

# Scholarly Personal Narrative in the SoTL Tent

## ABSTRACT

Scholarly personal narrative (SPN) extends the available methodologies by which researchers conduct the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). In this article, the authors define SPN, which interprets personal experience through scholarly frameworks, leveraging the power of reflective practice to understand the interpersonal dynamics of both the classroom and wider academic communities. SPN fosters disciplinary understandings of SoTL and bridges discourse barriers in order to illuminate the complex environments of teaching and learning. The article examines how widely-accepted definitions of scholarship apply to SPN and provides a scholarly approach for researchers to analyze personal experience as a pool of data, employ a range of analytical techniques, and identify significant results. Through an analysis of two articles, the authors discuss the usefulness of SPN both as a major and minor critical lens. The inclusion of SPN may enrich SoTL pluralism and contribute to the knowledge of the complex contexts and influences that shape instructors, learning environments, and student experiences.

## KEYWORDS

SoTL, scholarly personal narrative, theory building, reflective practice

## INTRODUCTION

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) has given us pathways into successful practices that connect instructors across disciplinary silos and national boundaries. Among the most exciting intersections for scholars in SoTL has been what Shulman (2005) calls “local contexts” (2013) and what Huber and Hutchings (2005) identify as the “teaching commons,” which together encourage discourse within and outside of our disciplines about how we teach and how students learn. These Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching colleagues encourage scholars to make their inquiries not private but communal enterprises that cultivate discipline-specific methodologies in an ongoing pursuit of deepening our understanding of teaching and learning. They urge us to create a “big tent” for SoTL (Huber & Hutchings, 2005, p. 30). Answering this call, we have found potential in scholarly personal narrative (SPN), which arises out of the social sciences and capitalizes on reflective critique. SPN is a constructivist research methodology that integrates personal experience as a data source that can be analyzed to extend the reach of SoTL findings. The processes of teaching and learning are made more transparent through illuminating the interior, intellectual life of educators within their scholarly framework. In this article we examine scholarly personal narrative as a nascent SoTL practice, determine whether it can meet the accepted criteria for scholarship, and consider its potential value in SoTL.

## CONNECTING THE PERSONAL AND THE SCHOLARLY

No matter the discipline, teaching and learning occur within the specific circumstances of curriculum, demographics, interpersonal connections, intellectual experiences, and innumerable other

conditions. These “local contexts” provide vital specificity within which to examine our pedagogies and build shared insights (Shulman, 2013). As we engage in our cross-disciplinary, international SoTL dialog, a “local and provisional” examination of our sites of learning can better reflect what the “dialogic, various, rousing, impinging and often downright messy” interaction between teachers, students, and course materials (Parker, 2003, p. 142). SPN draws on detailed description and analysis that conveys a holistic approach to exploring the complexities of teaching and learning. Nash, who pioneered the field of scholarly personal narrative, explains that it illuminates the multiple situatedness of research, in part, through the integration of “intellectual content and honest personal voice” (2004, p. 30). In SPN, writers apply rigorous scholarly practices to examine untidy educational processes and interactions. Doing so could reveal more about the dispositions we bring to the classroom and field. SPN is little known, but potentially important emerging methodology. In Nash’s view, “To write a creative personal narrative in a professional school, so that it enlarges, rather than undermines, the conventional canons of scholarship is, in my opinion, to transform the Academy and the world” (2004, p. 22). In SPN, writers distill internal observations into external products recognized and valued by other professionals.

Scholarship often builds upon a foundation of personal interests. In their book *Me-Search and Re-Search* (2011), Nash and Bradley suggest that most research has its origins in personal interest. Researchers begin with an idea that resonates with experience or curiosity (p. 37). Inherent in such projects is a connection to the personal, often minimized in the framework of clinical studies (p. 36). From the outset, the questions of “what if” and “why” are the common bonds that unite inquiry. What occurs after that initial impulse is a metamorphosis that takes place when those deliberations are transformed into products inherent in each professional field.

The cognitive work of connecting the personal and the scholarly can be academically rigorous and insightful. Those who pursue such an endeavor may term their work autoethnography, self-ethnography, personal narrative, and self-narrative. Perhaps the predominate form is autoethnography, which interpolates the cultural, social, and political contexts as frameworks for exploring personal experiences. With its roots in anthropology, it privileges social science methods, even when implemented by those outside these fields. SPN draws on practices that grew out of ethnographic studies, such as what Geertz (1973) developed as “thick description.” Writers describe behaviors in terms of the contexts in which they occur. In SPN, the detailed descriptions and contexts provide readers with a more precise understanding of how education happens. In her *Autoethnography as Method* (2008), Chang discusses SPN and indicates that Nash’s foundational SPN *Spirituality, Ethics, Religion, and Teaching: A Professor’s Journey* (2002) qualifies as autoethnography because of its cultural interpretations. SPN and autoethnography can sometimes overlap.

For the purposes of SoTL, which values the methodologies of disparate fields, SPN’s inclusive parameters allow for the blending of personal narrative with the author’s disciplinary approaches. SPN creates a broader critical frame than autoethnography; it incorporates socio-cultural aspects yet can emphasize pedagogical study. Offering a viable practice on its own and in concert with other disciplinary tactics, SPN can contribute to the larger movement of cross-disciplinary dialogue to enhance SoTL inquiries. To date, scholars who identify their work as SPN are predominately in the fields of education, humanities, and various social sciences. SPN’s value, however, is beginning to garner limited interest in STEM as well. Heidelberger and Uecker (2009) in “Scholarly Personal Narrative as Information Systems Research Methodology” suggest that SPN can help Information Systems (IS) provide more comprehensible academic journal articles that can be used by practitioners. They propose that SPN can benefit IS scholarship because personal narratives that illuminate the meaning-making process reveal “experts’ knowledge, especially tacit knowledge” to the entire community (p. 2). In their view, SPN can

increase the relevance of IS research and enrich scholarly discourse. Although this represents only one field in STEM, their articulation of SPN's value to largely quantitative fields points to an opportunity that has not yet been seized. Our article, in part, seeks to highlight SPN as an additional tool for scholars to develop and communicate knowledge. Those who are interested in SPN are at the forefront of a new interdisciplinary field.

### TRAITS OF SCHOLARSHIP

As an emerging methodology, SPN's rigor and worth are still being established. While reflective practice has been widely accepted as a valuable tool in teaching and learning, reflective writing is perhaps less privileged. In our exploration of SPN's scholarly potential, we continue a conversation from *Teaching Theology and Religion* wherein Killen and Gallagher (2013) explain their journal's standards of scholarship for SoTL, which excludes memoir or personal narrative. Responding to this essay, Brookfield (2013) disagrees with Killen and Gallagher's claim that memoirs and personal narratives do not constitute scholarship. Instead, he proposes that SPN, as pioneered by Nash, can be scholarship if it has two key elements: "use of research and theoretical literature" and a "continuous attempt to theorize generalizable elements of particular events, contradictions, and actions" (p. 127). SPN bridges the local, individual data and insights with larger "generalizable elements" of teaching and learning. This debate connects to the on-going SoTL conversations about what comprises SoTL scholarship. Our article extends Brookfield's brief proposal by investigating how SPN fits with definitions of SoTL scholarship, analyzing two essays to illustrate how SPN can be used as a tool for scholarly critique, and further identifying the ways in which SPN may contribute to the international conversations of teaching and learning.

From early in the discussions about SoTL, many noted scholars have outlined how to define scholarship in a way that recognizes the varied work of faculty. Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997) suggest in *Scholarship Assessed: Evaluation of the Professoriate* that often scholarship is recognized as such because it shares "these qualitative standards" (pp. 24-25):

1. Clear goals
2. Adequate preparation
3. Appropriate methods
4. Significant results
5. Effective communication
6. Reflective critique

Shulman (1998) emphasizes this fifth characteristic: "For an activity to be designated as scholarship, it should manifest at least three key characteristics; it should be public, susceptible to critical review and evaluation, and accessible for exchange and use by other members of one's scholarly community" (p. 5). Fifteen years later, we are still seeking to refine our parameters and affirm the value of SoTL work. Poole (2013), in "Square One: What is Research?" explains that

*When academics from a range of disciplines collaborate to look at issues, opportunities and problems, they face the challenge of translating disciplinary research languages and of understanding the research cultures. More fundamental still is the challenge of coming to an agreement on the definition of 'research' itself. (2013, p. 136)*

He refers to Abbott, Bergon, Hoddinott, O'Neill, Sampson, Singer, and Sykes's definition: "Research is an undertaking intended to extend knowledge through a disciplined inquiry or systematic investigation"

(as cited in Poole, 2013, p. 148). He emphasizes that “It is viable research if its methods fit the purpose” (p. 148). Poole’s framework provides a common structure that is not wedded to the language of one discipline, but rather open to interpretation. A power resides in the commonality inherent in all these definitions: disparate disciplines share standards of rigor and innovation that can foster SoTL discourse. Creating a multidisciplinary field of inquiry makes available products and discoveries of each field while fostering the continuing evolution of a living field of study.

A wide spectrum of disciplinary methods enriches the inquiry into teaching and learning, and standards can be upheld by evaluating the worth of SoTL through the criteria set forth by such scholars as Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997). SPN adds another approach for our study of teaching and learning. Humanities scholars have shown the value of tools such as close reading when used in conjunction with learning practices. This “big tent” includes “data” that is primarily textual, often narrative, and inclusive of student work. While not an SPN, a ground-breaking humanities SoTL study “Pressing an Ear Against the Hive” (2009) illustrates the value of textual analysis in understanding how comprehension emerges within the dynamic interplay of student, professor, and text. Chick, Hassel, and Haynie’s (2009) discoveries follow from interpretations of the students’ works and provide commentary about class environment and session activities. The authors detail a classroom conversation about Roethke’s poem “My Papa’s Waltz” (1966) where students discuss images that could point to abuse between the speaker and his father, and the array of reactions students had to the idea. Their “thick description” of this class informs the design of the assignment and illuminates the processes students use for analysis. This background information provides a foundational understanding of context that the written assignment, alone, could not provide. Chick and her co-authors exemplify how narrative contributes to SoTL and illustrate what Bass and Linkon discuss in “On the Evidence of Theory: Close Reading as a Disciplinary Model for Writing about Teaching and Learning” (2008). Close reading provides useful SoTL tools in its “four elements: inquiry, texts, theory, argument” (p. 247). Like close reading, SPN uses these four elements with an emphasis on reflective practices to complicate and enrich the scholarly value of the inquiry. If we use Parker’s (2003) concept that teaching and learning happen amid the interchange of teachers, students, and course materials, SPN encourages a nuanced picture of the learning dynamic that is inclusive of the intellectual and interpersonal shades of meaning. SPN is the scholarly use of personal narrative—that is, text—as an artifact to be studied.

#### SCHOLARLY PERSONAL NARRATIVE IN THE SOTL CONVERSATION

SPN multiplies the kinds of texts (i.e. data) that contribute to the richness of our multidisciplinary SoTL conversation. The genre of SPN may blend disciplines and, done well, make a valuable contribution to SoTL. As noted by Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997), specific criteria must be met for a work to be considered scholarly in the “big tent” and in our respective fields. When exploring SPN as methodology, its elements correspond to the rigorous criteria of scholarship. We can easily align SPN with the ideals of scholarship as expressed by the Glassick team and Nash. First, both require the use of clear goals. A project must have a clear purpose; similarly, Nash underscores that the personal aspect of the narrative must illustrate a clear theme or argument (2004, p. 58). They also parallel in the second criteria: for Nash “adequate preparation” is demonstrated when scholars employ an appropriate theoretical frame for our experiments. Literature reviews and other types of research preparation found in conventional third-person studies are at the center of SPN. For instance, in *Me-Search and Re-Search* (2011), Nash and Bradley write:

*There are times when SPN writers will need to draw from the research approaches and truth criteria of humanists, social scientists, artists, and natural scientists. Sometimes they will use mixed methodologies, sometimes not. Whatever the preferred research genre, however, SPN writers will need to know when to be non-traditional—subjective, experiential, creative, and artistic—and when to be traditional—objective, authoritative, data-driven, and credible. SPN writers will need to know how to live within the conventional borders of research, when to cross them, and when to transcend or transform those borders. (p. 80)*

This critical framework extends from the second into the third criterion, appropriate methods, so that the framework informs inquiry and interpretation.

SPN also has a focus on Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff's (1997) fourth and fifth criteria. While Nash may not be considering SoTL in his formation of SPN theory from *Liberating Scholarly Writing*, his concepts draw together the criteria of significant results and effective communication through his emphasis on themes:

*Scholarly personal narratives . . . do a lot of the work of autobiographies, personal narrative essays, and memoirs with one major addition: namely, SPN writers intentionally organize their essays around themes, issues, constructs, and concepts that carry larger, more universalizable meanings for readers. (p. 30)*

Themes are the stressed elements that readers follow to understand the experience in the context of the critical frame to create results that are meaningful and thoughtfully expressed. Similarly, Brookfield (2013) suggests the connection between the individual circumstance and the larger implications: SPN includes “the continuous attempt to theorize generalizable elements of particular events, contradictions, and actions. The particular events in a narrative may be unique to the individual but they often contain universal elements” (p. 127). To achieve this effect, SPN writers must balance scholarly demands with personal understanding to create a cohesive work that meets the rigor of their respective fields. This interweaving gives SPN great flexibility as it can be the central methodological framework or it can be a subframe that only appears in specific sections of a text to explore elements that may be neglected if they were not a direct response to research questions.

The effectiveness arises, in part, out of the practice of reflective critique, which is the last criterion that Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997) offer in their definition of scholarly endeavor. This paradigm is well suited to Nash and Bradley's (2011) use of the first-person narrative structure of SPN. While there is a value in merely relating a personal experience, SPN demands that as scholars we reflect on those experiences using the critical lens of our inquiry. To be considered a SoTL SPN, authors must synthesize the scholarly and the personal elements into one picture that captures the complexities, or “swampy lowlands,” of educational environments, interpersonal meaning-making, and the informed perspective of the researcher. (Schön, 1983, p. 42). In short, Nash, who later refined his ideas with Bradley, offers a methodology that meets the criteria for scholarship.

## ANALYSIS OF SPN EXAMPLES

To clarify how SPN meets scholarly standards while integrating personal narrative, we offer an analysis of two SoTL articles that incorporate scholarly personal narrative. Our first rests primarily within the discipline of higher education administration. This article investigates student motivation, identity formation, and persistence in the classroom as well as the university. In “Coming Home:

Hermanos Académicos Reflect On Past and Present Realities as Professors at Their Alma Mater” (2012), Reddick and Sáenz, as men of color, struggle with the legacies of discrimination and the dominant culture, yet persevere and thrive, partly through formal and informal mentoring and community-building programs. Reddick and Sáenz’s SPN article analyzes the influence of mentoring and community in the contexts of divisive, marginalizing racial history and behaviors at the researchers’ alma mater. From the vantage of professors returning to the university where they were once students, they reflect on the paradoxes of the institution’s legacies and efforts to be inclusive, as well as their own alternating invisibility and hypervisibility as celebrated returning alumni who exemplify the university’s potential benefits for marginalized groups.

Their work reflects the key characteristics of research as outlined by Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997). First, Reddick and Sáenz offer clear goals to “inform conversations among community members and faculty invested in developing a welcoming and supportive institutional ethos” (p. 355). The audience may also include institutions whose mission includes public outreach, particularly to “underrepresented minorities of modest socioeconomic backgrounds” (p. 355). Additionally, their “article is also about the evolution of the institution in relation to the experiences of two of its scholars” (p. 355). And their work will help “aspiring scholars of color [to] understand . . . where we stand today” (p. 355). Importantly, their objectives also contribute to SoTL inquiry on student success and retention, specifically their findings on methods for building community and support for minorities. Further their study addresses how institutions can support a range of students and employees through strong mentorships and strategic efforts to provide individual attention through targeted interventions.

Secondly, they have adequate preparation as scholars whose SPN “researches” their own pasts to identify pivotal moments and factors that stalled and/or contributed to their success. Reddick and Sáenz reflect on their peer mentoring partnership, as well as their years as undergraduates in a “foreign” landscape of higher education. Both authors use, though Reddick to a greater degree, a scholarly framework in which to evaluate their time as students. They write as professors reflecting on what experiences as undergraduates, graduates, and new professors made a difference in their successes.

Third, Reddick and Sáenz apply methods appropriate to the scholarly conversation. Pursuing answers to specific research questions, their work is appropriately grounded in the history of this institution and its relationship to treatment of and attitudes toward minorities. This foundation is even more pertinent when they reveal that they are intentionally using SPN as a way to explore minority experience in this context. They open by discussing the history of the University of Texas at Austin, specifically its founding as 40 acres established after the end of the Civil War in the “ashes of the Confederacy” (p. 356). Further historical moments touched on by the authors provide an understanding of this venerated institution from the viewpoint of scholars whose cultural heritage is often at odds with the dominant climate. As undergraduates, they experienced cultural alienation, which increased the need for family, community, and university support. Reddick recalls that the office of the Dean of Students organized a mixer wherein he “met older students of color who were confident and successful, role models who shared many characteristics with me” (p. 361). From this moment, he began to conceive of himself as a member of this community who could be an academic, a significant identity shift. These upper-division students modeled how to be true to cultural heritage while also forging ahead in university life. Reddick and Sáenz contribute to the scholarly conversation around fostering diversity and inclusivity in higher education. Their article underscores that true diversity is more than increasing the numbers of an unrepresented group; it is about genuine integration into one diverse academic community. Central to their methods are theories of (in)visibility. They draw from Merton, Roberts and colleagues, and, most strongly, from Brighenti. Her work “presents the converse of invisibility-

supervisibility, defining it as a ‘paradoxical double bind that forbids you to do what you are simultaneously required to do by the whole ensemble of social constraints’ (as cited in Reddick & Sáenz, 2012, p. 358). Reddick and Sáenz demonstrate the ways in which their histories bear out Brighenti’s claim that visibility is “a double-edged sword: it can be empowering as well as disempowering” (as cited in Reddick & Sáenz, 2012, p. 359). Further, the process they undertook through SPN was one that allowed them to research their own lives methodically, analyze for patterns, apply theory to deepen understanding, and use these occurrences in pursuit of scholarly insights. Personal and theoretical approaches interweave to enrich the analysis.

Fourth, their article offers “Significant results” that are at once deeply personal and yet of value to institutions, students, and communities who are working toward more opportunities for advancing integration and equality. For example, Reddick and Sáenz (2102) find that

*The process of managing visibility (Brayboy, 2004; Brighenti, 2007; Roberts, Roberts, O’Neill, & Blake-Beard, 2008) allowed us to accrue valuable social capital, culminating in our successful undergraduate experiences (Gasman & Palmer, 2008; Smith, 2007; Tierney & Venegas, 2006). Our development came largely through the efforts of mentors who found ways to bring our intellects and personalities out of the shadows (Kram, 1985; Reddick, 2009). We also have both experienced the duality of being invisible as minority males in many contexts while hypervisible in others—experiences that continued in graduate school and the professoriat. (p. 355)*

Applying visibility theories to their personal experiences, these authors create a compelling and rigorous scholarly article that illuminates real-world progress of minority high school graduates through the challenges of creating a life in academia. When addressing questions of persistence and inclusiveness, such detailed analyses of learning experience from trained researchers may inform theory and practice.

Their “effective communication,” the fifth requirement, bridges the personal experience with the scholarly language and interpretation. The voice of the researcher is clear, as is the voice of the individual:

*I have not always been the most likely candidate for the professoriat. As an undergraduate student, I sat in many college classrooms thinking, “I could never do that . . . I could never be a professor.” It just seemed so completely impossible, so far removed from anything I had ever known. Even coming from a family of educators, I did not know a single professor growing up, nor could I have imagined myself in such an intellectually demanding and visible role. I often share this story when I speak to young people, emphasizing the point that we are often our own worst critic, our own worst enemy. (pp. 369-70)*

The article, while theoretical, is also compelling and grounded in human experience. Their language and style are readable and scholarly, encompassing several different fields, indicative of “big tent” discourse.

Finally, their reflective critique speaks to both their findings and the practice of SPN in their research project. While the authors do not explicitly engage with Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff’s (1997) recommendation that professors evaluate their project according to “what went right and what went wrong, what opportunities were taken, and which ones were missed” (p. 35), they do reflect on their use of SPN in pursuing their research goals. Further, they discuss the significance of SPN for addressing Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff’s (1997) emphasis on defining goals “within all relevant contexts, disciplinary or interdisciplinary, public or professional, and educational as well” (p. 26). Their work, in

fact, explicitly discusses how the SPN approach can add more “intersectional analyses of the lived experience of faculty along the axes of race, gender, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, nationality and immigration status, age, ability status, and other factors to be expanded” (p. 376). In reflections on their findings, they observe how mentoring and community can make a significant impact on the learning environment and success of students. This kind of SPN can also speak to the wider context of the decisions made that shape the social climate of university life, from recruiting and retention to faculty development and community-building. Ultimately, Reddick and Sáenz identify SPN as a valuable tool to communicate more holistically “the panoply of underreported experiences in academia” (2012, p. 376). Their work contributes to the understanding of how to create inclusive teaching and learning environments. They offer a fresh approach to SoTL research methodology that provides a space for a scholarly discussion of intellectual and emotional lives within higher education.

While Reddick and Sáenz use SPN as a central framework for their text, it can also play a smaller, subtler role in research. As a secondary lens, SPN can be applied to studies that look at large institutional endeavors or to classroom-specific analyses. For instance, a thoughtful exploration of large classroom dynamics and the importance of experimenting in this type of setting is explored by Tinkle, Atias, McAdams, and Zukerman (2013). In “Teaching Close Reading Skills in a Large Lecture Course,” the authors do not explicitly state that they are engaged in SPN, but they draw from the SPN practices. They open in the classic third person, but as they move from planning the course to execution of the project, their first-person perspective fleshes out the conditions of their classroom, the rationale for their pedagogical structures, and the classroom experience unique to their institution.

From the start, Tinkle and her graduate teaching assistant co-authors (2013) are very clear about the goals of their project, which is the first of Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff’s (1997) criteria. The article begins with a brief description on the course context and the problem that the instructors encounter in using the Stanford approach to teaching literature in a large lecture-style format. At the end of this discussion the authors outline their goal of turning passive lecture listeners into “active learners, engaged in creating new ideas, explaining ideas to each other, applying information to new contexts, and evaluating their own learning” (p. 506). They go on to further refine this goal into research questions about how students actively read and engage with texts. They ask, “How do students learn to read closely and to write effective analyses of complex texts? And can students substantially improve their close reading skills in a large lecture class?” (p. 506). By laying out these ideas at the start of the article, the authors create a touchstone as they discuss choosing pedagogical methods that will help them achieve the desired outcomes and assignments for assessment. At the end of the article, they return once more to the goals for critical reflection on their performance as instructors and their students’ performances as engaged learners. This reflective element shows how their goals created the form of their study as well as provided the yardstick for measuring success. Additionally, Tinkle and her team include another layer of investigation. They use the reflective moments to discuss how the process influenced them, an outcome not captured in their research questions. This reflection includes the unexpected realization of how the pedagogical choices affected them: “Collaborative pedagogy involving faculty and graduate students could foster mentoring and improve both cohorts’ self-consciousness about pedagogical strengths and weaknesses” (531). At the start of the study the learning outcomes and pedagogical frames were chosen as the best match for the class and goal. The benefits they received from the collaboration was a development that enriched their practice. Without identifying it as such, the authors weave in SPN to add context and discernment to unanticipated outcomes.

Addressing the second criterion of scholarship, adequate preparation, Tinkle, Atias, McAdams, and Zukerman detail the research they use for defining their idea of close reading, drawing on Gallop



and Jane, and for their choices in pedagogy, citing Gagne et al. While these references provide the literature review, the first-person discussion points to which elements the team emphasizes in the study and the rationales for choosing these critical frameworks over other possible frames. Tinkle and her co-authors discuss Gagne's ideas in the terms of on-going feedback and recursive instructional approaches throughout the semester. Instead of a listing of works, what Tinkle and her co-authors have provided is a succinct discussion of critical devices and applications. Here, SPN allows the authors to highlight their process for choosing the models they use, as well as show how their experiences molded that choice. While the audience may not be able to identify with the subject, it is possible to use this process regardless of field.

The authors use a mixed methods design, which is a more widely recognized approach to research and fits criteria three of Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff's (1997) list. They are using in-class activities, student work, and perception data. Tinkle and her team divide their potential data pool into written assessments and classroom interactions. Given that some of their goals deal with having students actively engage with the writings, the combination is appropriate for a pilot SoTL study. Their use of student work and quizzes allows them to showcase the tools of their discipline through close reading, in the tradition of what Gurung, Chick, and Haynie suggest in their *Exploring Signature Pedagogies* volumes. They provide examples of students' writings, use close reading to pull apart the nuances of the students' texts, and then provide their tentative conclusions on the pieces. Thus, they use the tools of their field to assess, establish the level of rigor, and allow the students' voices to have a place in the text through examples, and layer in the SPN elements in the discussion and reflection sections.

The in-class section of the article details how Tinkle and her team converted the lecture format to include small-group activities, increased resources for the students, and addressed obstacles inherent in dealing with a large (120 students) section. The overview provides a general idea of what the integrated classroom experiment looked like for those participating. However, the "swampy lowlands" of the classroom experience does not appear in this section. If SPN was utilized more widely by researchers, this methodology section may have been enhanced by a discussion of the community's interpersonal dimension, creating a foundation for the reflective critique they provide later. The reflective section, written in an SPN approach, exemplifies the power of personal analysis as a means of conveying persuasive insights. The authors discuss how their team dynamic changed. Specifically, teaching together allows them to

*lean on each others' skills, areas of expertise, and experiences of the course in order to pursue a common goal of assessing what students learned and how. During the grant period, the summer after we taught the course, we benefited from much-appreciated institutional support for conducting research and managing a qualitative assessment of student learning.* (p. 530)

The narrative style of this article highlights not the dynamic of the classroom but the empowerment that occurred for the authors as they navigated the challenges of creating, executing, and publishing the findings. These outcomes are not captured in the goals or research questions, which so carefully form the spine of the study. This circumstance leads us to the question of where personal reflection fits within the framework of scholarship we have been exploring. Earlier, Tinkle and her partners outline the teaching goal and the measures they use to see if students improved their understanding of the materials:

*We worked to diminish the hierarchy inherent in the lecture model by inviting active student engagement and by structuring class so that student participation was sustained, meaningful,*

*and essential. We designed the course to focus on what we see as the crucial learning goals of the major: not only close reading but also analytical writing, presentation of evidence, and historical literacy. (p. 507)*

Their reflection reveals that the dismantling of the classroom hierarchy is a reflection of the dismantling of the hierarchy between graduate teaching assistants and supervising professor. The community Tinkle and her partners sought to create for students was mirrored in the community that helped the researchers teach, analyze, and publish their findings. Their realization connects their work to the growing body of literature documenting the benefits of collaborative efforts in teaching, extending the scope of their essay beyond SoTL in the humanities by drawing attention to a result that professionals and graduate students in other fields could experience as well. Without the authors' first-person reflections, the potential professional benefits of the collaborative teaching experience would not have been conveyed.

As their personal revelations indicate, Tinkle and her co-authors' work addresses the significant results criteria of scholarship. Due to the variety of materials the team collected, they have an array of results to help them determine if their experiment was successful. As they consider emerging insights from multiple perspectives, the interventions' effects become apparent. Through the combination of classroom activities, student work, and quizzes, the results of Tinkle et al.'s investigation shows how their interventions improved the close reading skills for the students in their section at their institutions. They came to the conclusion that

*We have discerned, to our immense gratification, that as students improve their close reading skills, they begin to make more sophisticated arguments, present more specific claims, understand and appreciate historical differences more fully, invent their own relation to the past more self-consciously and reflectively, and, above all, write more compelling analyses of texts. These are, we think, worthwhile results from an undergraduate class. (p. 530)*

The study suggests improved outcomes not only in the quality of student learning but also in the instructors' understanding of the teaching behaviors. A secondary effect of their analysis demonstrates how SPN could be incorporated in SoTL research as a minor critical framework to provide additional commentary that enhances the findings of the work. If they had developed the use of SPN (i.e., exploration of the team teaching dynamic in conjunction with their classroom methodologies), they may have enhanced their findings to show the potential benefit instructors experience beyond the classroom.

Since they are employing SPN in selective areas and not as an overarching framework, the authors weave together different types of narratives. The mixed methods approach is echoed in the techniques they use to meet the effective communication criteria of scholarship. These multiple narratives are necessary to fully capture the different layers of learning. Tinkle and her colleagues have written an article that is easy to follow, outlines the primary drive for the experiment, and discusses the unanticipated consequences the experiment had on the instructors. The use of first person allows the authors to discuss how they use the pedagogy, evaluate the results, and explore the unintended benefits of the experiment. The first person captures the hopes and experiences of the teaching team, and the third person provides the tone we have come to associate with objective studies. What results from this interweaving is an SPN that capitalizes upon the strengths of both methods.

Tinkle and her colleagues' blended approach comes to fruition in the reflective critique, criteria six for scholarly work. At the end of the article, the authors provide their assessment of the students'

works, the instructional tools, and the classroom experience, as well as their approaches to conducting this study. The authors follow Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff's (1997) assertion that scholarship includes an evaluation of "what went right and what went wrong, what opportunities were taken, and which ones were missed" (p. 35). In fact, their reflection is most powerful when dealing with the effects the study had on them as professionals trying to publish the results of their work. Through this reflection they begin to unpack the dynamic of collaboration between faculty and graduate students. They delve briefly into the barriers of such mentoring and interaction to advocate that

*the collaboration of faculty and graduate students in large lecture courses can benefit all the instructors while enhancing undergraduate education. We would go so far as heartily to recommend faculty-graduate student collaboration, including working together to determine the content and design of the course, workshopping lesson plans, and teaching with a specific and shared scholarly pedagogical mission in mind. (p. 531)*

What makes this reflection effective is that it not only includes an evaluation of whether the educational interventions were successful for the students, but also examines a replicable process of collaborative course design, which could be used in other fields to increase the effectiveness of the learning environment. They exemplify the sixth marker of scholarship, incorporating an analysis of "opportunities . . . taken" (Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997, p. 35). Both the seasoned and new instructors move forward with insights gained through reflection, and the scholarly communication of these findings broadens the impact of this local experience to others engaged in similar endeavors. Their work does not identify as SPN likely because this methodology is little known. Our analysis shows that if they had named SPN as a secondary frame, they would have drawn on the authority of a multidisciplinary reflective approach that guides critique in a way that is, we suggest, appropriate to SoTL.

## CONCLUSION

SPN challenges researchers to apply theoretical concepts to personal and professional experiences. For SoTL researchers, this methodology may illuminate in fresh ways the "messy," nuanced arena of teaching and learning while simultaneously highlighting the generalizable value of findings. Reddick and Sáenz's SPN dissects how alternating invisibility and hypervisibility shapes their educational experiences and development as students and professionals. Their personal and cultural contexts interpreted through the lens of theory highlight teaching and learning experiences for minorities in majority white institutions. Tinkle and her partners' article is enriched by integrating personal narrative into their research frame; in essence, they augment their findings to suggest how collaborative pedagogy informs their views of successful professional partnerships, as it shows their students the benefits of community support for developing close reading practices. The power of SPN is that these experiences the authors report are not necessarily tied to a single discipline, as tools like close reading or autoethnography may be. SPN gives scholars across the disciplines a means for analyzing how their experiences intentionally and unintentionally contribute to the educational context of their classes and institutions.

SPN can be of value to scholars across the disciplines. Reflection performed to scholarly standards leads to deeper understanding of the situations and influences that shape instructors, learning environments, and student experiences. The "thick description" common to SPN illuminates our teaching and learning practices, relationships, and environments across national and disciplinary

boundaries. As Hutchings and Huber (2008) explain, “the scholarship of teaching and learning is strengthened by its methodological and theoretical pluralism, and by having, as a consequence, the potential for lots of lively exchange across fields and contexts” (p. 233). SPN provides researchers with a platform for discussing agendas and practices in a way that makes their conceptions of the classroom and education more transparent. SPN brings to the SoTL community a vehicle for exploring classroom dynamics and the subtleties of the wider academic community. If, as Palmer (1997) has shown, “we teach who we are,” then SPN will help us connect our identities, research methodologies, and signature pedagogies in ways that enrich our understanding of how they influence learning (p. 14). Scholarly personal narrative, as a part of the SoTL “big tent,” promises to make an important contribution to our cross-disciplinary conversations about teaching and learning.

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