

One hallmark of a good Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) is a coherent conceptual structure. Many different approaches can be used to create a structure that leads readers from one set of ideas to the next. Often when I read early drafts of a student's SPN, I have an idea for an organizing principle that might clarify its structure. Some students ignore my suggestions, but find an organizing principle that works for them. (Unfortunately, some ignore the suggestion and find no alternative, resulting in a conceptually fragmented SPN.) Other students adopt my suggestion, but the disconnection between the organizing principle and content suggests that they did not really take ownership of the idea. Maura represents another response. Initially, she didn't really resonate with my suggestion, but she continued to think about it. Eventually, she saw a way of drawing on her previous experience and knowledge as a dancer to structure her SPN. One of the qualities I really appreciate in Maura's SPN is the elegance, relevance, and thoughtfulness of the quotations she uses to set the stage for each chapter.

One purpose an SPN can serve is integrating various aspects of one's life into a coherent sense of self as educator. As Maura explains, before writing her SPN, she saw her life as a dancer as separate from her life as a teacher. As she worked her way through the writing, she came to see how these two life experiences shape who she is and how she embodies her pedagogy. In this way, Maura fulfilled the integrative purpose of the SPN.

Another purpose of an SPN is integrating personal experience with theoretical discourses. Within the time constraints of the Creative Inquiry course, conducting exhaustive reviews of literature is not feasible. Students like Maura, however, use the SPN as an opportunity to revisit ideas encountered through previous course work and begin to create a more cohesive theoretical and philosophical foundation for their practice. In her SPN, Maura deals with three large and complicated discourses—the Reggio philosophy, culturally relevant teaching, and trauma-informed care. Through the inquiry, she begins to see more clearly how these discourses relate to each other and to her commitments as an early childhood educator. At the same time, she recognizes and acknowledges that she has only begun to plumb depths of these ideas and that her inquiry can continue as she proceeds on her professional journey. This type of self-assessment is inherent in a scholarly mindset.

In addition to reading the thoughts that Maura presents in her SPN, she shares her experiences and insights during an interview for our Speaking of Education Podcast which is available in that section of the Scholar-Practitioner Nexus website.