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Legitimizing Reflective Writing in SoTL: “Dysfunctional Illusions of Rigor” Revisited

ABSTRACT

In a classic 2010 article, Craig Nelson critiques his own previously held “dysfunctional illusions of rigor” that for years had constrained his teaching. He demonstrates that certain “rigorous” pedagogical practices disadvantage rather than support learners, and he argues for an expansion of what counts as legitimate pedagogical approaches. We evoke Nelson’s assertions to make a parallel argument regarding the traditional conventions of academic discourse. While formal scholarly writing may be well suited to capturing some of the outcomes of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), these genres can also be exclusive; inadequate to the task of conveying the complex, incomplete, and messy aspects of the work; and neither interesting nor accessible to those who are not required to produce or to read publications focused on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. We propose that reflective writing be legitimated as a form of writing for SoTL, and we use examples from a growing body of reflective writing about pedagogical partnership to illustrate our points. Echoing Nelson, we offer four reasons for this expansion of legitimacy: (1) the process of reflection is an essential component of learning; (2) reflective writing captures the complexity of learning; (3) reflection is an accessible form of writing for both new and experienced SoTL authors; and (4) reflective writing is accessible to a wide range of readers. We conclude by emphasizing the potential of including reflective writing among those modes of analysis valued in SoTL to expand what counts as rigor in the construction and representation of knowledge about teaching and learning.

KEYWORDS

reflection, reflective writing, rigor, SoTL, student-faculty partnerships

“DYSFUNCTIONAL ILLUSIONS OF RIGOR” REVISITED

In 2010, Craig Nelson, founding president of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL), published “Dysfunctional Illusions of Rigor: Lessons from the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.” His stated goal was to illuminate a “series of misconceptions about teaching and learning” that he formerly used “at least implicitly” to justify his pedagogical approaches (p. 178). These misconceptions included beliefs such as “[w]hen students fail it is primarily due to inability, weak preparation, or lack of effort” (p. 179); “traditional methods of instruction are unbiased and equally fair to a range of diverse students of good ability” (p. 182); and “a good clear argument in plain English can be understood by any student who applies herself” (p. 187). Through his own reflection on his practice, his forays into academic development, and his engagement with

educational research, Nelson came to recognize these and several other beliefs as “dysfunctional illusions of rigor”—biased assumptions that undermined student learning, growth, and being, and that allowed for an abnegation of his responsibility as a teacher. In his essay, he enumerates these illusions, and he offers “more realistic views” supported by educational research and examples from his own changed practice. He concludes that, given the preponderance of research demonstrating that “alternative pedagogies are more effective and equitable” (p. 189), it is incumbent upon educators to integrate those alternative approaches into their pedagogical practice. He also expresses the hope that by sharing his own “regrettably slow” realization and revision processes he will help others “find and master some of their own illusions and more seriously consider revised practices” (p. 189).

We were inspired by Nelson’s analysis and saw parallels to the illusions of rigor present in the writing conventions commonly adopted in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). We offer here in response four affirmative reasons why reflection should be embraced as a legitimate, rigorous, and necessary mode of writing in this field. The first reason has to do with *the process of reflection*, which links analysis and practice and reduces the risk of either one eclipsing the other. Reflection is essential to learning and is a necessary component of inquiry about teaching and learning, but it is not adequately acknowledged or captured in traditional forms of academic discourse. The second reason focuses on *the reflective mode of writing*. Because it invites those writing about their work to do so in a relatively informal and conversational way—to include in-process musings, unproven hunches, and still-forming hypotheses—reflective writing is well suited to capture the surprises, insights, questions, uncertainties, and other lived aspects of the study of teaching and learning in ways that traditional scholarly writing cannot. The third reason focuses on *those doing the reflecting*. Because of its user friendliness to writers, reflective writing affords participants in different institutional roles—academics, administrators, staff, students, and others—the opportunity to analyze and represent the many aspects of teaching and learning they experience. Our fourth reason concerns *those reading reflective writing*. Because it is more accessible to a non-expert audience than most scholarly discourse, reflective writing invites a larger and more diverse audience of readers. For these reasons, we argue reflection and reflective writing have a legitimate place in the knowledge creation and representation that are part of the work of scholarship about teaching and learning.

The intellectual and emotional engagement required for reflective writing constitutes a kind of thorough and careful analysis that is particularly in keeping with the ethos of SoTL and especially useful in capturing for ourselves and sharing with others the experiences, outcomes, and challenges of learning and teaching in higher education (Bryson, 2014; Hamshire et al., 2017). We offer examples drawn from reflective writing about pedagogical partnerships to illustrate how diverse SoTL scholars can more authentically capture the nuances and dynamics that often are ironed out in the process of drafting a traditional scholarly paper. Over the last decade, pedagogical partnership practices have rapidly developed and expanded in SoTL and across higher education (Bovill & Felten, 2016; Cates, Madigan, & Reitenauer, 2018; Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014; Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2016; Matthews, 2016; Werder, Pope-Ruark, & Verwoord, 2016). Pedagogical partnership brings into collaboration differently positioned participants in higher education with varied ways of engaging in, making sense of, and analyzing teaching and learning. Such work offers particularly powerful illustrations of the importance of reflective engagement in and reflective writing about the surprises, insights, questions,

uncertainties, in-process musings, unproven hunches, and still-forming hypotheses that animate SoTL work.

We begin by situating our argument in ongoing conversations about SoTL and by describing our approach to gathering perspectives on reflective writing from academics and students. In the subsequent four sections, we weave reference to classic and more contemporary publications on reflection, our own analyses of the power and necessity of reflective discourse, and selected assertions offered by student and faculty authors of reflective essays focused on pedagogical partnership. We link these to Nelson's claims, and we argue that the process of gathering and sharing the author comments for this piece is itself an example of how a reflection-oriented article can still be a rigorous article. Thus, we endeavor to enact as well as analyze the reflective writing that we argue is a legitimate and necessary form of writing in this field. We conclude by returning to Nelson's call for revised notions of rigor and how such revisions positively influence student achievement by making teaching more inclusive. By analogy, we suggest that a revised notion of rigor in scholarly writing makes SoTL-focused publications—and the practice of this scholarship—more inclusive.

SITUATING OUR ARGUMENT AND DESCRIBING OUR APPROACH

We are not alone in asserting that scholarly writing about teaching and learning in higher education reproduces and perpetuates some of the same misconceptions Nelson identified. By embracing uniform, exclusionary criteria that privilege distanced arguments substantiated by certain forms of data, much academic discourse limits practitioners' and readers' opportunities to engage in the very critical reflection and knowledge construction that are, ostensibly, the desired outcomes of a rigorous approach (see Sword, 2009, on this point). Academic customs have meant that writing in the field often has omitted the uncertain, the unfinished, the relational—in short, the human—aspects and processes of scholarship and the phenomena at the heart of learning and teaching. Not only does this falsely (but “rigorously”!) obscure the experiences of many who learn and teach, it also leads to the production of scholarship that is only accessible and interesting to disciplinary insiders. Sword extended this analysis in her 2017 ISSOTL keynote address, demonstrating that by bringing individual perspectives, identities, and emotions into our writing, we are not abandoning rigor but rather using effective techniques to represent our scholarship and to connect with our readers.

While academic norms and traditional forms of publication serve many valuable purposes, and analytical, third-person writing is a powerful and flexible tool to develop and convey understanding, these need not be the only tools in a SoTL-focused writer's toolkit, nor are they always the most appropriate tool for the job at hand. Indeed, prominent voices have long called for a broader approach to representing the complexity and nuance of scholarship on teaching and learning (Bernstein & Bass, 2005; McKinney, 2007). More recently, Manarin used her keynote address at the 2016 ISSOTL conference to “name our assumptions” and make our conceptions about SoTL “translucent” so that we can see learning and teaching from perspectives that are sometimes obscured by the forms and conventions of our writing (2017, p. 7). In Sword's 2017 ISSOTL keynote, we heard a stirring invitation to bring emotion and identity more centrally into our writing. Similarly, Gravett and Bernhagen (2018) have called for an embrace of feminist practices in our work on teaching and learning in higher education, which involves “a consideration of who we are and how we got to be this way. It forces us to ask who we have left out and to uncover the spoken and unspoken reasons why” (p. 2). Quoting the

introduction to the guide to feminist pedagogy developed by Bostow et al. (2015), they insist that a feminist approach “also encourages deep self-reflection regarding ‘fundamental beliefs and values about teaching, learning, and knowledge-making.’”

This push for the valuing of reflective writing has been accompanied by growing attention to methodologies that encourage reflection. Ng and Carney (2017), for instance, have argued for the use of a social science research technique called the “scholarly personal narrative” to capture “the interior, intellectual life of educators within their scholarly framework” (p. 1). We appreciate the discipline of this and related approaches, but we worry that putting strict methodological parameters around personal reflections will simply create new and unnecessary hurdles for the diversity of participants engaged in this work to present their narratives. Instead, we suggest a flexible, open approach to critical reflection, “a big tent” (to use Hutchings’s term, [CELatElon, 2013]) stance on reflective writing, that will create the generative space necessary to represent the fullness of analyses of learning and teaching.

We do not wish to reproduce in our argument the very exclusiveness that we are challenging. Furthermore, as Nelson (2010) does not advocate replacing all traditional forms of pedagogy with alternatives, we likewise are not suggesting that reflection should replace more conventional forms of writing. Rather, we call for an expansion of processes, participants, readers, and forms of representation in SoTL. To support this call, we expand on the four reasons listed above, drawing both on scholarly arguments for the centrality of reflection to teaching, learning, and the production of knowledge, and on comments offered by student and faculty authors of reflective essays on pedagogical partnership published in *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education (TLTHE)*. These students and faculty have all participated in pedagogical partnerships through which they worked in semester-long collaborations focused on explorations of classroom practice, and all chose to share the processes, insights, and questions that arose from that work with a wider audience. As we were preparing this article, we invited authors of such reflective essays published in *TLTHE* to comment on the reasons we present for legitimating reflective writing. All non-cited comments are personal communications from authors who published essays in *TLTHE*, are included with their authors’ permission, and are intended both to address and to illustrate the power and necessity of reflective discourse.

1. THE PROCESS OF REFLECTION IS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF LEARNING

Reflection has long been central to learning and to scholarly analysis, and its place in inquiry about teaching and learning attests to its enduring value. Taking a broad look at how definitions of reflection in learning have evolved, we can see a shift from focusing on an intellectual activity alone to focusing on the integration of intellect and emotion in analyzing action. Dewey (1933) established the importance of reflection in learning, framing it as an intellectual undertaking characterized by “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 118). Introducing emotion into the process, Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) argued that reflection entails returning to an experience, attending to or connecting with feelings associated with that experience, and evaluating the experience. In reference to what he calls “reflection-in-action,” Schön (1987) argues that such reflection as engaged in by professionals is catalyzed by “surprise, puzzlement, or confusion” in a unique or uncertain situation, includes “analyzing prior understandings which have been implicit” in and have informed behavior, and is followed by “an experiment which serves to generate both a new

understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation” (p. 68). Reflection, in Schön’s view, is connected to action in the same way SoTL is often framed as the work of teacher-scholars seeking to understand and evolve through understanding. Further animating conceptions of reflection is Lesnick’s (2005) use of the image of a “mirror in motion” to argue for “an understanding of reflection that admits of ongoing movement, change, and interaction” (p. 38). She asserts that “‘success’ in reflective practice is a matter of agility, mobility, flexibility, and, importantly, of the interdependence of one’s movements with those of others on and beyond the reflected scene” (p. 38; see also Cook-Sather, 2008).

One student author who published a reflective essay in *TLTHE* muses about the power of reflection, which helped her to develop the metacognitive awareness and confidence that are critical to all learning:

[It] helped me to isolate the things that went well (and determine why they went well), the things that could have gone better (and what I could do the next time to make them better), and forced me to take time to actively appreciate this great thing I was a part of. Even though I was almost always initially hesitant to engage in the reflective process, looking back now I see that it was a major factor in the confidence that I gained over time.

Another student author captures the way in which reflection that was part of her pedagogical partnership experience extended into other realms:

Before partnering with faculty, the only self-reflection I’d done in any systematic way was writing end-of-semester self evaluations for the odd class that asked for it. As a [student] consultant, I thought about my responsibility as a student, my learning, my impact on others’ learning, my identity, and how all of these intersected with classroom pedagogy on a weekly basis. I valued this reflection because, through it, I became a better student and a better ally to my peers.

These comments illustrate how the process of reflection plays a key role in helping participants to gain critical distance or perspective on their experiences while at the same time to discern and connect with the emotional dimensions of those experiences. Reflection does this by making space for, capturing, and clarifying experiences, understandings, and feelings. Such careful, critical attention to process is essential to learning, as another student author succinctly captures, “[i]f we don’t reflect, we don’t learn about our practice. It’s not only an essential part of partnership, it’s an essential part of learning.” Extending this insight to SoTL, reflection is an integral part of this scholarship because it is an integral part of learning itself. Although reflective writing might not be considered “rigorous” in many scholarly traditions, holding tight to that “dysfunctional illusion” (Nelson, 2010) means that writing about teaching and learning does not mirror what we know about the centrality of reflection in learning.

2. REFLECTIVE WRITING CAPTURES THE COMPLEXITY OF LEARNING

Reflective writing reenacts and captures the experience of the individual internal or interpersonal dialogic process of reflection. It offers some freedom from the norms, requirements, and constraints of academic discourse, but couples that freedom with a demand for courage and candor with

one’s self and others about one’s process of engagement and learning. As a student author of a *TLTHE* essay explains,

I think often in academia we can have a process of inquiry and study that only rewards clear logic and air-tight assertions when many matters are not as completely clear cut. The reflective space doesn’t lack logic but does provide for more space to linger in a more undefined place. The reflective process also allows for a more supported manner of inquiry to make sense of things and find patterns without being tunnel focused on arriving at conclusions. It feels very exploratory, democratic and creative.

As this student suggests, in order to produce traditional scholarly writing, authors must focus on crafting original, logical arguments substantiated or proven by bodies of data and situated within the literature. Idiosyncratic, still emerging, or intellectually and emotionally vulnerable presentations are not generally welcome (Sword, 2009). And yet we know from learning theory that it is through struggle, uncertainty, risk taking, and related processes that some of the deepest learning takes place. The genre of reflective writing constitutes a kind of brave space; it does not promise to protect and exempt people from the challenge that real learning and growth require (Arao & Clemens, 2013). Rather, it requires both courage and humility to reveal one’s struggles, half-formed insights, realizations, and revisions (see Felten, 2017; Woolmer, 2018). This form of revelation not only sets a tone for engagement but also proposes a mode of engagement (Cook-Sather, 2016), and it opens up possibilities for insight that are less likely to emerge through other modes.

In her keynote address at the 2016 ISSOTL conference, Manarin (2017) discussed the genres or forms in which we write about the scholarship of teaching and learning. She both highlighted the ways in which stories and storytellers who are too far outside the expected framework risk being silenced and the “productive friction” that allows readers of unfamiliar genres to see the familiar anew. Reflective writing is an “unfamiliar genre” in the land of academe not because it has no place but because its place has not yet been legitimated. Indeed, in Sword’s 2017 ISSOTL conference keynote, she challenges the split that journals—including many SoTL-focused journals—create in maintaining separate sections and sharp boundaries between research articles and reflective essays. One faculty author also cautions against over-prescription of traditional methods and scholarship, highlighting the value of open reflection:

Being an informal and inductive process, shared reflection allowed for a wide range of experiences and ideas to enter the funnel of refinement. We literally told stories for a while and then began to recognize central elements in the stories, along with emerging themes from the separate examples. . . . A more structured form of inquiry, perhaps with standardized prompts, might have missed some of the stories that popped up only because they were interesting or memorable.

These descriptions of reflective writing are analogous to the kinds of active learning Nelson (2010) advocates as alternatives to traditional pedagogy. They are messy, complicated, slow, and unpredictable, but, as Nelson shows, they support deeper learning for a greater diversity of students. So, too, reflective writing. The qualities of experience and the insights that reflective writing can capture are

essential to our understanding of teaching and learning, and they require courage, candor, and deep attention to generate.

3. REFLECTION IS AN ACCESSIBLE FORM OF WRITING FOR BOTH NEW AND EXPERIENCED SOTL AUTHORS

In his discussion of his dysfunctional illusions of rigor around students learning to write for the academy, Nelson (2010) cites Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) and Baxter Magolda (2000), whose work on self-authorship expanded Perry's (1970) previously more narrow focus on intellectual and ethical development in thinking. These scholars challenged Nelson's "dysfunctional illusions" about what it takes and means to make "a good, clean argument in plain English" (Nelson, 2010, p. 185). This expansion of what counts as legitimate analysis is analogous to our argument for reflective writing as a form that encompasses intellectual and emotional insight, logical and contradictory assertions, and confident assertion as well as uncertain query.

Faculty are required to produce and are accustomed to producing academic writing, by which their achievements as scholars are typically measured. Often, though not always, this writing relies on collection and analysis of some form of "data" and is characterized by *distanced* analysis of those data, assertions in response to that analysis, and citations of scholarly work by peers to put one's work in conversation with others. Some, however, find the opportunity to write in a different form a welcome alternative to and respite from this more formalized approach. One faculty author explains how writing in a reflective rather than a traditional academic style "helped me understand my own experience . . . In essence, it helped me form a coherent narrative about the experience." Another faculty author muses:

The reflective writing genre gives permission to think from your lived experience first and foremost, which is not where I start with academic writing in [my discipline/field]. Instead of focusing on product and outcome with polished (censored) narrative—again, typical of my experience of academic writing—reflecting on practice creates space for making sense of your progress for partnership and grappling with what you are learning as you go.

While many professional and academic staff may be interested in producing scholarly writing, others may have neither time for nor interest in that form. As one faculty member explains,

[t]he informal nature of the reflective genre of writing lowers the bar for participation in sharing ideas, with the result of increasing the number of participants whose experiences are shared. As a scientist by training, I had no time, education, or inclination to prepare a rigorous academic treatise on my experiences in the classroom; but the reflective genre allowed me to share the experiences and ideas generated by [my pedagogical partnership with a student] with a wide academic audience who may benefit from these insights.

In addition to staff, students, in particular, may not have the time or interest or confidence to author traditional scholarly texts, given their responsibilities in their courses and campus jobs and their academic goals (see Mauer, 2017, for some of the structural barriers to students as co-authors in SoTL). Publications about pedagogical partnerships again offer a vivid illustration of this issue. Partnerships

themselves typically involve at a minimum a 50/50 balance of students and faculty/staff and often include more students than staff. Yet a recent systematic literature review revealed that undergraduates are first authors of only 5 percent of scholarly papers published on partnership between 2011 and 2015, and just 26 percent of these papers include at least one undergraduate as a co-author (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017, p. 7). These figures suggest that there is a need for additional scholarly forms of writing for students to more fully document and evaluate the experiences, outcomes, and challenges of this work. The emergence of student-staff partnerships as a strand of SoTL (Hutchings, Huber, & Ciccone, 2011; Werder & Otis, 2010) offers us an opportunity to be deliberate about the forms of analysis we choose for pedagogical partnerships and the knowledge these forms generate about curricular and classroom practice.

Reflective forms of writing give a wide range of differently positioned authors an opportunity to work through their experiences in writing. Faculty in disciplines with very strict scholarly expectations might, as one faculty author puts it, “not feel ‘ready’ to present these findings in a peer-reviewed journal or in a formal presentation.” Students (and others!) who chafe under academia’s privileging of “clear logic and air-tight assertions,” as one student author mentioned previously, appreciate the “exploratory, democratic and creative” genre of reflective writing.

4. REFLECTIVE WRITING IS ACCESSIBLE TO A WIDE RANGE OF READERS

In the same ways that it opens access to writers, reflective writing can open access to a wider range of readers of SoTL-focused literature. One faculty author who partners regularly with students notes that a reflective form of writing results in “more places of entry for those who are coming from different positions to benefit from reading reflective essays.” Many authors of reflective essays point to the absence of “unnecessary field-specific jargon,” as one faculty author describes it, which, as another faculty author suggests, “can be alienating to those outside of the field.” Reflective writing is, in one student author’s words, “more accessible to staff and new scholars who may not yet be fluent in the methods and terminology core to varying fields or who do not identify with a specific discipline.”

Another way of describing the accessibility of reflective writing is that, in one faculty author’s words, it “tends to let readers in on the writer’s experiences and thinking/feeling in a way that’s invitational, inclusive.” Student authors also comment on these qualities, with one suggesting that “reflective writing is accessible because it feels very human. It’s reassuring to know your experiences, sometimes doubt or difficulties, are communal and not just individual hurdles.”

While we discussed in the last section the user-friendly nature of reflective writing for authors with different positions and roles in teaching and learning, including students, McKinney (2012) proposes that we also “take students seriously as an audience” for SoTL. She argues that “[w]hat we know about teaching and learning should not be kept, even unintentionally, a secret from our students” (p. 4). Considering students as an audience for our work means writing in ways that are accessible, rather than following conventions that are comfortably familiar to readers from particular disciplines but that are alien to many others (such as writing in a passive, third-person voice). As one student author asserts, “[reflective writing] sheds the need to be academic in the stereotypical ‘stuffy’ way.” In contrast to the “stuffy,” distanced style of much academic writing, reflective writing, according to another student author,

feels inherently inviting and engaging . . . [it] has the unique power to draw readers in, regardless of their positionality or experiences, because it allows the reader to imagine herself or himself in the shoes of the writer. The use of first-person perspectives and storytelling help provide the context and emotional connection that makes it possible to engage with reflective writing in a way that often feels challenging with academic literature.

Many faculty, too, experience the reading of reflective writing as an accessible alternative to their standard modes of discourse. One suggests that the “less guarded” nature of the writing style opens it to broader and more diverse audiences. Another author suggests, “it humanizes the experience and lets other people in a similar situation learn from one another.” Faculty readers of reflective writing can connect on an empathic level, instead of getting caught up anticipating disciplinary barriers. Indeed, Sword (2009; 2017) has demonstrated that many academics prefer to read scholarly writing that is active, personal, and “stylish.”

Finally, about the potential for administrators to benefit, one author of a reflective essay, a faculty member who moved into administration, mused,

[a] college president who hasn't taught much lately can still remember what it's like to be observed; administrators, including those not on the academic affairs side, were all once students themselves. These stakeholders can get a better sense of the teaching/learning experience by seeing through a student's eyes, or by listening to faculty who discuss/reflect on their partnership experiences. All of this can help to strengthen the central mission of the institution.

The overarching theme in Nelson's (2010) discussion of dysfunctional illusions of rigor is that faculty put the onus or blame on students for not learning or performing well rather than turn a critical eye on their own pedagogical approaches. He also throws into relief the either/or thinking that is common when faculty feel they must either stick to their “tried and true” pedagogical approaches or throw those out in favor of “alternatives.” Rather than assign blame or confine oneself to any single approach, Nelson advocates a mixture of pedagogies that are informed by scholarly research and are responsive to students.

There is an analogue to that argument in our proposal that reflective writing is accessible to a diversity of participants in SoTL. While useful and necessary in many instances, polished scholarly writing that presents distanced arguments bolstered by certain forms of data can seem to present more of a wall than a window to some who approach it. Reflective writing gives a wide range of readers an opportunity to glimpse the in-process unfolding of scholarship on teaching and learning—what one faculty author describes this way: “to get inside the voices in the head, into the black box of thinking, that's a part that no one has direct access to.” Furthermore, capturing those efforts and sharing them with others can inspire those who read reflective writing to engage in similar explorations and analyses.

CONCLUSION

All of the reasons we have offered in this discussion inform one final assertion: that the standards for publications recognized as rigorous and relevant need to be expanded beyond the uniform, exclusionary criteria that privilege distanced, data-soaked publications. This assertion, too, is analogous to the dysfunctional illusions of rigor Nelson (2010) identified regarding his classroom practice that needed to be revised and expanded to constitute a more realistic—and inclusive—view. Hutchings (2002) reminds us that SoTL builds on many past traditions in higher education including classroom and program assessment, K-12 action research, the reflective practice movement, peer review of teaching, traditional educational research, and faculty development efforts to enhance teaching and learning (McKinney, 2011). This diversity of traditions contributes to a diversity of possibilities for writing that needs to be fully embraced.

We believe that the time has come both to legitimate critical reflection as a form of scholarly writing about teaching and learning, and also to make *all* SoTL writing more explicitly reflective—making space for the conditional and the human aspects of our inquiries and our partnerships. Such an expansion would, according to one faculty author, be “particularly valuable because of its rarity in educational spaces; that is, so often what’s valued is certainty and conclusions, whereas hunches and surprises promise another kind of learning, a kind of open-endedness that holds up process as a source.” Other authors and readers of reflective writing about pedagogical partnership concur. One faculty author captures what many convey: “In my traditional scholarly writing, there may be many hours of reflection that don’t make it onto the page, that nonetheless inform the argument. It would be great to be make this less-visible aspect of teaching and learning more visible.”

Student authors add important points about what kind of knowledge and whose voices are valued in academic writing. One asserts that recognizing the reflective genre as legitimate “would allow more perspectives to be uncovered and valued as more people might see themselves as having a voice and value as a contributor.” She suggests that, “with these additional voices, I imagine knowledge might be constructed differently and more fully than if it was limited to rigid definitions of both writing and representation.” Another student makes a similar point, highlighting in particular how reflective writing can be more inclusive:

Adding [reflective] practice to knowledge creation and the academy would give marginalized students more of a voice in the classroom and in academia. It helps us realize that our voices matter, our stories matter, we matter. In a space that often doesn’t reflect us, reflective practice reminds us that we fit into this landscape.

This assertion for legitimating reflective writing is related especially strongly to the final dysfunctional illusion Nelson (2010) identifies: that “faculty know enough to revise their courses and departments know enough to revise their curricula” without consulting the literature on teaching and learning, or inquiring into student learning in their own context (p. 188). A more realistic view, Nelson contends, is that such revision of teaching and curricula “should be informed by pedagogical research” (p. 188). To our minds, pedagogical partnership in scholarship about teaching and learning in higher education offers a powerful illustration of how practice can benefit from being informed by wider perspectives. Considering the insights of those outside of one’s discipline in SoTL is analogous to considering the

insights of those outside one's role, including students, who also have pedagogical insight. Hence the power of pedagogical partnership to illustrate what can happen when we expand what counts as knowledge and who counts as a knower about teaching and learning.

Nelson (2010) concluded his analysis of the dysfunctional illusions of rigor that undergirded his existent practices and made them "resistant to change" (p. 189) with several reflections. He argued that what we know about how we can make a "massive difference" in student achievement and engagement shifts the burden of proof: that "anyone using a relatively unmodified traditional pedagogy might well be required to show that it is at least as effective" as a practice that uses a "[mixture] of nontraditional approaches" (p. 189). We argue this same burden of proof should exist for the dysfunctional illusions of rigor that separate reflective analysis and writing from "real" scholarly writing on teaching and learning.

Reflective writing as a form of thorough and careful analysis is particularly in keeping with the ethos of SoTL, with its emphasis on local context, lived experience, and human interaction (Felten, 2013). Because teaching and learning are fundamentally relational practices, it is essential to develop forms of representation that can capture and convey the complexities of the processes, outcomes, and challenges of actual experiences, inquiries, and analyses of teaching and learning. Because those who engage in SoTL occupy a range of roles (such as faculty/academic staff, professional staff, student), it is important to develop forms of writing that are accessible to a wide range of readers, including students (McKinney, 2012), and produce-able by a wide range of authors (e.g., staff who do not have scholarly publication among their responsibilities). Embracing a wide range of forms of writing about teaching and learning is, ultimately, an issue of equity and inclusivity and it redefines rigor, since, as one faculty author writes, "I can think of nothing more rigorous than challenging, resisting, and changing the practices that feel 'normal' to people."

Therefore, instead of the drive to "deny all traces of self in scholarly writing" (Dauphinee, 2010, p. 804), we argue for an inclusion of the voice and awareness that self brings in reflective writing—the messy, but no-less-rigorous process of reflection made visible and offered as an invitation to others to engage in similarly deep and demanding ways. As a student author explains, "for me the knowledge creation involved in reflective writing relied heavily on my analysis of my own placement in the world. This kind of introspection is easy to hide from in traditional academic writing." A faculty author concurs: "Enhancing the legitimacy of subjectively alert, self-situating thinking is vital for every challenge facing humanity!" So perhaps it is not too much of a stretch to argue that by allowing the work of engaging in and analyzing teaching and learning together, as student-faculty partnerships do, in order to legitimate reflective discourse in SoTL we may open up more engaged, human, and generative practices and analyses across all SoTL work. Writing that directly faces the complexity and emotion of learning and teaching deserves to be considered "rigorous" and scholarly; our modes of writing ought not to reinforce dysfunctional illusions of rigor.

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