture of evidence based pedagogy and higher education

 [00;01;07;24 - 00;01;30;28] **Demi Harte**

And in our first episode, we are talking specifically about the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning or SoTl or if you want to say the acronym SoTL. SoTLis a growing field in higher education which uses systematic inquiry in teaching practices and learning experiences. It aims to improve student learning by finding better and more engaging ways to teach.

[00;01;30;28 - 00;02;00;20] **Jacob Santos:**

Our guest for today's episode is Elif Gokbel, who joins us as an experienced instructional designer with the Academic Commons at Thomas Jefferson University. Elif has been actively working to enhance the quality of education through thoughtful course design and the integration of innovative teaching methods. Her work spans online and hybrid learning, learning analytics and student engagement, with a particular focus on how technology can be effectively woven into the fabric of teaching and learning.

[00;02;00;22 - 00;02;27;00] **Jacob Santos:**

Elif's academic journey began in Turkey, where she earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics. She then continued her studies in the United States, earning a master's degree in secondary math education and a doctorate in instructional technology and leadership. This strong foundation in both mathematics and instructional technology has uniquely positioned her to contribute to the scholarship of teaching and learning, where she consistently seeks to improve educational practices.

[00;02;27;03 - 00;02;28;14] **Jacob Santos:**

Welcome, Elif!

[00;02;28;17 - 00;02;35;27] **Elif Gokbel:**

 Well, thank you so much for having me and congrats on launching this great initiative.

[00;02;36;00 - 00;02;46;11] **Demi Harte:**

Yeah, thank you for joining us. Can you just tell us a little bit about yourself, your academic pursuits and your role here at Thomas Jefferson University?

 [00;02;46;14 - 00;03;24;19] **Elif Gokbel:**

Oh, yes. Sure. So my name is Elif Gokbel. I am an instructional designer with the Academic Commons at Thomas Jefferson University for about three years now. I focus on multiple instructional design areas in my role. These include course design, online and hybrid learning, learning analytics, technology integration, and finally psychology, both teaching and learning. I have a bachelors degree in math, a master's degree in secondary education, and a doctorate in instructional technology and leadership from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

[00;03;24;21 - 00;03;43;29] **Elif Gokbel:**

My background in both math and instructional design has allowed me to contribute to the scholarship, both teaching and learning field, for a long time now. Before Jefferson, I was at Coastal Carolina University, where I worked as an instructional designer for another two years.

[00;03;44;02 - 00;04;05;22] **Demi Harte:**

Awesome. Thank you for agreeing to be our first guest. So this is very exciting. And, we're just going to jump into the questions because we have quite a few for you. And so our first question, keep it simple is can you explain what SoTL is and why is it important in higher education?

[00;04;05;25 - 00;04;32;27] **Elif Gokbel:**

SoTL stands for Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and basically it is about being thoughtful and research driven in how we teach. So it is not just about what content we cover. What we teach our students in that class session, but how we deliver the content to our students and how well our students are actually learning what we are teaching.

[00;04;32;29 - 00;05;07;05] **Elif Gokbel:**

So in SoTL we look at, our teaching methods and study their effect. This might involve trying, new ways to engage students or maybe seeing how different groups of students respond to the same material, same lesson you are teaching. The really big idea is to gather real evidence that can help us improve our teaching strategies. For me personally, SoTL is about always being curious.

[00;05;07;07 - 00;05;31;22] **Elif Gokbel:**

In our teaching practices, asking questions like how can I make this class session better? How can I do this better as a teacher? And then seeking out the answers through research, going out by talking with your colleagues, learning from others. It's about growing as an instructor, as a teacher, to give our students the best learning experience possible.

[00;05;31;23 - 00;05;56;04] **Elif Gokbel:**

And I'm going to move to the second part of your question here, where we need to talk about the importance of SoTL in higher education. SoTL is really important in higher education because it helps us make sure that our teaching methods are effective and based on evidence. So it is not just tradition or guesswork we are doing in SoTL.

[00;05;56;06 - 00;06;28;08] **Elif Gokbel:**

So in higher education where the stakes are high and we know that in some subjects, especially the learning material can be really complex. So it is crucial that we are using the best possible strategies to help students understand and succeed. And with SoTL is again, I think it's especially important in higher education because we are preparing our students for their careers and teachers challenges they will face after graduation.

[00;06;28;10 - 00;06;55;07] **Elif Gokbel:**

And so that ensures that we are not just teaching well, but teaching in a way that has a real positive impact on student learning. So by using our scholarly lenses and wearing our research, hat in the classroom that we are teaching, we are able to find out what really works in the classroom, which means we can adapt our approaches to meet the needs of our students.

[00;06;55;08 - 00;07;18;01] **Jacob Santos:**

I love when you were just describing, SoT, SoTL sorry, and how it differs from, traditional, research. You mentioned how curiosity is a big part of this. And colleagues were speaking to each other and talking to each other about what they're doing. So, my question, you know, coming now, having been a teacher and having done that, you know, talk to my fellow colleagues.

[00;07;18;01 - 00;07;32;10] **Jacob Santos:**

What are you doing in your classroom? What's working for you? Trying to figure out how I can improve the teaching in my own classroom. Is it still considered SoTL if the instructor isn't publishing their findings? Or is that something totally different?

[00;07;32;13 - 00;07;58;08] **Elif Gokbel:**

Yeah, that's a good question. When instructors use reflective and evidence based approaches, but they don't publish their work, it is actually called scholarly teaching. And the big difference is that SoTL involves sharing your findings with others to contribute to the wider educational community. And there are really different ways of sharing your work. You could present at a campus workshop.

[00;07;58;08 - 00;08;22;01] **Elif Gokbel:**

You can give a talk at a conference, post about your findings on a blog or your what you have done in your classroom and what you find out that is working on a blog, or even you can write up your study for a journal. I think the one, one of the biggest difference is the publishing piece, between SoTL and scholarly teaching.

[00;08;22;04 - 00;08;57;12] **Elif Gokbel:**

And one quick tip for our Jefferson community here. If you have been doing scholarly teaching and now feel that you are ready to share your work more widely, Jefferson. Our Academic Commons is an office for professional writing, publishing and communication which could be a great resource. They can help with everything from brainstorming, how to share your work to crafting a presentation, or even guiding you through writing a manuscript for scholarly publication.

[00;08;57;15 - 00;09;16;13] **Demi Harte**

That's great. We're going to leave a link for how to access and reach out to this group in the description and our our resource notes based on that. What are some of the biggest challenges educators face when trying to integrate learning theories and lab practices into their live classrooms?

[00;09;16;16 - 00;09;48;11] **Elif Gokbel:**

I think one of the biggest challenges is definitely the time it takes to develop and try out new teaching methods. So for my experience and for talking with other faculty, this is often the first big hurdle. So faculty members are we are all working with faculty from different disciplines and different, levels of experience. So we know that faculty members are balancing a lot includes teaching, research services, sometimes even administrative work.

[00;09;48;12 - 00;10;17;29] **Elif Gokbel:**

So finding the time can be really tough. Another challenge is the background that many educators come from, especially for those who are rooted in traditional research fields. It can be hard to see how research methods can be applied to do teaching. And this can create a disconnect where they might not immediately see the value in doing research on their own classroom practices.

[00;10;18;02 - 00;10;48;24] **Elif Gokbel:**

So, for example, in an instructor who is fully focused on their research might be hesitant to try out new teaching approaches, especially if they see them as untested, or risky, which is super understandable because we all want to make sure that what we are doing in the classroom is actually effective. And then related to this challenge, I think there's a challenge of applying theoretical knowledge to real classroom settings.

[00;10;48;24 - 00;11;17;13] **Elif Gokbel:**

But every student is different. So it seems to me like it's just wanting to understand the learning theory in the abstract. But putting that theory into practice in a live classroom can be tricky. And because every student is coming with a different background, different experience, they are bringing their unique selves into the classroom. So, for instance, if you want to well, let's say you are trying to apply constructivist approach in a lab setting.

[00;11;17;16 - 00;11;47;27] **Elif Gokbel:**

So you might want to rethink how you usually run experiments in your labs, moving from maybe from a lecture based format to something that's entirely student centered. And there's a big shift here. And this shift takes careful planning and a good grasp of theory and realities of your specific classroom environment. To me is like with SoTL I always, always told the faculty, the key here is to start small.

[00;11;47;29 - 00;12;18;27] **Elif Gokbel:**

 So maybe by only adding just one simple new technique into one lesson plan. Let's say that you are applying think, pair, share activity. You have not been using it. And so that think, pair, share has been helpful in one of your colleague's classes. And you want to apply it to your class. Just take one lesson plan one lesson and apply it to a small piece of time frame in your lesson and gradually building from there like you get to to.

[00;12;18;27 - 00;12;33;11] **Elif Gokbel:**

Even if you can do get students feedback weekly about how they felt about the activity over time. These small changes, I think, can lead to a big improvement in how we teach and how students learn.

[00;12;33;13 - 00;12;53;03] **Demi Harte**

Yeah, I think that's that's great advice. And like you said earlier, you can start with just scholarly teaching. You don't have to publish. You know, you start small and work your way up. And then if you feel like this is you're finding good stuff and you want to grow bigger and you can get those resources and work to publish, right?

[00;12;53;04 - 00;13;23;23] **Elif Gokbel:**

Yeah. Like with, in terms of the difference between scholarly teaching and social, and you said starting small is important. So I have seen that lots of lots of the time, faculty are concerned about active learning, for example, implementing active learning because they see that active learning boost engagement. So when you realize this, when you come to this realization, when you like, reflect on your teaching and see this difference, you will start using more of those techniques in your classes.

[00;13;23;26 - 00;13;52;01] **Elif Gokbel:**

So it is basically scholarly teaching. You notice something and then you apply it. You implement it in your teaching. So it's all about using resource based strategies to improve your teaching and directly benefit your students. But Scholarship of Teaching and Learning basically will go one step further. It is not just applying what works, but it is also about formally studying those practices and sharing what you find with others.

[00;13;52;01 - 00;14;13;29] **Elif Gokbel:**

And in actually in SoTL and others. The different steps from scholarly teaching is you will collect data, analyze the outcomes, and then of course share your results through presentation and publication. This way, your efforts not only make your own teaching better, but also contribute to improving the education more broadly.

[00;14;14;00 - 00;14;25;12] **Demi Harte**

So what role does reflection play into SoTL and how can educators cultivate a reflective approach to their teaching?

[00;14;25;15 - 00;14;52;09] **Elif Gokbel:**

I think it's a really great question, and I feel like that could be a new podcast topic by itself, because reflection feels to me that it is really at the heart of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. And it is more than just teaching about what went well or what did not work. It is about digging into your teaching practices and understanding how they impact students learning.

[00;14;52;11 - 00;15;19;17] **Elif Gokbel:**

So for example, mid-semester feedback from students could be a great example for this. So if you are collecting feedback from your students mid-semester, that's impactful. Be super valuable because it gives you a real time look at what is working and what might need tweaking. And this kind of reflection lets you adjust your teaching strategies while the course is still running.

[00;15;19;18 - 00;15;51;18] **Elif Gokbel:**

This is important because you can make improvements that can benefit your current students and even do better for the future students. So we have reflection from students from learners and also instructors own reflection piece here and to me to really embrace a reflective approach. Instructors should regularly assess their teaching in different ways. So this could include self-assessment. This could include getting feedback from students.

[00;15;51;18 - 00;16;33;16] **Elif Gokbel:**

We talked about that, but also being open to making changes based on that feedback. So if you hear anything and if you don't question that a lot deeply, or if we don't have conversations about that feedback, with anyone else, that means like, we we are not truly ready to make changes. So for like a quick example from my own teaching, when I was teaching at Duquesne University, where I worked as a teaching assistant and research assistant, that same time, when I was teaching to my pre-service teachers, I kept a teaching journal, and it was also a role playing for them.

[00;16;33;16 - 00;16;59;24] **Elif Gokbel:**

So I wanted to do that and show them that I am doing so that they can do it when they were teaching as well in the future. So I kept a teaching journal where I will jot down observations and ideas after each class session. It only took 5 to 10 minutes of my time after every class, but it was so helpful to watch, my own growth as well.

[00;16;59;26 - 00;17;26;03] **Elif Gokbel:**

And it also helped me to see what really clicked with my students. And I was able to get some best strategies of my own teaching ready to go for my future students. Another great tool is peer observation here, I think. I haven't talked about it yet, but which is super powerful and so helpful because you get constructive feedback on your own methods.

[00;17;26;03 - 00;17;56;03] **Elif Gokbel:**

And also, if you are doing the peer observation, you watch how others teach and you have that, productive conversation about teaching what is going on in real time classes with your colleagues. And if you are interested, our instructional design team actually in the Academic Commons offers teaching observation. So feel free to reach out if you are interested in, having us to visit your class as an observer.

[00;17;56;03 - 00;18;20;16] **Jacob Santos:**

Well, thank you for that answer. And thank you for that little plug for the Academic Commons there at the very end for always appreciate it. So how do you see SoTL evolving in the future and what emerging trends should educators be aware of, whether that's through student involvement or technology or even global involvement? Wherever you want to take that.

[00;18;20;19 - 00;18;54;29] **Elif Gokbel:**

I think the future of social is really exciting, especially as it becomes more collaborative and interdisciplinary. I do see that researchers are collaborating more often with other researchers outside of their fields or outside of their institution, or even across to cities across the country. It's, all these collaborations are made possible by technology. One of the biggest changes I am seeing is, of course, the growing use of technology in education.

[00;18;55;01 - 00;19;26;09] **Elif Gokbel:**

This includes everything from online learning platforms to more advanced tools like AI, generative AI, which are starting to have a big impact on how we teach and learn these days. We are all aware that I can now tailor learning experiences to fit individual student needs. We can get instant feedback on assignments through AI platforms and even analyze like large scale of data.

[00;19;26;12 - 00;19;27;19] **Jacob Santos**

[00;19;27;21 - 00;20;00;08] **Elif Gokbel**

Personally, I'm particularly excited about how AI is being integrated into educational practices, and I actually recently joined a research group at Jefferson where we are redesigning the final assignment for a doctoral research course in occupational therapy to include AI. And our goal is to leave students hands on experience with some AI research tools at Jefferson and then which they can use in their careers beyond the classroom.

[00;20;00;08 - 00;20;14;22] **Elif Gokbel:**

I think this kind of work really shows where SoTL is headed, bringing technology research and practical applications in to create more effective and dynamic learning experiences.

[00;20;14;22 - 00;20;47;03] **Demi Harte**

Yeah, I think it'll continue to stay important and necessary as things change and students change in the type of learning. And so it's important to keep up with that and look into other research and see what other people are doing. In this age of AI. So I know you brought up a little earlier, but could you, tell our listeners, if they, you know, what steps they can take to explore SoTL and publish their teachings and learning research here at Jefferson?

[00;20;47;06 - 00;21;27;14] **Elif Gokbel:**

In terms of steps, I think the first step is always to identify a teaching challenge or a question you are really curious about. And this curiosity should keep you a little bit longer excited because like you never it in a thoughtful project can take up to two, 2 to 3 years. And this curiosity is the starting point for your solo project, I think, in fact, during our first session in the SoTL Learning Community, we spent helping faculty pinpoint these questions because they are so important.

[00;21;27;16 - 00;21;57;29] **Elif Gokbel:**

And like, we spent the whole session a one hour to really encourage faculty to come up with different, challenges or questions they might have from their classrooms, and really focusing on one and giving feedback on that which one will be more doable and more interesting, or in terms of literature, which about which one will be more helpful for the education community out there.

[00;21;58;01 - 00;22;27;17] **Elif Gokbel:**

So, for example, you might wonder for that curiosity piece at the beginning, you might wonder why students perform well on assignments, but struggle with exam questions, or why they had difficulty applying theoretical concepts to real world scenarios. So this is the curiosity that you have been keeping, and then you put it in a form of question, ideally a research question.

[00;22;27;19 - 00;22;52;20] **Elif Gokbel:**

And then now you got your research question. The next step is to really see what is already out there in the literature. So our libraries and librarians are great sources for this step. So they can look for Saturdays with you that interest you. And if there's a gap in the literature, in the research that you could really feel.

[00;22;52;22 - 00;23;18;24] **Elif Gokbel:**

One thing I really like, and also I had been encouraged to do when I started educational research back in the years, is the replicating a study that is existing. So replicating it in terms of methodology, for example, so you can find a study that is really great in terms of methodology or maybe a study from another field.

[00;23;18;27 - 00;23;41;23] **Elif Gokbel:**

And think about if you can apply it to your own field. So for instance, something like it made a quick example, something if any of teaching strategy has been explored in history education and it has been working well, you read about that and that might not have been looked at in biology education yet, which is your field.

[00;23;41;28 - 00;24;04;12] **Elif Gokbel:**

And you can think about, oh, how can I adapt this teaching strategy in my own field? And using a similar methodology, how can I move from here and contribute to the literature? Hey, yes, we had tried this methodology in our own field and we found this findings that are either supporting you or contrasting with what you had said before.

[00;24;04;14 - 00;24;16;09] **Elif Gokbel:**

This could be a super valuable and super, structured, smooth to enter to the SoTL field. After that, the next step would be.

[00;24;16;16 - 00;24;17;29] **Elif Gokbel:**

Trying.

[00;24;18;02 - 00;24;44;07] **Elif Gokbel:**

To collect and analyze your data so you find your curiosity. You put it in the form of question and you look at the literature, and then you are now collecting and analyzing your data. This could involve gathering student feedback, analyzing performance metrics, or observing classroom interactions. Once you have your data, you think critically about what it tells you.

[00;24;44;07 - 00;25;24;13] **Elif Gokbel:**

What does it reveal about your teaching and what changes could you make depending on this data? And finally, one piece we already talked about is sharing your findings is the most important step of SoTL and Jefferson offers a lot of resources and support for faculty, doing SoTL like opportunities to present your work at conferences, even to being our intern of Faculty days events where you can start, sharing your ideas with Jefferson community and get feedback before you publish, or maybe even use this podcast platform to share your research findings with the Jefferson community.

[00;25;24;15 - 00;25;51;10] **Jacob Santos**

Yes, we will happily do that later on the podcast. More interviews. Please let us know if you have something you've studied, whether you've worked, or at least, we want to thank you very much for your time. I do have one kind of a last question to wrap things up with us today. So you've given us a lot, different pieces of the steps and process for how you can get involved in SoTL here at Jefferson and what you can do.

[00;25;51;13 - 00;26;13;11] **Jacob Santos**

And as we bring our interview to a close and, you know, let's say our, our listeners are feeling particularly inspired by, everything we've had, to share with them today. What would you say are the top 1 or 2 pieces of advice for someone who wants to explore this topic? Just kind of summarize that we're,

[00;26;13;14 - 00;26;41;05] **Elif Gokbel:**

I think my first piece of advice is really to stay curious, is, as we mentioned, an open to new teaching method. So suddenly it's all about asking questions and being willing to try new things in your teaching. And actually, sometimes the unexpected ideas can lead to big improvements in how you teach. So ask yourself questions. Share those questions.

[00;26;41;05 - 00;27;11;17] **Elif Gokbel:**

Have conversations, casual conversations with colleagues. But always stay curious. And another thing I think is really networking is important. So connect with a community of scholars for support and collaboration. And this could be whether through a book club or a workshop or events like faculty days. We mentioned being part of a community lets you share ideas, gain insights and get encouragement from others on the same journey.

[00;27;11;20 - 00;27;38;00] **Elif Gokbel:**

In my experience, really some of the best ideas really come from these casual conversations. A casual conversation with a colleague or someone from the Academic Commons can spark a new direction for your research or a fresh approach to a classroom challenge. So try to be present, engage with your colleagues, and don't hesitate to reach out for support.

[00;27;38;03 - 00;28;06;12] **Elif Gokbel:**

If you are new to SoTL I have a self-paced course, about psychology, both teaching and learning. For those who are new and with lots of helpful resources. So it is all in our Academic Commons website under Self-paced courses modules, and you can share the link as well, but feel free to check it out and reach out if you have any questions.

[00;28;06;14 - 00;28;30;09] **Demi Harte**

Thank you Elif. Thank you for adding that you have this asynchronous module, which is really great, and we will definitely link it in our, episode summary that we'll have online, and it will also include many other resources to check out about SoTL. And once again, we want to thank you so much for being our first guest and for your expertise.

[00;28;30;09 - 00;28;32;25] **Demi Harte**

And you are wonderful.

[00;28;32;27 - 00;28;39;23] **Elif Gokbel:**

Thank you so much for having me.

00;28;34;24 - 00;29;01;23 **Leah Miller**

Thank you for joining us this month. On The Learning Curve. You can find more information and resources related to this episode at **academiccommons.jefferson.edu/thelearningcurve**, and we hope to see you at some

upcoming Academic Commons workshops. If you would like to be featured on a future episode of The Learning Curve, please contact us using the button on our show page.

[00;29;01;25 - 00;29;03;02] **Leah Miller**

Thanks for tuning in.