

Metaphor to meaning: narrative inquiry as SoTL tool

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ABSTRACT: Over a number of years we have conducted a shared narrative inquiry into the nature of our work as SoTL scholars and academic developers: beginning with the development of SoTL identity (Simmons et al., 2013) and continuing as a comparative study into the lived experience of academic developers (Kensington-Miller, Renc-Roe, & Morón-García, 2015). The latter developed as a response to a call to “make public the intense difficulty of our work” (Peseta, 2007, p. 17) and because we recognised a need to address the affective aspect of our role and sustain ourselves emotionally (O'Farrell & Fitzmaurice, 2013).

Narrative inquiry is a useful and powerful way to explore and share changing identities and experiences. As a relatively new field with a need to attract new entrants, it is important to share both the richness of academic development work and its challenging nature. By focusing on “victory narratives” out of a need to protect and grow the field’s reputation, we paint an incomplete picture leaving those new or isolated in the profession vulnerable. Narratives collected using SoTL techniques and approaches shine a light into these troublesome spaces, guiding and sustaining others.

Throughout our inquiries we observed frequent use of metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008) as a shorthand way of sharing and reviewing experience; something we have in common with our teacher colleagues (Saban, 2006). When sharing our explorations at EuroSoTL 2016, Academic Identities 2016 and ICED 2016 we asked those attending our session:

- What metaphor would you use to describe how you feel about your role?
- How has SoTL impacted on your academic identity?

This elicited short illustrative narratives from participants which we will share in this session in order to:

1. add to the stories that illustrate the breadth and variety of the academic development role;
2. illustrate the impact that engagement with SoTL has on academic identity.

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