Becoming a SoTL Scholar

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CHAPTER 8

ENGAGING WITH NUANCE

Authentic SoTL Engagement for Scholars in the Humanities

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Mid-career is a time when many faculty hit a wall. At tenure-granting institutions, these faculty have earned that sense of security and a promotion. Faculty at institutions that don't grant tenure have an established track record of accomplishments and probably an identity based on this track record. At this long middle phase in their career trajectory, these faculty may "find themselves asking: What's it all about? Where do I go from here?" (Monaghan 2017, A9). Many have gained confidence in the classroom, so they enjoy teaching more at this stage. At the same time, they may feel like they've gone as far as possible with their original research agenda, so they yearn for something new—new learning, new colleagues, new challenges—but some are uncertain about what would count for the next promotion (Baker 2020). A common path forward is through leadership roles. Campuses typically encourage this service to the institution, but it's not for everyone. Another path forward for some is in shifting their research agenda to align with their teaching. This path often leads mid-career faculty into SoTL.

Some humanists[1] who've considered doing SoTL have found it uncomfortable in part because of the significant shift in the objects of study (e.g., from written texts, often by long-dead authors, to

1 I use the term "humanist" and "humanistic" to refer to colleagues in the humanities (e.g., literature, philosophy, languages, history). Although I could use phrases like "colleagues in the humanities" or "humanities scholars," it's helpful to also have a single-word term for our collective identity.

the live students in our classes). They may also find it "foreign" and even unwelcoming if they've run into explanations or examples with "well-defined questions, controlled studies, systematic analysis, or objective results," all of which "bear little resemblance to" their regular scholarly practices (Bass and Linkon 2008, 246). Later in this book, Karen Manarin reflects on her experience with similar language that "tripped us up" while co-authoring a SoTL book with colleagues in engineering and education (Miller-Young, Yeo, and Manarin, chapter 17). I won't dwell on these challenges here since plenty has been written about them (e.g., Bass and Linkon 2008; Chick 2013; Potter and Wuetherick 2015; Chick 2015; Bloch-Schulman and Linkon 2016; Bloch-Schulman, Conkling, Linkon, Manarin, and Perkins 2016; Manarin 2016, 2017, 2018; Hovland 2021).

Instead, in this chapter, written in the voice and style of a humanistic scholarly essay,[2] my hope is threefold. Most importantly, I want to help interested colleagues in the humanities embrace SoTL as an integral part of the next phase of their careers while remaining authentic to their disciplinary expertise and epistemology. Illustrating the importance of this support for authentic disciplinary engagement, the previous chapter by Matt Fisher highlights some key principles—using language, concepts, and metaphors that are familiar to them—to guide his colleagues in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics in understanding and engaging with SoTL. My second goal serves the first. A decade ago, Gary Poole encouraged faculty working together across disciplines to navigate the "challenge of translating disciplinary research languages and of understanding research cultures" by starting at "square one": reflecting on and articulating an answer to the question, "what is research?" (2013, 136) My third hope, then, is to support my colleagues in the

2 This includes my thoughts captured into these footnotes. The process of reading these clarifications, additions, and asides may feel unusual, but I encourage readers to follow me—from above to down here and back—to experience some of the layers of humanistic thinking and writing.

humanities as they respond to Poole's question and communicate their authentic work in SoTL's multidisciplinary spaces.

Articulating Humanistic Choices in SoTL

At the 2018 meeting of the Arts and Humanities Interest Group of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) in Bergen, Norway, I was one of a dozen or so members who drafted "Characteristics and Choices of SoTL from the Arts and Humanities."[3] Some of what we drafted is aspirational, what we'd like to see more often or feel free to do if we knew this work would be accepted in broader SoTL circles. In fact, throughout this chapter as I write that humanistic SoTL scholars do this or that, I'm referring to those who operate authentically from their disciplinary background, or those who hope to do so. In some cases, projects with the characteristics we described may not yet even exist. Also, we didn't mean to imply that any of these characteristics or choices is unique to the humanities: some apply to other areas as well, but each is indeed descriptive of the humanities, and the totality represents the humanities most fully.

On that early Saturday morning on the last day of the conference, we left our list in a single level of bullets ending with "More . . . ?" so our brainstorm remains what we called "An *Uncomprehensive, Non-Hierarchical, Not-a-Checklist* List" (emphasis in original). (See figure 8.1 or https://bit.ly/ISSOTL_AHIG-chars.) In this chapter, I sort the list into meaningful sections describing humanistic SoTL: our purpose, our questions, artifacts and evidence, meaning-making, and sharing our work. My humanistic perspective is situated

3 Although the list of participants encompasses both the arts and humanities, most of the members present were from the humanities. In fact, I initiated this group as the Humanities Interest Group, but after a few years, some members from the arts joined because they found it welcoming to their approaches as well, and they wanted the arts recognized explicitly. They acknowledged the significant overlap between the two areas, but some objected to the frequency with which the arts "fall under" the broader umbrella of the humanities. They wanted to be named. And so we changed the name to the Arts and Humanities Interest Group.

within my specific discipline, so at times my language, analogies, and examples will be drawn from literary studies.

Characteristics & Choices of SoTL from the Arts & Humanities

An *Uncomprehensive, Non-Hierarchical, Not-a-Checklist* List Brainstormed at the Early-Saturday-Morning Meeting of the Arts & Humanities Interest Group at ISSOTL18 in Bergen, Norway

- Embraces narrative, descriptive, exploratory "what is?"-type SoTL questions (Hutchings, 2000)
- Storytelling
- Artifacts of student thinking, learning, expression
- Texts are important, and broadly defined
- Contains meaningful reflection
- Engages with nuance
- Attention to what, as well as *how* meaning is articulated
- Rich with quotes and others' voices
- Intentional about citation style that foregrounds valued bibliographic information (e.g., full name of author, not as concerned about date of publication)
- Authentic (even poetic?) ways of describing methods
- Uses methods such as narrative inquiry, close reading, thought experiments, meditations
- *Constructs* arguments, rather than starting with a hypothesis (Stephen Bloch-Schulman suggested they're more abductive than inductive) -- Here's a description of it as originally described by Peirce, and here's brief description of the different types of reasoning)
- Presented not only via essays and articles, but also as poetry, drama, videos, drawings, graphic short stories/novellas, role play, et al.
- More....?

[To share a simple URL for this page, use https://bit.ly/ISSOTL_AHIG-chars]

Figure 8.1. Characteristics and choices of SoTL from the Arts & Humanities

Our Purpose: The Missing Characteristic

The list developed by the interest group doesn't address why humanists do SoTL, and why we might do it in specific ways. Literary scholars would call this missing piece a lacuna, a gap in a narrative that leaves readers confused and challenged to fill in the blank. This lacuna is problematic in multidisciplinary spaces like SoTL where the emptiness may be filled in ways we don't intend. In "Identifying a Tradition of Inquiry: Articulating Research Assumptions," Carol Berenson notes the consequences of such silence: "When paradigmatic assumptions are not uncovered and articulated, all research is held up to the same standards—those in the dominant paradigm. This can position some research as not research at all" (2018, 43). But we in the humanities rarely step back and talk about the fundamental purpose of what we do, as if what we do and why we do it are self-evident. They're not.

Here's a good place to repeat the point that I don't mean to imply that the humanities is alone in any one characteristic. Our tacit assumptions about the purpose of our work have created a kind of expert blindspot, making it difficult to "see and defend for others the rigor of our work, including the logical progression of what counts as evidence, how we generate and analyze that evidence, and the claims we make about the broader relevance of our research when all is said and done" (Berenson 2018, 42).

It's not hard to come up with a pithy description of the ultimate purpose of the humanities: "Put simply, the humanities help us understand and interpret the human experience, as individuals and societies" (National Humanities Center, n.d.). Embedded in this seemingly simple explanation are some of the nuances of our "research paradigm," or our "tradition of inquiry." Berenson's chapter helpfully walks through positivism and constructivism, "the farthest endpoints along a continuum" of paradigms and the two most visible in SoTL (2018, 43). Within this framework, humanistic SoTL research is most aligned with a constructivist approach: "Situated and visible researchers reflect on their impact and assumptions" and develop "emergent" projects that "begin with the data, and from there [develop] concepts or theories"[4] about "subjective, perceived, interpreted realities of learning" (46, 45). Berenson notes that this approach is also "the most likely to be challenged on the SoTL landscape" (43), in part because of the silence described above, which leaves the positivist voice as all that gets heard, privileging its assumptions about "research as an objective, value-free endeavor" that's aimed at testing hypotheses by collecting data from "a large number of participants (which is typically required)" and designed for replication and "empirical generalizability" (45, 48, 49).[5] To make sure our work isn't held up to the standards of the wrong paradigm, we need to be explicit about why and how we do SoTL.

4 Many humanists use the terms "evidence" or "artifacts" for what they collect. More on this shortly.

5 For a more detailed discussion of these research paradigms and their relevance in SoTL, read Berenson (2018), Poole (2013), and chapter 3 in Yeo, Miller-Young, and Manarin 2023.

Gently adapting the National Humanities Center's description, we can explain that **humanistic SoTL aims to help educators understand and interpret the student experience, as individuals and groups.**[6] This broad purpose undergirds the characteristics listed by the interest group, beginning with the kinds of questions we ask.

Our Questions

- "Embraces narrative, descriptive, exploratory 'what is?'-type SoTL questions"
- "Engages with nuance"
- Pays "Attention to what, as well as how meaning is articulated"

As part of the larger project of understanding and interpreting the human experience, SoTL scholars in the humanities ask questions that seek to understand and interpret the student experience—or rather, students' experiences.

Questions to Understand

As the interest group noted, we tend to ask "**what is?**" questions. Described in Pat Hutchings's taxonomy of SoTL questions, these open-ended questions explore "*what it looks like,* what its constituent features might be," in the sense of "*what is* happening in the course" (emphasis in original; 2000, 4–5). This SoTL question sets up descriptive or narrative projects that aim for "a deeper understanding of what's going on for students" (Linkon 2000, 64). This question is also illustrated in Randy Bass's canonical article "The Scholarship of Teaching: What's the Problem?" (1999). We often focus on his use of "problem" as a way to problematize teaching in the same way we do research, but his titular question of "What's the problem?"

6 Certainly, we also need to understand and interpret the experiences of teachers. However, as I've argued elsewhere, we need to explicitly name student learning as the *ultimate* purpose of SoTL, "the goal, or the outer edge of its benefits, envisioned by design from the beginning" because "once that purpose is fulfilled or that goal is achieved, it's rare to continue further" (Chick 2022, 19). This is a necessarily nuanced argument, so please see the section "Purpose: Why We Do SoTL" in Chick 2022 (18-21).

is the focus of the project he describes in the article, as well as a preview of the question Hutchings would include in her taxonomy the following year. Here, the question "What's the problem?" calls for exploration, for going "beyond 'best practice' and 'what worked' to get at the questions about why and how things worked—or didn't work" and even come to a new "understanding of what it meant for something to 'work'" (Bass and Eynon 2009, 7).

I would rephrase Hutchings's question by asking, "**What is—really?**" or "**What's really happening?**" or "**What does it really look like?**" Humanists seek a deeper understanding, as Linkon notes, because we see students and their experiences as highly complex and largely invisible to us, informed by all aspects of the worlds around them and far more than what we can observe. So when we teach, what we assume about our students—what they're thinking, how they're doing something, why they're doing it, what they understand, what they don't understand and why—is often wrong. This question keeps us open to being surprised—pleasantly or not. The emphatic "really" thus reminds us to pause, check our assumptions, and look more carefully to illuminate what's actually happening. This tendency to stop and look more closely may be the defining ethos of humanistic SoTL work: we "engage with nuance."

Another nuance of many humanistic approaches is resisting universals that erase the significance of context, identity, and experience, so we might also amend "what is?" to articulate the situatedness of teaching, learning, and SoTL. Chng Huang Hoon and Peter Looker, for example, add "where" to Hutchings's questions, challenging "the dominant discourse where the Western location is unconsciously amalgamated with the universal and treated as default 'common sense' and other locations are theorized out of the picture totally" by "bringing cultural contexts to bear" (Chng and Looker 2013, 134, 138). Following through on Chng and Looker's attention to cultural context would remind us to attend to the diversity of experiences within any given group, so we might also add "for whom?" Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic taught us that teaching and learning change, so we would add "when" to consider relevant

historical moments like a global pandemic or an influential political environment. Box 8.1 unpacks some of these abstract questions with more specific examples.

Box 8.1. Some Examples of Questions to Understand

The initial formulation of a question might begin with *What is? What is*—really? *What's* really *happening? What does it* really *look like? Where? For whom? When?*

These broad questions might evolve, when applied in practice, to increasingly specific questions like the following:

→ *What do my students really understand about x concept/skill?**
  → *How do different students in my class understand x differently?*
  →*What does it look like for only some of my students to understand x?*
→ *What do my students not understand about x?*
  → *How do different students in my class experience this difficulty differently?*
  → *Do different students in my class have different reasons for this difficulty?*
    → *What do these difficulties look like?*
    → *What are the consequences of this difficulty?*
      → *Are the consequences different for different students in my class?*

* The question of "where?" is signaled by focusing on "my students," and "when?" by the present tense verb "do understand." Rather than writing a long, convoluted question, we would highlight these details when designing and then presenting the results of this project. For example, I would foreground that my students are at Rollins College, a small, private, residential liberal arts college just outside Orlando, Florida, a major metropolitan area in the southeastern US, and that they're enrolled my literature course in the wake of the global pandemic (fall 2022). This specificity of where and when is similarly captured in other questions' verb tenses and pronouns.

Questions to Interpret

The questions above delve into understanding students' experiences, largely through a descriptive lens. The interest group's characteristic of paying "attention to what, as well as how meaning is articulated" acknowledges that humanistic work is also interpretive work. To parse this short phrase more explicitly, we attend to both what meaning is articulated and how it's articulated. Some of our interpretive SoTL projects might thus begin with the question, "**What does it mean?**" This question reaches beyond the descriptive work of explaining surface, literal, or denotative (i.e., standard, straightforward) meanings and toward implied, figurative, or connotative meanings (i.e., associative, suggestive).[7] In literary study, we talk about unpacking multiple meanings because "what appears on the surface is never the whole story," including with "seemingly simple texts" (Linkon 2011, 10), so "even after one meaning has been grasped, . . . it inevitably holds still more possible meanings" (Corrigan 2019, 7). So answering "What does it mean?" requires nuance.

In attending to "how meaning is articulated," our interpretive SoTL projects might lead to the question, "**How is it expressed?**" This question reflects our recognition that specific choices in words, phrasing, syntax, punctuation, spacing, and other elements of language are meaningful—or meaning-full. When Mariolina Rizzi Salvatori reads her students' writings about difficult texts, she looks beyond what they say, focusing on "'markers' . . . that indicate movement toward more complicated forms of thinking," such as complex sentences: "To use 'but' is to imply that there is another possibility to consider. 'I say this because' marks a moment of reflection, of accountability" (2000, 89).

Elsewhere, Salvatori describes her SoTL as responses to the question, "What does it mean for me to teach this text with this

7 The interpretive expansion of "What does it mean?" is easily misunderstood, so it's worth explicating. In the "Artifacts and Evidence" section of this chapter, I'll address the "it" in the question, or *what* we interpret in humanistic SoTL. In the "Meaning-Making" section, I'll address the process that follows the question, or *how* we interpret.

approach to this population of students at this time in this classroom?" (2002, 298) This use of "**What does it mean?**" points to another way we ask this question, as in "**Why is it important?**" or "**What does it matter?**" (Blau 2003, 52) Asking why something is important leads us to broader insights. In describing meaningful SoTL questions, Tony Ciccone notes that they "go beyond the problem from which [they] arose" (i.e., the specific teaching and learning situation) "to elucidate some key insights into the big issues about student learning and the frameworks that would explain them" (2018, 20). Ingie Hovland illustrates Ciccone's point in her study on her religion students' use of pre-reading maps to reveal and support their reading practices. After analyzing the specific learning of the mapping activity, she opens up her query to consider why it matters. She observes the students differently approaching a habit that experts have "automated," a process she calls "making-while-reading" through which readers "reach their own realization of what a reading can be in the humanities, and who they can be as a reader—namely someone who is trying to take steps to understand, discuss, and contribute to a web of ideas about humanity" (2021, 40). Hovland's exploration of the larger processes of reading as a humanist is an example of the wider insights gleaned from asking "why is it important?" Like Ciccone's claim that meaningful SoTL questions "elucidate some key insights into the big issues," Hovland argues that such extended inquiry allows for "'conceptual generalization,'" a move that translates SoTL findings beyond a project's local setting to "help another instructor understand the same conceptual situation in her own, different setting" (Hovland 2021, 42).

While Hovland illustrates a conceptual move in response to "Why is it important?" another is guided by a contextual move. Students' written texts may tell us a great deal about themselves and the worlds in which they live. As Sherry Linkon explains, "Writers"—including student writers—"cannot help but employ the cultural vocabulary of the moment," so a student text is "influenced and illuminated by its context even as it provides a lens for understanding the context of the text and our own culture" (2011,

10). In some of our SoTL work, we might thus ask, "**What does it elucidate about the cultural, historical, geographical, political, socioeconomic, etc. moment in which it was written?**" Certainly, if we continue to ask "What does it mean?" and "Why is it important?" much of the SoTL coming out in the 2020s, whether explicitly or implicitly, will reveal more and more about learning and teaching in a global pandemic, in an era of misinformation, and in a time of political divisiveness. Box 8.2 illustrates how some of these questions can be developed more specifically in practice.

Box 8.2. Some Examples of Questions to Interpret

The initial formulation of an interpretive question would begin with *What does it mean?*, a question that likely has more than one answer, inviting the follow-up question, *What are the possible interpretations?*

What does it mean? can develop in a few ways:

→ *How is it expressed?*
- → *What are my students saying, explicitly and implicitly?**
  - → *How are they saying it?*
  - → *What are my students not saying, and what's happening in the unsaid?*

→ *Why is it important?*
- → *What does it elucidate or make clear?*
- → *What does it contribute to our understanding?*
  - → *What does it elucidate in or contribute to our understanding of student learning?*
  - → *What does it elucidate about the cultural, historical, geographical, political, socioeconomic, etc. moment in which it was written?*

*See the explanation of the role of verb tenses and pronouns in Box 8.1.

Our Artifacts and Evidence

- "Artifacts of student thinking, learning, expression"
- "Texts are important, and broadly defined"

In our goal to understand and interpret human experience, humanists look to what we call "texts," objects or phenomena that "generate meaning" as we read, analyze, interpret, and otherwise make meaningful. Humanistic scholars "pay close attention to language" (Corrigan 2019, 7; McLaughlin 1990, 80), understanding language as written, spoken, or visual. Novels, speeches, poems, plays, essays, conversations, autobiographies, photographs, paintings, murals, and film are all expressions of the human experience through language. So in our SoTL, we try to understand and interpret students' experiences by collecting and analyzing their texts as "artifacts of student thinking, learning, expression." Karen Manarin explains the term "artifacts" as signaling that these texts are "created by students," that they "might contain traces of learning," and that they are "oblique measures open to many interpretations" (2017, 168). Later, she explains she also prefers "artifacts" because it suggests they're "shaped by a series of choices the student made . . . in a particular time and context" (2018, 102). Many humanists in SoTL use the term "evidence" as we do in constructing arguments, representing specific textual moments (again, broadly defined) to illustrate a concept, advance a position, or lead to a conclusion. Bass and Linkon clarify that SoTL's "evidence of student learning" comes in the form of "specific utterances" from "students' work, together with what they say and do in the classroom, [which] constitutes the 'visible action' of student learning" (2008, 258). The terms "artifacts" and "evidence" aren't competing terms, though: an artifact may be collected and then used as evidence to support and illustrate an interpretation of student work.

SoTL's written artifacts may include formal work such as **essays, papers, stories, and poems**, as well as informal student texts such as **minute papers, in-class writings, journal entries, and other reflective writings, notes, and marginal annotations**. Such

informal, formative, or unpolished texts can be especially meaningful in capturing students' messier experiences of the learning process, rather than the polished performance of learning. SoTL projects drawing on written artifacts aren't hard to find. Jeff Sommers looks to his students' reading journals throughout the semester to find their "open-ended thinking," such as a willingness to "explore confusion," which he saw "squelch[ed]" in the final exam (2004). In his poster at the 2004 ISSOTL conference, he illustrates this tension with excerpts from one student's written exam and reading journals, leading him to ask if "the hegemony of the final exam worth 25% of the course grade forced this student to an artificial closure in his open-ended thinking to succeed on the test" (2004). Holly Hassel, Aeron Haynie, and I wanted to surface students' initial patterns of interpretation when asked to make sense of moments of ambiguity, so we analyzed their annotations—underlining, crossing out words and phrases, and marginal notes—on a poem (Chick, Hassel, and Haynie 2009).

Some humanistic SoTL projects will look to spoken artifacts, such as **comments and conversational moves in class discussion, study groups, or office hours, presentations, or think-alouds**. Dianne Fallon found her students' presentations to be powerful evidence of something more nuanced happening in her diversity course. After some surprise about the seemingly "reductionist" and "simplified" statements in her students' final writings, Fallon revisited their short presentations and class discussions throughout the course, which had "demonstrated an understanding of the complexity of diversity issues" (2006, 412). Rather than settling on what would have been her own reductionist and simplified assessment that her students had failed to learn, she reminded herself that "when we examine student learning, . . . nothing is as obvious as it might seem" (413). Taking seriously the demonstrations of more sophisticated thought in students' spoken work over the course of the semester, she wonders if her students are "striving for complexity, but then revert[ing] to another position that feels more comfortably aligned with, or less challenging to, the value system and past experiences

that they've brought with them into the classroom" (413). This serious turn to students' spoken artifacts is a key moment in her SoTL project and one that led to her development of a "Taxonomy of Diversity Learning Outcomes, Behaviors, and Attitudes" (415). Stephen Bloch-Schulman uses think-alouds "to investigate whether students were reading philosophic work through a schema driven by plot, . . . utilizing the reading skills they would correctly use reading fiction when reading philosophy, and missing the purpose and structure of philosophical writing" (2016, 9). In his article, he focuses on the short videos and transcripts from one philosophy major and one philosophy colleague to illustrate the likelihood that traditional pedagogies in philosophy are teaching more about content than about how to read and think like a philosopher.

Visual "artifacts of student thinking, learning, expression" might include students' **photographs, photovoice, posters, mind maps, or concept maps**. Camille Kandiko, David Hay, and Saranne Weller collected students' concepts maps from early, the middle, and the end of the semester in a classics course to "externalize [students'] personal understanding" of "the impact of Greek literature and culture on the Roman world" (2012, 71, 74). Although the first maps revealed each student's "understanding of 'expert' knowledge" and "facts and concepts" (81), the second and third evolved "beyond a surface understanding of others' ideas" to make visible the distinctive shapes of the student's "personal learning self" with "an individual, personal perspective and voice" (82). The article includes three concept maps from one student, vividly illustrating this progression of how the student organized and then re-organized their knowledge in the course. Manarin writes about assigning research posters to her students in a literature course: since the paper "often seems to be an exercise in formatting rather than knowledge creation," her students first create and share posters about the research process of "scholarly conversation, with each other and with our primary and secondary sources" (2016, 2-3). Her choice for her literature students to create visual artifacts is intentional, as the "posters defamiliarized literary research by making it less about the research paper and more about

the process of knowledge creation," allowing her "to see aspects of the research usually hidden in the conventions of the research paper" (12).

The examples in this section—reading journals, annotations, presentations, discussions, think-alouds, concept maps, research posters—reveal another characteristic of humanistic SoTL that didn't make it into the interest group's list: attention to process, not just product. In "Capturing the Visible Evidence of Invisible Learning," Randy Bass and Bret Eynon write about how much of learning is invisible to us, particularly during its "intermediate processes," so they encourage SoTL that collects and looks closely at "artifacts that captured the intermediate and developmental moments along the way" to "traditional summative products" (2009, 5, 9). Here, they say, we may find more about "the aspects of learning that go beyond the cognitive to include the affective, the personal, and issues of identity" (5).

Our Meaning-Making

- "Uses methods such as narrative inquiry, close reading, thought experiments, meditations"
- "Engages with nuance" (again)
- "*Constructs* arguments, rather than starting with a hypothesis," possibly "more abductive than inductive"

Looking again to the larger project of trying to understand and interpret students' experiences, humanistic ways of analyzing or making meaning from those experiences are embedded in the verbs "understand" and "interpret." Salvatori characterizes this kind of inquiry and analysis as "unprecedented attentiveness to students' work, their cultural capital, and their learning" (2002, 298). At the same time, within the attempt to understand and interpret, **our methods and methodologies reflect the fact that we "value ambiguity, complexity, and the irreducibility of learning and knowledge in the Humanities"** (Bass and Linkon 2008, 259). The

interest group focused on specific methods (some of which were aspirational) that share these goals.

Narrative inquiry is a "storytelling methodology through which we study narratives and stories of experience" (Kim 2016, 3). As a specific, named approach to research, it originated as an effort to "pull psychology out of its state of disillusionment by replacing the mechanistic and reductionist postulates of positivism with a humanistic paradigm highlighting story making, storytelling, and story comprehension" (Bochner and Herrmann 2020, 287–88) and involves "'researcher-storytellers'… put[ting] stories (our data) together in a narrative form that best represents our research data" (Kim 2016, 3). These descriptions clearly identify narrative inquiry as a social science methodology that draws from humanistic approaches to meaning-making, so its inclusion on the interest group's list aligns with other discussions about how humanists have struggled to position their work as legitimate research within the multidisciplinary spaces in SoTL (see, for example, the citations in the second paragraph of this chapter). In this chapter, however, I'll just say that SoTL invites humanistic SoTL practitioners to **explore and interpret the stories of their students and themselves to represent the complexities of their experiences, and to represent their work in a range of storytelling genres**.

Close reading is a way of answering the questions, "What does it mean?" and "How is it expressed?" and "Why is it important?" Bass and Linkon describe close reading as a recursive or hermeneutic process that starts with a text-focused inquiry driven by scholars' "assumptions about what matters" and ends with "offer[ing] new insights on a more broadly defined subject" (2008, 247). In "Close Reading: Paying Attention to Student Artifacts," Manarin (2018) offers an extended description of this method that's worth quoting at length:

> When I'm doing a close reading, I'm . . . looking for patterns. . . . I usually begin by looking at a content area (what was said or demonstrated in the artifact), and then I move to how it was said or demonstrated.

> Sometimes, I look at what wasn't said because paying attention to the silences can be important. . . . Often, I read something in multiple ways, "with" and "against" the grain. . . . Reading with the grain means reading as the writer hoped you would, trying to understand what the writer wanted you to see in their own terms; reading against the grain is a type of resistant reading, considering the unexamined assumptions, the contradictions, or the silences of an artifact. (2018, 103)

Here is yet another way we "engage with nuance," analyzing student texts to open up their language beyond its denotative or surface meaning in order to "unpack" its connotative, figurative, and contextual meanings (Chick 2013)—parallel to Manarin's reaching beyond "reading with the grain" to also "read against" it, or what Bass and Linkon describe as "recognizing how a text's various sub-texts enrich, subvert, and complicate the text's overall meaning" (Bass and Linkon 2008, 259). **This analysis is active, generative, and constructive, so our question "What does it mean?" may be more precisely asked as "What do we make of it?"** Manarin situates this analysis within constructivism, the theory "that people construct knowledge of external reality through experience and reflection" (2018, 107).

It's important to point out that this kind of meaning-making isn't limited to literary scholars and writers, or even to humanists. Thomas McLaughlin explains that it's "built into the language" because there is "deep logic that underlies any use of words," including a "figurative history of the word [that's] a part of its meaning" (1990, 84). He illustrates with the word "tiger." English speakers understand its meaning as a "large, predatory cat," and also that describing a football player as a "tiger on defense" doesn't point to "claws and sharp teeth on the field" but instead is commentary on "the player's aggressiveness and speed" (81). McLaughlin explains:

> All in a moment we work it out that the tiger and the player are both elements in a mental category,

> "aggressive things," so that it is appropriate to transfer a characteristic of the tiger to the player by means of the figurative phrase. Now if this analysis seems too obvious, that's because I'm trying to articulate the logical steps that we accomplish in an intuitive flash. (81).

Qualitative social scientists may see some similarity to grounded theory, discourse analysis, and other qualitative approaches, and sometimes it's easiest for humanistic SoTL scholars to cite these methodologies as a shortcut for rigor that will be familiar to non-humanistic reviewers.[8] Yet we do our colleagues and the humanities as a whole a disservice when we miss the opportunity to share the value of our homegrown and historical approaches. I'll address how we describe our approaches in more detail in the next section.

The interest group's list includes thought experiments as a method for humanistic SoTL, added by philosopher Bloch-Schulman, who has used them in his own SoTL. He describes a thought experiment as an "arm-chair" or non-empirical method of research that doesn't measure, collect evidence, or predict. He illustrates SoTL thought experiments by imagining two ways of teaching. The first results in a higher rate of learning during the semester, but a dwindling of that learning within a year or two. The second shows less learning during the semester but substantially better performance than the first after a year or two. "Which is preferable?" he asks. This thought experiment leads to some important insights: "For example, in programs that are cumulative, the learning in one class might only need to prepare students for the next without a concern that the learning itself lasts long," but enduring learning may be more important in other programs, information with implications for how to design courses within each program. The experiment of imagining the two ways of teaching and drawing

8 I've certainly done so, and continue to wrestle with this shortcut to appease reviewers.

conclusions is valuable.[9] "Meditations" are similar, a kind of expressive writing that invites readers to join the writer in exploring their thoughts and reflections. Helen Sword calls her piece "The First Person" a "playful meditation on academic pronouns" (2019, 182).

The interest group also noted that humanistic SoTL scholars "construct arguments, rather than starting with a hypothesis." Our work is **often inductive, drawing from specific artifacts, evidence, or observations to arrive at more general conclusions, interpretations, or insights**. Ingie Hovland carefully traces the sequence of such an approach with her religion students' development of pre-reading maps, ending with the observation that the "inductive, open-ended process described here will usually produce conceptual answers—that is, thick descriptions, interpretations, analyses, and arguments" and will "[dig] deeper into considering 'what is,' foregrounding student experiences and multi-faceted moments of learning" (2021, 42). She and other humanistic scholars, she says, find this approach meaningful and "significant" because it "move[s] the conceptual conversation forward: Do the answers generate new and productive questions for other scholars? Do they give others conceptual lenses through which to see patterns they had not noticed before? Can they be discussed and contested?" She contrasts this inductive approach with a deductive response to "the reasonable need to know what worked in the author's classroom, what that looked like from the author's perspective as a teacher, and whether it can be reliably replicated in their own class when they walk through the classroom door on Monday morning" (42). Bloch-Schulman extended the interest group's discussion of inductive projects by proposing that "they're more abductive than inductive" in their reasoning, acknowledging that our evidence, artifacts, and observations are necessarily incomplete, so we don't assert that our conclusions are "true" but

9 Thank you to Stephen Bloch-Schulman for fleshing out his idea from the Bergen meeting. For more information, see his article "A Critique of Methods in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Philosophy" (2016).

instead that they're the most likely.[10] This discussion of the logic beneath humanistic SoTL projects—like Manarin's preference for the term "artifacts"—emphasizes that **the goal isn't certainty, truth, or universals (i.e., generalizability) but instead interpretations, insights, and observations based on careful, close analysis of the artifacts, evidence, and other information available.**

Sharing Our Work

- "Presented not only via essays and articles, but also as poetry, drama, videos, drawings, graphic short stories/novellas, role play, et al."
- "Engages with nuance" (again)
- "Rich with quotes and others' voices"
- "Intentional about citation style that foregrounds valued bibliographic information (e.g., full name of author, not as concerned about date of publication)"
- "Authentic (even poetic?) ways of describing methods"
- "Storytelling"
- "Meaningful reflection"

Given the humanistic interest in how humans express themselves and the meaningfulness of these choices, it's fitting that the interest group's list devotes more attention to how we share our SoTL work than any other topic.

Genre

The interest group was composing this list at an annual SoTL conference, so it's a bit surprising that it doesn't include any explicit references to conference presentations or posters. My sense is that poetry, drama, videos, and role play were offered in part as alternatives to the ubiquitous PowerPoint presentations, and video, drawings, and graphic short stories/novellas as what our SoTL posters might

10 It may be helpful to know that this reasoning is also used by doctors in making medical diagnoses based on available symptoms and by juries in reaching verdicts based on the evidence presented.

look like.[11] Most humanistic SoTL scholars share their work in essays and articles published in peer-reviewed journals, book chapters, or entire books. (Books are highly valued products in humanistic disciplines, typically the highest level of publication, even ahead of peer-reviewed journal articles.) The inclusion of "essay" is important here, connoting a free-form genre made up of many paragraphs, although it may be signposted with subheadings that identify specific ideas within its sections, like this chapter. This genre contrasts with the IMRAD article format (i.e., discrete sections for Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion), the standard template of research reports in the sciences and, according to some sources, the appropriate and even "the most prestigious genre" for sharing empirical research (Healey, Matthews, and Cook-Sather 2020, 117, 119).[12] Manarin writes about her difficulty with this format that places "too much of a gap between the specific quotations from the artifacts and my interpretation of what those quotations mean," whereas she wants "to show and tell my reader my interpretations of the learning glimpsed through student artifacts. I want to give my reader the chance to see what I saw, but I also want to explain the inferences I drew from those specific words presented in that specific way" (2018, 104).

The rest of the interest group's list is largely aspirational and invitational, as there are—to my knowledge—few examples of "poetry, drama, videos, drawings, graphic short stories/novellas, role play" documenting the results of a SoTL project. Olivia Archibald and Maureen P. Hall's 2008 article on their collaborative project on reflective writing in their courses is written as, according to their

11 For an early challenge to represent our work through meaningful visual shapes and graphics, including graphic short stories, see "Posters: Visual Representations of SoTL Projects," part of my online *SoTL Guide* (https://nancychick.wordpress.com/posters/).

12 I suspect I'm not the only humanist who's capitulated to the IMRAD template, especially when working in multidisciplinary collaborations. (See, for example, Chick, Karis, and Kernahan 2009.) On one hand, I found it far easier to write since I knew exactly what to write and where; on the other, I struggled with separating my interpretations into distinct "Results" and "Discussion" sections (like Manarin), and I'm sure any slips in that article were entirely my doing.

subtitle, "A Play (of Practice and Theory) in Three Acts," and the style is a combination of narration, reflection, and analysis. They explain their choices: "We have deliberately subverted the typical research reporting format in an attempt to jump beyond the often limiting boundaries and templates of conventional writing forms, to create the acts of a journey—our journey—through the project" (2008, 15). Deborah Currier, at the 2013 conference of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, led a performance of "Landscapes of Learning," a collaboratively "devised theatre piece investigating a scholarship of teaching and learning question" (2013, 221). There are a few poems about SoTL (see, for instance, Gilpin 2013 and Sheffield 2020), but none that share SoTL projects. I dream of two kinds of SoTL publications chronicling a SoTL project: it's not hard to imagine someone narrating the arc of a SoTL project in a short story or novel,[13] or exploring the results in a poem that looks a bit like T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* in its length, richness, and footnotes—but perhaps not its tone.

Characteristics of Our Products

From what I remember, and the way I read the interest group's list, much of what we discussed was focused on the varied ways through which we express our SoTL projects and what these expressions looks like. **Just as we "engage with nuance" in the questions we ask, the students' learning experiences we explore, and how we make sense of those experiences, we do so again when we share the results of work.** This complexity is visible when our presentations and publications are "rich with quotes and others' voices." Since we believe that what people say and how they say it are meaningful, simply summarizing overarching themes would erase the richness we sought in our projects. We also want readers to follow the breadcrumbs of our analyses, so we include the voices of students, as well as the words of fellow scholars. The resulting intertextuality is a hallmark of humanistic publications

13 Faculty developers have Thomas B. Jones's *The Missing Professor: An Academic Mystery* (2006), so I eagerly await a SoTL counterpart.

and presentations, which also means that we often have relatively long bibliographies. The mention of bibliographies led to a moment of aspiration (and perhaps rebellion) for interest group members who've had to use unfamiliar citation styles that remove all but the first letter of fellow scholars' first names and promote the date of publication, as if that mattered to us.[14] In response, they challenged future SoTL scholars to be "intentional about citation style that foregrounds valued bibliographic information (e.g., full name of author, not as concerned about date of publication)."

The interest group also challenged humanistic SoTL scholars to write "authentic (even poetic?) ways of describing methods," referring not just to the methods we choose and describe but also about how we describe them. The language implores us to avoid jargon density and mechanistic step-by-step descriptions and show pride in representing what and how we do SoTL, embracing the claim in Sword's *Stylish Academic Writing*, "Elegant ideas deserve elegant expression" (2012, xvii). Some publications offer models for such authentic descriptions of humanistic SoTL methods (see the book's online resources for examples), but I don't yet know of any that I'd describe as poetic, although Manarin's chapter on close reading (2018) is certainly elegant. This comment on how we represent our work connects to the list's mention of "storytelling" and "meaningful reflection." Storytelling suggests using a personal voice to share an experience, so its inclusion in the list invites us (at the very least) to represent the arc of students' and our own experiences—vividly and in narrative form, not just basic exposition. After seeing the increase in first-person pronouns in SoTL from 2007 to 2017, Sword celebrates with others "who prefer the live voices of real human

14 In her 2016 article in *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, Karen Manarin ends her second paragraph with a brief endnote—one of just two in the whole article—for her "disciplinary colleagues [who] will notice immediately" her use of APA citations. She clarifies that they were required by the journal, and ends simply with the statement, "Different formats encourage different ways of thinking because they emphasize different elements" (2016, 13). See Russell, Littler, and Chick (2020) for more about how citation styles meaningfully encode disciplinary values and priorities.

beings to the dull dronings of agentless academic prose" (2019, 188). The clarification that our reflection is "meaningful" may point to extended moments of analysis of our artifacts, or of considering how we affected or were affected by our projects, or of exploring broader implications of our work. Both of these characteristics—storytelling and meaningful reflection—also suggest that we are explicitly part of our research, and we share these experiences when we share our projects. We are not, as Sword writes, "the missing person" cloaked by passive voice, generic pronouns, and the "anonymity of purely impersonal prose" (2019, 187).

I'll wrap up this chapter by returning to the "Uncomprehensive, Non-Hierarchical, Not-a-Checklist" list generated by ISSOTL's Arts and Humanities Interest Group. The items on that list and what we didn't capture that Saturday morning invite further unpacking. Each of the bulleted characteristics deserves a deeper dive than this already-too-long chapter allowed, so I encourage others to help us explore and articulate what our work can look like. For example, Stephen Bloch-Schulman, who so generously provided feedback on this chapter, wrote a 729-word marginal comment illustrating the nuances of deductive, inductive, adductive, abductive, and subsumptive reasoning in SoTL, and a 333-word marginal comment on thought experiments in SoTL—both of which could be developed into helpful essays that are significantly better than what I did with those ideas here. Or, as I've written this chapter, I've thought repeatedly about the humanistic tendency to value process as much as (and at times more than) product. Surely we talked about that in Bergen, but it didn't get recorded in our list. Finally, one of the anonymous peer reviewers of this chapter encouraged me to write about curiosity and joy, which would be a lovely extension of the list and would resonate with mid-career faculty seeking more of both in their work.

However, that same reviewer made another recommendation that I find more compelling—to connect to Randy Bass's newer essay, "What's the Problem Now?" His essay invokes many of the characteristics from the interest group's list, especially as he

reframes learning as a "complex, wicked problem" (2020, 6). This move resonates with Gary Poole's 2013 often-quoted nudging for SoTL to "shift from an imperative of proof to an imperative of understanding" and to "move from an imperative of generalizable simplicity to one of representing complexity well" (2013, 141). But Bass applies greater pressure than Poole's nudge by exploring why: The complexity of human learning, he argues, now demands that we strive toward "*better understanding [of] human learning*," so that we can "*[apply] our understanding*" to design a high-quality, equitable education that will lead to more equitable society (emphasis in original; 2020, 10). This understanding of learning is, he says, "an urgent, if not moral, imperative," concluding that it's "morally objectionable to misunderstand a wicked problem for a tame one" (9). Both Bass and Poole plead with us to engage with nuance, not for the epistemological or methodological reasons I've explored in this chapter, but because the world now demands it of us.

Humanities academics who feel that they've gone "far enough" with their disciplinary work and now seek something that makes them look forward to the remaining decades in the profession may be looking for curiosity, joy, novelty, community, and much more. But ultimately, what they often yearn for most is a sense of meaning or purpose in their work (Hall 2002; O'Meara, Terosky, and Neumann 2008; Monaghan 2017; Nagoski and Nagoski 2019). I can imagine few endeavors more meaningful than authentically applying their expertise in a diverse and welcoming community that's working to better understand the complex, wicked problem of learning as equity-building work.

Reflection Questions

- Thinking about your approaches to SoTL, what do you find most difficult to explain to an unfamiliar audience, and why?
- How would you explain any of the characteristics or choices described in this chapter differently or in your own words?

- What humanistic characteristics or choices aren't included in the interest group's list or in this chapter, and how would you explain them to an unfamiliar audience?
- Have you encountered colleagues using approaches with which you're unfamiliar and which remain unexplained? How did this make you feel? In what ways could they have been more clear to you, so that you fully understood their work?
- If you're from a discipline outside of the humanities, which characteristics or choices in your field do you find most difficult for unfamiliar audiences to understand? Draft a paragraph of explanation for each, and return to this draft the next time you write or speak about these concepts to a non-specialist audience.

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