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# Phenomenology of Surprise: Transformed “Seeing” in a SoTL Scholars’ Program

## ABSTRACT

Faculty members participating in a year-long Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) development program experienced various surprises as transformational events. This study is a phenomenological exploration of these surprises. We use Dastur’s (2000) understanding of surprise as a phenomenological event that allows for changed perception and the possibility of a different future through an altered state of being in the world. Four different categories of surprise are explored: surprise that doing SoTL changed teaching, surprises about students, surprises about SoTL and the research process, and finally, surprises about communities and disciplines.

## KEYWORDS

surprise, phenomenology, SoTL, educational development, higher education

## INTRODUCTION

How does change occur in the practices of postsecondary educators? University teaching and learning centers, invested in such change, tend to take a development approach. They provide information about current practice, workshops, and consultation to faculty members, most of whom have not studied education formally. Our article presents an account of surprising transformations—moments of rupture or recognition—that occurred as a result of engaging in Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, or SoTL, projects. Participants and facilitators did not expect many of these transformations. We argue that phenomenology provides a useful approach to understand how surprise can operate to open up previously unavailable insights and practices in teaching and scholarship to those who experience it, allowing what Hutchings has termed “visions of the possible” (2000) because surprise invokes the possibility that things might be different than what was previously envisioned.

Our institution is a teaching-focused undergraduate university. The Institute for SoTL was established in 2008, intended to reflect an institutional appreciation of SoTL as research and scholarship distinct from teaching-related professional development opportunities to improve teaching offered by the teaching and learning center. Thus, the institute operates as a research center, encouraging and supporting SoTL inquiries, providing resources, coordinating initiatives, and building a culture of inquiry about teaching and learning.

Over five years, the SoTL Scholar’s Program, an initiative of the Institute for SoTL, supported an annual cohort of scholars who developed individual research projects to be conducted in their own course. This inquiry is part of a larger study aimed at evaluating the impact of the program. The annual

call for proposals defined SoTL as “research into student learning, conducted within one’s own class, that is evidence based, peer reviewed, and publicly shared; it is the investigation of fine-grained on-the-ground student learning outcomes of particular pedagogies; systematic scholarly inquiry into whatever influences the learning process.” In Miller-Young, Yeo, Manarin, Carey, and Zimmer (2016) we describe the structure of the program in detail.

From 2009 to 2013, 41 full-time faculty members, eight contract faculty members, and one administrator participated in the program. In a survey inquiring into the influence of the program on these scholars’ teaching, scholarship, and career trajectories, participants reported impact at an individual, departmental, institutional, and disciplinary level (Miller-Young et al., 2016). In Miller-Young, Yeo, and Manarin (2018), we offer strategies to deal with discomfort involved in engaging with SoTL as an area of research.

As demonstrated by prior research, engaging in SoTL can have many benefits for faculty members and their students. Waterman et al. (2010) document enhanced student learning as a result of SoTL projects studying teaching interventions. Kember (2002) found teaching and learning projects at his university led to not only participants’ learning how to conduct such studies, but also improved student learning; long-term impact on teaching, including a shift to more student-centered approaches; and, finally, more reflective teaching. Scholars have also reported that engaging in SoTL has positive impacts in areas outside the classroom, such as informing program-level assessment and developing “greater understanding of other disciplines and fields” (Bennett & Dewar, 2013), as well as influencing the teaching of colleagues (Kember, 2002). However, the *means* by which these changes happen is little understood, and we argue that surprise acts as one mechanism by which such change can occur.

Seventeen participants in the program from several cohorts were interviewed about the impact on their teaching and research. What emerged from these interviews was an unanticipated finding: that most faculty members had encountered some manifestation of surprise or the unexpected in the context of the program—often unrelated to their research study. These surprises in turn appear to be powerful forces in changing practice, both in the classroom and within scholarship practices of the participants. Our current study proposes a phenomenological explanation and insight.

We argue that phenomenology allows a valuable rendering and interpretation of the notion of surprise, in turn giving us a powerful understanding of the transformations and changes reported. In part, our study is an answer to Kreber’s (2013) observation of “a strong tendency for the SoTL to be interpreted as empirical inquiries into the relationship between instructional strategy and the students’ learning of the material taught” (p. 12). In her article “The Transformative Potential for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning,” she points out that historically the primary influence on SoTL has been psychologically based theories. Kreber calls for more theoretical and philosophical explorations that ask value and identity questions about aspects of higher education, exhorting SoTL researchers to be “thinking about university teaching more broadly, not exclusively in relation to the learning of subject matter” (p. 12).

What can phenomenology do that other perspectives cannot? Perhaps an example can best illustrate the approach. Imagine an instructor encountering a student who openly challenges her authority. A psychological approach might consider various theories of personal interaction and self-presentation, might mean considering the instructor’s past personal experiences in understanding her response. A sociological approach might consider more broadly the power dynamics in the classroom, including external societal contexts and how they may be shaping that interaction. In contrast,

phenomenology would focus on the embodied, lived experience of being challenged. It would attempt to uncover something essential and fundamentally human about the experience, how it manifests and lives in the world, and how, intersubjectively, we can commonly come to understand it.

Our article about this phenomenological study is structured by first briefly exploring the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology itself, and then how that might be applied to the particular phenomenon in lived experience, in this case, the experience of surprise. Then we present the data collected (in this case, interview transcripts) for evidence regarding the “concrete particulars” of the phenomenon, in order to create an interpretation and develop insight about that experience that may be helpful to others encountering it. Our emphasis is on the rendering of the experience of surprise in relation to practice and identity, rather than on an empirical account of the results.

## PHENOMENOLOGY OF SURPRISE

### **What is phenomenology?**

Phenomenology is a philosophical tradition, and in many disciplinary fields such as curriculum theory, it also serves an interpretive perspective and research methodology—a way in which to understand our human relationship with the world. Phenomenology understands “the self not to be separate from the world; rather, “being” is understood *through* the phenomena that present themselves to us. It is the “descriptive study of whatever appears to consciousness... Phenomenology is usually characterized as a *way of seeing* rather than a set of doctrines” (Moran, 2002, p. 1). Husserl’s famous maxim, in describing phenomenology, further appropriated by Heidegger, is to “return to the things themselves” (Dastur, 2000, p. 180). This return, however, does not imply that we are satisfied to merely describe what exists, what is simply there. Neither does it mean turning toward complete abstraction (Dastur, 2000, p. 180). Instead, phenomenology “seeks to restore the richness of the world as experienced; it wants to be present at the birth of the world for us” (Moran, 2002, p. 2). It asks that we become attentive to what appears in everyday life, its “modes of appearing and givenness” (p. 180). It is a process that is “always already” occurring and that is never finished (p. 180).

This then is a phenomenology of being and becoming. The process occurs in a context of temporality, always shifting in each moment from the past through our present into our future. The temporal conceptualization within phenomenological perspectives is key to the mechanism of surprise in its ability to open alternative futures before us.

### **What is the place of surprise in phenomenology?**

There are many potential disciplinary lenses with which surprise can be understood, but phenomenology in this case provides a robust opportunity for exploration. There is an important relationship between time, or temporality, and surprise. Phenomenology has a particular interest in the relationship between past, present, and future, and for this reason provides a framework for this study. In her article “Phenomenology of the Event: Waiting and Surprise” (2000), Françoise Dastur offers an analysis of the event and of surprise in Heidegger, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty. She begins by exploring the phenomenological relationship of being and time. She explains, “for time, precisely, is not identical to being, it is a process which is always in becoming. It is always of the order of the process, the passage, and that which comes” (p. 179). Thus, the passage of time is always fluid, and what happens next is always flowing out of our past and our present.

The conscious self is always in relation to a world that already exists. Events unfold, creating opportunities for the consciousness to perceive the world, and this has a close relationship to the notion of surprise. Dastur (2000) suggests that an event, in the strong sense of the word, is “what arrives unexpectedly and comes to us by surprise . . . something which takes possession of us in an unforeseen manner, without warning, and brings us towards an unanticipated future” (p. 182). This statement, the idea that surprise can create new future possibilities for action, is the central argument of this article. Events, when they are unexpected, contain the possibility of transformation. The surprise of the event interrupts the flow of time, creating a disjuncture. For Dastur, this creates not simply a changed perspective, but indeed a changed existence, “as if a new world opens up through its happening” (p. 182). In this article, we demonstrate through the interview data that by conducting SoTL projects for the first time, participants encountered moments of surprise and rupture, that “took possession of them in an unforeseen manner,” and thus created new possible futures for their teaching and learning selves.

An important aspect of the phenomenology of surprise is our willingness to *be surprised*, our openness to it. This is what Dastur (2000) terms “the paradoxical capacity of expecting surprise” and “openness to unpredictability” (p. 186) and Depraz (2010), “attentional openness” (p. 224). We must *allow* ourselves to be surprised, caught off guard, brought up short. This then allows the temporal disjuncture, the pause. It is what, in hermeneutics, Gadamer (1999) would term a *breach* (p. 366), and both Heidegger (1962) and Caputo (1987) call a *rupture*. Segal terms this phenomenon the *shock of estrangement* (cited in Schwartzman, 2010, p. 34) and explores how this leads to learning, involving both cognitive and emotional elements. This is when we are most present in the world—we are arrested, able to turn in a new direction, think about something in a different way, learn. Elizabeth Cooke (2011) suggests that this openness is critical in allowing one to *be surprised*, pointing out that there must always also be an external event, that “ultimately, something other than a self is also needed, which presents what is surprising (since one cannot surprise oneself)” (p. 79). Darren Stanley (2009) describes this a different way from a complexity theory perspective in terms of *interactions*:

*“Surprise” is an emergent phenomenon that manifests itself at a level different from the interactions of . . . different systems . . . Through the interactions, the possibility of surprise is brought forth through some “push” into novelty. At some perceptual threshold, the experience of “unexpectedness” is felt.* (p. 52)

This threshold or turn is what Cooke (2011) refers to as *abduction*, where inferences are made to lead to the most likely explanation. Cooke suggests that it is surprise that allows us to recognize when we have been mistaken in our thinking. This notion is central to our study. She writes, “The world may not always tell us when we are right, but it often tells us when we are wrong; and knowledge begins with this recognition of error” (p. 63). In this sense, surprise can draw our attentions to our misperceptions, erroneous beliefs, and incorrect thinking. Once this is done, it cannot be undone, and a new way of acting and being within the context of surprise becomes possible. While in phenomenological philosophy, the examples given are often big aspects of human life like birth and death, phenomenology is also interested in the fabric of day-to-day life and work—this is where surprise addresses us, breaching our awareness, helping us to perceive things anew.

In the current study, 14 of 18 interviews participants expressed instances of *surprise*. These took the forms of surprises that doing SoTL changed their teaching, surprises about the participants’ students,

surprises about SoTL as a discipline and the research process, and surprise in relation to communities and disciplines. After a brief description of the study methods, we turn to the interviews to explore how manifestations of surprise during this SoTL Scholar's Program led to significant changes for participants on multiple axes.

## THE STUDY

From 2009 to 2013, the program consisted of three, three-day off-site residencies over the course of one year, with monthly meetings in between. Residencies involved participants working on their specific projects and discussing them in small groups with help from facilitators (Miller-Young et al., 2016). All 50 Mount Royal University scholars who were accepted to the program in the years 2009 to 2013 were invited by email to participate in the study. A total of 25 scholars participated, with 22 scholars completing an online survey and 17 being interviewed. This article focuses exclusively on the interview data. Participants were distributed across cohort years and provided good representation across all faculties (arts, business, communication studies, health and community, library, science and technology, teaching and learning: this represents the organization of the faculties at our institution at the time of the interviews).

The interview protocol was developed after considering the results of the survey. Semistructured interviews were conducted, asking participants about their experiences in the program and the impact of participating across faculty roles, what they learned from their study, and finally about their experiences in the field of SoTL. All interviews but one were conducted by the investigator who had the least involvement with the program. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. An initial thematic analysis was conducted separately by co-researchers and then discussed to reach consensus—it was during one of these discussions that the notion of surprise struck the researchers as significant. We then began to explore phenomenological perspectives on surprise, and how this might shed light on what we heard in the interviews. Below we explore five kinds of surprise manifested in the interviews and how that surprise led to change and in some cases, what is described as transformation. All of the names used below are pseudonyms. Of those interviewed, 12 participants were female and five were male, which represents the gender ratio of willing participants rather than program participants. Years of teaching experience at the time of the program range from one to more than 30 years. A broad range of disciplines is represented in the study, but the discipline of each participant is not noted (unless relevant to his or her remarks) in order to preserve confidentiality as specified in the approval process of our university's Human Research Ethics Board, nor are the participants' real names used.

## SURPRISE THAT DOING SOTL CHANGED TEACHING

To us, the most astonishing comment by several of the participants was they did not expect that engaging in SoTL would change their teaching. Kathy explained, "So because I went into it thinking of it primarily as a type of scholarship...I really didn't think it would...I didn't even think of it impacting my teaching and so I was quite surprised when it did!" In her case, what she learned about her students, described in the next section, completely took her aback. She did not expect to learn things about her students that would change her approach to teaching. Surprise is both vehicle for and evidence of transformation. In fact, several participants expressed that indeed, their projects led to a transformation of their teaching, as Madeleine said, "I would say now I am completely different teacher than I was before." Maxine puts it this way:

*I have become a different person in the classroom . . . I am really engaged in trying to understand who they are and what they bring to the classroom . . . there are parts of me that are now accessed as a teacher that weren't accessed, you know, historically when I was focused on the content and the tasks. Like now I want to know who my students are and what they are carrying.*

This describes a transformation in terms of how she relates to her students, a completely different way of seeing them, an altered way of being with them in the room. She goes on to describe her transformed approach in terms of designing learning experiences:

*So my whole way of teaching has absolutely . . . I came into this enterprise very much as a content coverage sage on the stage, kind of quite traditional teacher, and I was already on a trajectory of change, which is why I think that SoTL stuff looked so interesting to me. But I don't teach the same, I swear if I ever say students, "You get to do a research paper again," strike me dead! It is not going to happen unless I have a scaffolded approach . . . like I am never going to go there again; I think it is irresponsible to go there again.*

We see here Dastur's (2000) openness to the unexpected, in that she was beginning to evolve in her teaching and that is what drew her to SoTL in the first place. Once in the program, what she learned about her students surprised her and transformed her teaching.

Susan also describes transformation both in terms of her approach to teaching and learning and in her way of being as a teacher:

*What the whole thing has brought to my teaching practice is I am much more focused on trying to make student learning visible . . . And so I think for me the whole process has . . . yeah, given me more tools to make student learning visible to both students and me, and then we are able to come up with plans to hopefully continue learning, and hopefully produce more knowledge based on unearthing what is already known and what we are learning along the way . . . [Before] it was almost like I was doing teaching to them . . . I had objectives, I had plans, I had lectures, I did this thing to the students . . . but I wasn't talking to my students enough, I wasn't interviewing them along the way to see the understanding of what I was asking them to do . . . I am far, far more relaxed about the teacher-student relationship, and I am more relaxed about letting the learning unfold as it may . . . That is my sense of how I am changing as a teacher.*

What Susan describes here is a phenomenological sense of what it means to be a teacher. Her attention is now on the learning in the classroom with the students in front of her, rather than her plans and objectives, pre-decided. Phenomenology is concerned first and foremost with our being in the world as it occurs for us, while it is happening, life as it is actually lived. Surprise, for the above five participants, was transformational to their being as teachers and their relationships to students.

## SURPRISES ABOUT STUDENTS

The five participants above expressed the most transformational impact of their surprise. The surprise was located in what they learned about their students, and this category of surprise was quite

common in the interviews, with mention made in 12 of the 17 interviews. Participants were often brought up short by assumptions they had previously made about their students; that despite many years in the classroom they realized they had been operating under misconceptions. As Cooke (2011) describes, this kind of surprise allows insight and change in thinking, which for teaching will necessarily lead to change in practice. Kathy spoke very explicitly about the nature of her surprise:

*It made me re-examine a lot of my different assumptions around my discipline and around my students, and it challenged some of my, I would say, deficit narratives . . . it started me focusing more on what they were doing, rather than just my assumptions about what they could or couldn't do. And then also making me think more about why they were doing particular things which were not necessarily the things I had explicitly asked for, but implicitly that is what I was telling them I wanted.*

Remember that Kathy had not really expected SoTL to have an impact on her teaching at all. Yet, in the course of her study, she was confronted with the revelation that students did not understand what it was she wanted them to do, and, significantly, the realization that with her own assessment practices she was indeed rewarding them for what she did not want them to do. Kathy gave this example about how students utilize sources:

*So for example, if I tell students to find and use ten sources in a paper they were finding and using ten sources and they weren't necessarily reading or understanding the ten sources, but they were finding and using ten sources because that is what I had asked for . . . There was just a disconnect between what I thought I was asking and what they heard me asking. I mean: find, read, think about, synthesize . . . [and they think] find and use. And you know, they get rewarded . . . it really challenged my assessment assumptions in that they get rewarded for finding and using, whereas if they find, read, and try and synthesize it is harder, and it is probably messier and it is uglier and so they very well could get a lower grade.*

Kathy's willingness to be confronted by this surprising realization, and her resulting shift in thinking was not something she had anticipated. Sarah also spoke about how engaging in SoTL presented her with a surprising realization about her own preconceptions:

*Well, first of all [laughs] . . . the surprises that emerged where the disjuncture between my assumptions, my so-called "expert predictions" about what they are going to say, and often unkind, I must say, or I was expecting a lack of theoretical sophistication, or a lack of nuance . . . I guess I realized I make so many assumptions and I just always have to check them at the door, like a new group of people here, don't do blanket, "No, they can't learn this. They don't read that. They don't understand this."*

It is noteworthy how similarly both Kathy and Sarah were struck by their previous lack of generosity toward the students, and how the surprise at the "disconnect" or "disjuncture" functioned as a rupture that allowed them to focus more on the students in front of them, and what they were able, rather than unable, to do. This is arguably a deeply phenomenological moment, a new way of seeing, returning the

teachers' attention to "the things themselves," or to the students as they *actually are* rather than a projection of them. Worth noting is that in the interviews these moments were frequently signified by laughter, often present in moments of rupture, as the participant was struck by amusement at what they "used to think."

The above two examples had to do with students' abilities to utilize texts and to deal with theoretical complexity. Liz, who taught engineering courses, was interested in the cognitive process students used to understand particular types of problems. She had what for her was a surprising revelation about her students' facility with what she had assumed they could do with ease:

*It just really opened my eyes to some of the troubles the students were having that hadn't occurred to me, like they seemed to have more trouble seeing stuff that was behind the plane of the page, for example, and I just never realized that before. We expect them to pick these things up quickly, and it is sort of like, "Here it is! Do it quickly and now moving on," kind of thing and I had never really taken the time to really uncover the troubles they were having with the diagrams before.*

These examples of surprise show how the process of engaging in SoTL for some researchers allows them to "break through" what might be thought of as expert blind spots (Brown, Roediger, & McDaniel, 2014). As experts in their discipline, it is very challenging for faculty to recognize that what they do with such ease can be so difficult for students, and hard for them to see exactly where the students are experiencing frustration. Liz's insight that the students "they seemed to have trouble seeing stuff that was behind the plane of the page" allowed her to shift her teaching practice to allow for more learning: "So it definitely changed the way I just introduced those types of questions and I try and model my own thinking process more for them when we start doing those types of problems." Sarah, too, spoke about what she did differently in the classroom as a result of her surprise, "I also recognize the importance of... the kind of questions that will really try to elicit useful answers, so that has helped just in the classroom—in the dialogue in the classroom."

Several participants spoke about revelations they had about their students within the affective domain. Maxine recounted learning, through the reflective assignments, about a traumatic event that a student had experienced and how important that was to his learning. David expressed how much more aware he was of the performance anxiety his students experienced. Les was surprised that "time seemed to be one of their biggest challenges . . . So how that made me more intentional was that I really realized I can't waste these guys' time in class . . . we really had to get down to business." Realizations of this nature seemed to lead the participants to different kinds of relations with their students, to a renewed presence in the classroom to the actual needs of the students as they better understood them. Susan described her shift in focus to, "What is happening in this course right now and what do we need to talk about today in order to inform what we are going to do tomorrow?" and is echoed by Halle's comment, "So it has changed my understanding of how students learn, but also how I teach right now and why I teach the way I do." The transformations in teaching and understanding of students present in the interviews, through a mechanism of surprise, were the most dramatic.



## SURPRISES ABOUT SOIL AND THE RESEARCH PROCESS

There were other kinds of surprise, however. One of these was regarding the research process itself. For most participants, engaging in SoTL means learning an entirely new set of research methodologies. And it is not only methods themselves, which can be relatively straightforward; research methodologies are born out of radically different epistemological assumptions. For many participants, this was extremely challenging. Several participants expressed surprise at their transition from quantitative to qualitative research, which for them was very drastic. Madeleine, a scientist, related,

*I had a lot of struggles that first year . . . because I was reading a lot of, like one person case studies and I was like, okay, to me this just goes against everything I can think of! . . . And it really made me question the validity of SoTL as I was going through the SoTL work., but when I started getting into my own research I started finding more experiments that were similar to what I expected and then I started realizing that the literature is so vast that there are various different ways to . . . approach and look at different questions.*

Her expression was surprise at what she expected SoTL to be, what she initially found it to be, and eventually a more expansive view that allowed her to bring more of her disciplinary approaches back into the endeavor.

Liz similarly described her initial discomfort with qualitative approaches:

*In science you are supposed to be objective, right? . . . I wasn't comfortable with any subjectivity at all, which kind of explains the project . . . I didn't want reflections, I wasn't interested in that, and I didn't want student opinions about what worked or didn't work. . . I really wanted to capture what are they thinking at this point in time, and not what they say they are thinking, or what I think they are thinking.*

She goes on to describe what to her was a surprising fall into qualitative approaches, understanding now about the role of professional judgment and expertise in conducting research: "So it makes more sense to me now, but at the time . . . I wasn't ready to go there or even recognize it . . . whereas now I guess I understand . . . the opinion you have as a practitioner also can inform the scholarship."

From the other end of the continuum, Sarah, from a cultural studies perspective struggled with what for her were overly empirical approaches. She explained, "Language like 'data' you know, students as 'data,' qualitative methodology . . . even 'methodologies' . . . I was like, 'That is not my realm, that is not my domain, I don't see how I am going to be able to fit here.'" Despite this, she was surprised by how learning to do a presentation for a SoTL audience has altered her presentation style elsewhere: "That is actually something I have learned that has been to great benefit at other conferences, that presentation of your discoveries. . . [it] has very much helped how I present in other realms. I know how to present something." This was surprising to her, and opened new avenues of academic expression.

For some, the surprise was about the nature of the SoTL discipline itself. Two participants spoke at length about their difficulty in getting a grasp on the discipline. Beth commented:

*Getting my head around the discipline took longer than I thought. I guess I shouldn't be that surprised*

*at it, it is not like I had no concept . . . well, no, I had very little conception of it when I got to it, I just had a very general idea, so I would say that took a little bit longer than I had anticipated.*

In fact, in Beth's case, her surprise at this, and feelings of being ill equipped to do research led her to ultimately leave the institution to pursue a PhD. She explains, "It really highlighted for me a lot of the research shortcoming I had . . . I didn't feel confident in planning the kind of research that I wanted to do, and that is really what got me started on thinking that I need more schooling."

Halle decided to return to her disciplinary research after her experience as a SoTL scholar. She commented, "I don't know that I fully understood what it meant to immerse myself in a very different field of study," and this was a surprise to her. She found that the SoTL literature was much bigger than she thought. Her previous conception of the SoTL literature was that it could be contained on a small shelf of books, but "then when you realize it has got journals . . . like it is a discipline and it is bigger than like a bookshelf you would find in somebody's house, it is huge [laughter]." Despite what she considered to be a "failed" study, the surprise at what she learned about her students caused her to completely change her course. Halle explained that she "scrapped everything I had done in the course and started over again."

Another element of surprise regarding the discipline of SoTL that came up in several of the interviews was surprise that SoTL is still defining itself. Mara expressed as follows:

*There were a lot of what I have characterized elsewhere as "doctrinal definitional debates" which I have little patience for . . . this is SoTL, this is not, "I am doing better SoTL," and, "I am more SoTL than you are," and yeah, who cares really? Let's all find stuff out and share seems to me to be the basis of it.*

In Mara's case, this nearly became a surprise that dissuaded her from continuing, but she persisted was able to come to terms with this element by modeling a way of being in the SoTL community she was comfortable with. Similarly, Robert was also surprised by definitional issues:

*I think what I have found is the SoTL community is less sure of what SoTL is than I originally thought. I am not convinced that they are necessarily—the community is necessarily—willing to accept anything as SoTL, but they have not defined, "this is" and "this is not" . . . the standards are being developed . . . the SoTL community is trying to bring in new voices, and I think therefore is recognizing that there are new disciplinary approaches.*

Robert's home discipline is a laboratory science, and so for him it was a long methodological distance to travel. The description of his surprise relates to the ways he has found to marry an epistemological approach that is congruent with his discipline and integrated this with more qualitative methodologies. Robert views his audience as largely his disciplinary colleagues, as it is here that he is trying to influence practice, and therefore, the importance of conducting SoTL in a way that will be compelling to them. Kathy also described what for her was a surprising breakthrough in terms of being able to bring her own disciplinary ways of knowing to the task of SoTL: "For me, one of the turning points . . . was when I realized I could still do close reading of texts, right? . . . like after two sleepless nights . . . I realized I can read student texts."

Finally, throughout the interviews was a frequent expression of surprise at the richness of the data generated by the SoTL projects, and this richness opened the door for participants to see the potential of this kind of work, even if it had previously been unfamiliar and was an epistemological departure from their own discipline.

#### SURPRISE ABOUT COMMUNITIES AND DISCIPLINES

Several participants commented that they were surprised in various ways about the community they experienced in the program. Kathy expressed that she found a different kind of intellectual community in SoTL outside of her department, because within her department everyone had very narrow and different specializations. She explained, “Again, it is certainly not something I expected because, you know, all of my disciplinary scholarship has been done in isolation.” She then went on to make an interesting statement about that community then making it more difficult with her disciplinary colleagues:

*One of the impacts of the program was after being immersed in this academic community I found it really difficult to reintegrate back into my department, and there was a sort of a frustration on my part that they weren't engaged in these things that I thought were clearly worthy of everybody being engaged in.*

Here again then, we see the phenomenological experience of surprise and a disjuncture that results in Dastur's different possible future (2000, p. 182).

Other participants spoke about more of the affective elements of community. Mara said that one of the things she didn't anticipate was

*the depth of the community we built very, very quickly; now I knew most of the people going in, but certainly those relationships deepened and the new relationships were very, very good and the way that they have continued . . . So I think how quickly that group gelled as a community and how strong that community has been I think was a surprise—a pleasant surprise.*

In fact, in some cases what participants were taken aback by was a sense of emotionality through the experience, referring to “tears” or in Mara's words, “how fraught that process was! I am not a particularly emotional person, but just the depth of caring for each other that came out.” In this, we can see a different kind of presence, of being together in the world, result.

#### IMPLICATIONS

In this analysis, we see how surprise figured prominently in the experience of these faculty members as they engaged in the SoTL scholar's program. In a phenomenological frame, this surprise, for some, became the breach or rupture to their perception that allowed new ways of thinking about students and new ways of being in the classroom. For others, the surprises affected identities as disciplinary scholars, as they transitioned to SoTL research methodologies.

The faculty members interviewed for this study expressed instances of coming to breakthrough insights about teaching, learning, research, and themselves in a community of academics. This suggests that creating such opportunities for SoTL communities to form among faculty from disparate disciplines has a visible and potentially transformative effect on the postsecondary environment. SoTL studies are typically focused on improving teaching and learning for students in the classroom, through means of pedagogical and curricular interventions. Much less frequently addressed is transforming identities and perspectives of the instructors themselves, and when changing identities are explored (e.g., Simmons et al., 2013; Manarin & Abrahamson, 2016), the *means* through which this takes place is left unaddressed. A teacher with a transformed perspective on students will alter their practice, effecting long term change in their pedagogy. Through this study, we have learned that beyond the immediate success or failure of the specific SoTL study developed by the faculty member, the transformational effects ultimately felt by students are caused by the process of engaging in the SoTL work itself, even in cases where the SoTL study did not work out so well. In particular, this occurs through the mechanism of surprise that allows a new potential future to open up, for example, in the assumptions they had been carrying around with them about students as they taught, sometimes for decades. As seen in the interviews, surprise often creates the possibility for transformation, but it works the other direction as well, where the transformations become surprising to the participants as well. In this iterative fashion, our results demonstrate an example of Kreber's (2013) hope for SoTL that it become an "*extended form of professionalism*" for university teachers (p. 11).

For future avenues of inquiry, further exploration of these transformations over time would be worthwhile. Additionally, we suggest that experimenting with interpretive research methodologies within SoTL to address questions of being and becoming, such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, and narrative inquiry, would open more nuanced landscapes for investigation within the field.

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