Becoming a SoTL Scholar

Edited by Janice Miller-Young and Nancy L. Chick

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LEARNING FROM
EACH OTHER'S JOURNEYS

Editors' Epilogue

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In the end, the chapters in this book collectively illustrate that there are many paths to becoming a SoTL scholar, and each is far from the traditional academic journey. Each path charted in these chapters is both challenging and rewarding, and paves the way for others. Most explicitly, many chapters reflect on SoTL identity. Ten years after the self-study on SoTL identity development by Nicola Simmons, Earle Abrahamson, Jessica M. Deshler, Barbara Kensington-Miller, Karen Manarin, Sue Morón-García, Carolyn Oliver, and Joanna Renc-Roe (2013), our authors share many of the earlier authors' intra- and interpersonal "conflicts and configurations," but they also chronicle more varied experiences in the liminal space of becoming a SoTL scholar. The different entry points matter. Ten years ago, Simmons and colleagues rightly described this experience as "building an alternative identity" (2013, 15), but now some frame SoTL as part of their primary identity. Some are now pursuing a SoTL career before even having a degree (e.g., Abbot, chapter 3). Others are all but abandoning their original disciplinary identities (e.g., Eady, chapter 15; Webb, Kensington-Miller, Gansemer-Topf, Lewis, Maheux-Pelletier, and Hofmann, chapter 16). Even others have subsumed their earlier disciplinary selves into their primary identity as a SoTL scholar (e.g., Chick, chapter 8; McCollum, chapter 14).

The authors in *Becoming a SoTL Scholar* also remind us that identity development—of any kind—isn't linear. Instead, it's a recursive process of negotiation and renegotiation. As a review of nineteen issues of *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* reveals, SoTL is characterized by introspection (Poole and Chick 2022). One key area of such introspection is self-reflection on questions like "What parts of who I am are relevant to what and how I understand what is happening in this work, and in what ways? How is who I am changing as a result of this work? What matters most to me and why?" (2). We see these more detailed versions of "Who am I?" in the work of our authors across career stages, such as Brett McCollum's reflection on his "unlearning journey" by revisiting the teaching journal he's kept for years (chapter 14).

SoTL identity development is also a recursive process of negotiation and renegotiation through interactions with others. We see many transformative and clarifying moments of interaction among individuals. Corinne A. Green wonders, "What might have been, in some alternate reality, if my colleague hadn't invited me to the 2016 ISSOTL conference" (chapter 4). Nancy L. Chick describes a clarifying and collaborative meeting on an "early Saturday morning on the last day of the [ISSOTL] conference" when "a dozen or so" colleagues worked together to articulate their shared work in SoTL to help SoTL scholars in the humanities more effectively "communicate their authentic work in SoTL's multidisciplinary spaces" (chapter 8). As Kristin Winet was "saying goodbye" to her discipline and her tenure-track life, a colleague invited her to consider a new career: "Look up the scholarship of teaching and learning" (chapter 10). Winet writes, "Over time, I would come to see 'the coffee shop moment' as a pivotal one in my professional life, a moment that would come to help me redefine what I meant to the academy—and what it meant to me." Jeff Paul describes how he realized through "reading, talking to like-minded people, and attending SoTL events and conferences" that SoTL was his scholarly home (chapter 12). Finally, Brett McCollum describes an intensive teaching workshop as both the "entry point for me to the teaching and learning literature"

and the "influential . . . structure as a learning community" (chapter 14). For him, this body of writing by "research teams investigating teaching and learning outside of schools of education"—notably characterized as people, not just texts—introduced him to a new scholarly community, and the learning community that interacted outside of the "expert-novice hierarchy" were transformative to his future as a SoTL practitioner and mentor.

Another common theme across the chapters is the benefits of collaboration. Individual authors Lorelli Nowell (chapter 2), Matthew Fisher (chapter 7), and Michelle Eady (chapter 15) offer collaboration as one of several important strategies for advancing a career in SoTL, while others write in detail about their collaborative approaches such as journal clubs (Celeste Suart, Michelle Ogrodnik, and Megan Suttie, chapter 5) and learning communities (Bruce Gillespie, Michelle Goodridge, and Shirley Hall, chapter 11). This underscores the idea that SoTL is indeed a multidisciplinary field that thrives on scholars crossing and pushing boundaries, a trait that will help the field to resist any tendencies toward homogenization (Felten and Geertsema 2023).

It's worth noting that almost half of our chapters were written collaboratively. Indeed, collaborative writing is common in SoTL. To illustrate, "70% of the published pieces in *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* and 55% of those in *The International Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* have been collaboratively written" (Chick 2023, 1). But this collaborative work isn't part of all academic fields. For Nancy, whose life as a traditional literary scholar for whom research and writing are solitary ended in the previous century, the collaborative work of SoTL continues to be remarkable. Solitary work doesn't require one to participate in an ongoing process of identity negotiation. Collaborative work, on the other hand, demands it. Writing with our colleagues demands it even more. From start to finish, collaborative writing is a constant negotiation of each author asking and answering questions like: What should we say? What did we do? How should we write it? What do we mean? What do you mean? Janice Miller-Young, Michelle Yeo,

and Karen Manarin (chapter 17) describe how difficult these questions can be to answer in a truly collaborative writing project, as opposed to previous projects where they've taken a divide-and-conquer approach. Further, Andrea Webb, Barbara Kensington-Miller, Ann Gansemer-Topf, Heather Lewis, Geneviève Maheux-Pelletier, and Analise Hofmann illustrate how they used narrative inquiry to collaboratively explore such questions, allowing them to also "engage in work that [they] value and that has potential to benefit many others" (chapter 16).

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Editing this book has been the product of a collaboration that has informed how we think about ourselves as SoTL scholars. We started to observe these effects early on. Immediately after we read the first drafts of all the chapters, we decided to write brief narratives about our own experiences with the book and how we located SoTL within our careers. We share those narratives below. We had originally included them in our introduction, but as we finish this editors' conclusion one year later, we're struck by how the above observations about the book's chapters are prefigured in our brief narratives.

On Becoming a SoTL Scholar and Editing This Book

Janice's Journey

I developed both new insights and a deepened SoTL identity through the editing of this book. For example, Nancy and I facilitated an internal, single-blind peer-review process during the writing of the chapters where all authors reviewed other chapters in the book (before the peer-review process facilitated by the publisher). I found it informative, if not surprising, to see how scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds saw certain genres as more or less valuable. Also, as someone with a STEM background and who strives to promote and support inclusivity in SoTL in terms of research paradigms and methodologies, I felt somewhat troubled by my own lack of confidence and therefore my reliance on my humanities

colleagues to review the more affective and narrative-style chapters. I still have some growing to do in this area.

At the beginning of the editing process I would have said that I do SoTL, but I didn't identify as a SoTL scholar, because I found it difficult to identify with a term that has so many different meanings to different people. But, after reflecting on how much I have learned from collaborating with others, particularly with those from disciplines far from my own, I now confidently identify as a SoTL scholar. I still feel some discomfort with the use of metaphors in SoTL and with some of my humanities colleagues' resistance to defining terms. At the same time, my frustration with the limitations of language and traditional metaphors compelled me to try to push boundaries in my own way, and I decided to explore how an illustrated chapter could meet the criteria of scholarship, including being peer reviewed and making a novel contribution to the SoTL conversation (chapter 13). I guess this shows I'm at the stage of my SoTL career that I don't mind taking a few risks to try something new and different.

Nancy's Journey
I built a career in SoTL without planning it. I discovered SoTL in graduate school in the 1990s and never wavered from that interest in using my disciplinary strengths to better understand students' learning experiences, and ultimately the field itself. Reading voraciously, carefully analyzing my students' work, and observing how power continually plays out in the field, I now devote most of my time to supporting and guiding colleagues in SoTL, whether they choose to dabble or immerse themselves in the field. I can't remember a time when I didn't identify as a SoTL scholar. In fact, even in my most recent role in a faculty development center, I continue to identify as a SoTL scholar because I approach this work—whether providing one-on-one consultations, facilitating a workshop, leading a book discussion, or advising departments—by intentionally drawing on what I've learned from doing, reading, and generally learning from SoTL.

Janice's invitation to collaborate on a book about SoTL careers coincided with my work co-facilitating a multi-campus program for mid-career faculty seeking change, meaning, and even joy in their remaining years in the profession. The two projects felt aligned as part of a post-pandemic effort to redefine the experiences of working in higher education. There was a time when most of my SoTL colleagues had turned to SoTL precisely at that mid-career questioning of "What should I do now?" But this book has confirmed my hunch that this later moment of existential self-exploration is no longer the most common entry point into SoTL.

Co-editing this book has, in some ways, felt very similar to co-editing *Teaching & Learning Inquiry,* the journal of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Even though the book project is bounded and far more specific than the journal, the approaches to knowledge construction, writing styles, and genres of some of the chapters have met with the same resistance as what I saw in the journal's peer review by colleagues who bring specific expectations for what these features of academic work should look like. It's a natural consequence of such a multidisciplinary field that always invites newcomers who are also disciplinary experts; navigating these power dynamics is important (but challenging) editorial work.

Don't tell Janice, but my favorite part of this project has been watching her ideas unfold—from the very idea of the book and its structure, to her honest struggles reflected in her description above, to her powerhouse of a chapter that blows up how we've been thinking about SoTL. Working with her has just reinforced for me the sense that good collaborations are what keep me thriving as a SoTL scholar.

Our own entry points and journeys couldn't be more different. Janice was introduced to SoTL after having developed a strong disciplinary identity, and Nancy was introduced to it early on. Janice resisted a SoTL identity for many years, and Nancy embraced it. Each of us has written an individual reflective piece for this book,

and we've had insights as a result of collaborative projects, including our work together on this book.

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In the end, we hope that all the journeys chronicled in *Becoming a SoTL Scholar* invite readers to reflect on their own path to SoTL and where their entry point was, is, or will be. We hope introspective questions like "Who am I?" will prompt readers to recall key moments in their own experiences, and how those moments have resonated over time. We also encourage readers to consider how their individual work has differed from any collaborative work in this journey, and how others have contributed to their development as a SoTL scholar.

We especially invite readers to consider and share with others what milestones aren't depicted in this book. As we noted in our introduction, the book's authors come from Canada, the US, and Australia, but we'd originally hoped our chapters would represent more of the international field of SoTL. We especially hope readers from countries and contexts not represented in the book explore— and share—their experiences in becoming SoTL scholars. Even as the field of SoTL approaches thirty-five years of existence, with its own journals, conferences, and credentials, we all still have much to learn, and much to learn from each other.

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