



Awakening

(to *all* of our SoTL stories)

Expected to expound our heroic stories from the mountain top,
We slice and condense with bravado,
Generalize,
Extract failure, frustration, fear,
Making us less human.

Neat little tables all tidied up,
Third-person Anonymity, data-ized,
Smooth transitions through climax to resolution
Keeps people away, leaves people out,
Making others less human.

Yet there are quiet times
When we hear whispers through the dark forest,
Or feel a breeze upon the golden plains, awakening us,
And we are able to imagine new horizons,
We are nearly there, at the dawning of unexplored perspectives,
Compelling us to be more human.

Where can we recount the stories we are told we cannot tell?
The tales that writhe as a snaking river across the marshlands of our minds,
Sinking landscapes straining to remain visible,
We can embrace their expansive cadences
Singing deep within our hearts,
Making us more human.

Let's welcome different, varied, messy stories,
Take risks, share moments of struggle,
Be bold and courageous, personal and vulnerable,
Create, transform, reflect, perform,
See beauty and tragedy,
Accepting our humanity in the academy.

Let's unravel the threads of our stories:
How does the story begin? Who influenced the story?
Who owns it? Who judges it?
How can we respond? How do we protect others?
How does the story end?
Disturbing the still surface of deep waters,
Makes us fully human.

COMMENTARY

Initially, I wrote this poem as a personal reflection on the thoughts, ideas, and feelings that I experienced as a result of participating in Nancy Chick and Peter Felten's workshop, "How to Tell a True SoTL Story," at the 2018 International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Conference in Bergen, Norway. Part of that experience was hearing the other 30 participants' reflections, which resonated with me. I initially wrote a poem that drew on my handwritten notes from the workshop. At that point, the poem was a culmination of the experience, embodying my reflections and those of others that I had noted.

However, when I began to consider sharing this poem publicly, in print, I raised with Nancy Chick and Peter Felten the ethical issue of using others' words in an artistic piece. Reviewers also queried the ethics involved once I submitted the poem. The reviewers also raised the issue, indirectly, of whether the poem was a research piece using poetic inquiry or a purely artistic piece. The reviewers also, interestingly, encouraged me to revise the poem to be less academic and more artistic. I am grateful for their support, advice, and encouragement. The feedback I received led me to think about why I chose to use poetry and what had prompted me to write the poem in the first place and to consider what I wanted to say, based on my experience in the workshop. I revised the poem again, thinking less about the argument I wanted to make and more about the feelings I wanted to share because, indeed, this is why I had chosen the poetic form in the first place.

As an academic, this creative approach feels uncomfortable and risky. I feel vulnerable. I have written poetry for many years. I studied poetry to some extent when I was an undergraduate student. However, the art, for me, has been a deeply personal and private one. I have always written just for myself. I have written poetry as a form of reflection about my life to explore feelings and experiences that are intense and require, for me, a concise and yet resonating form of expression. Because I wrote the poem initially with an argument in mind, making less of an argument and sharing more of an expression of feeling also feels risky. The poem now invites the reader to participate in interpreting meaning. In that process, I have had to learn to let go of traditional academic approaches to being in the world, to engage in a creative process, and to have faith that readers will take from my work what *they* see and what *they* need.

As the ethical use of others' words without prior permission was obviously problematic, and because my time spent in the workshop was not a research process but an experiential moment of reflection, I decided that I needed to focus on my own thoughts and feelings. I do, however, continue to reflect that it is impossible for the artist (or researcher) to completely, objectively, surgically, separate self from others in their lived experience or in their intellectual or emotional processing. The shared discussions in the workshop had a significant impact on me, lifting my spirits and giving me hope. Yet I was also led to wonder why, when so many people feel so strongly that scholarship of teaching and learning should be more all-encompassing, we are so often compelled (by ourselves, our colleagues, reviewers, and editors) to remain strictly within traditional approaches to our research and reflections on teaching and educational development. Ironically, I was faced with this very dilemma in moving my poem from personal to public space.

The reviewers of my originally submitted piece noted that the issue raised by my poem is as much a systemic one as it is an individual one. I agree. We can move forward only if we come together to

collectively change what kinds of work we respect and revere. There are many ways of knowing and many ways of seeing, and these require us to embrace many forms of expression. Individual voices of authors and reviewers, but editors and publishers, in particular, need to join as a collective voice to ensure support for and acceptance of multiplicity of form and function, argument and feeling that does not privilege some voices or ways of knowing over others and attempts to reduce the risk for those who may feel more vulnerable than others. I offer my poem as one small step in that direction, and I encourage others to do the same.

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