



# Crossing the (SoTL) Bridge and Diving in: A Reflection on the ISSOTL17 Conference

## KEYWORDS

ISSOTL conference, bridges, networks, colleagues

At ISSOTL in Calgary, sessions were held on both sides of a bridge—a closed pedestrian walkway above the main street that connected the main convention building to a second building on the other side of the road. On the first morning of the conference, as we oriented ourselves to find meeting rooms and figured out how to carry our breakfast and coffee to them, I overheard discussion of whether or not it was worth the trouble to try to get to meetings held in rooms on the other side of the bridge.

I was glad to cross that bridge, taking the “road less traveled,” and to find the wonderfully inclusive international national teaching fellows meeting, where I met new and welcoming colleagues and heard about their interest in opening the group to those who weren’t necessarily national teaching fellows but who might like to receive mentoring into those roles.

Not crossing the bridge is a choice—I understand only too well (and experience more often than I’d like!) that life can become overwhelming to the extent that it feels like too much trouble. While I maintain that my life is rich and full, at times, in relative isolation at our institutions, it can seem a little too much so.

Bridges (metaphorical or otherwise) are not always across water—though I did ponder what parallel to shark-infested waters keeps us from crossing bridges—and keeps us in relative isolation. As our International Collaborative Writing Group from 2012 discussed (Simmons et al., 2013), there are challenges within our own institutions and roles that make it sometimes difficult to undertake SoTL work. These challenges seem to grow smaller when we meet at ISSOTL and share them with others having similar experiences. They seem to grow smaller as we find ourselves reenergized by the wonderful ISSOTL conversations.

A colleague who visited TELUS Spark, Calgary’s science center, saw a sign there asking whether a glass was half full or half empty. The sign reminded visitors that the glass is always full. Sometimes it’s full of water, and sometimes it’s only half full of water—but it’s still filled to the top with air. I wonder whether, when we get isolated in our SoTL practice, we sometimes feel we are drowning in the glass “half full” and not remembering that there’s air in the other half.

Attending ISSOTL always brings me back to the surface to get enough air to dive deeply again. ISSOTL helps me remember every year that I know how to breathe, and I know how to swim.

And so I offer a poem I have on my wall at work, by Tyler Knott Gregson (n.d.):

*Promise me  
You will not spend  
So much time  
Treading water  
And trying to keep your  
Head above the water  
That you forget,  
How much you have always  
Loved  
To swim.*

Forget, at least from time to time, the institutional battles. Go for a swim. And as the safety reminder goes: always swim with a buddy. Find your connective networks (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009)—whether they are in your department, your wider institution, or among good colleagues at ISSOTL. Find the ones that make you feel supported enough that you are prepared to risk more. Find the ones who will accompany you across the next bridge.

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