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# Foreword: 2019 International Collaborative Writing Groups (ICWGs)

## ICWG HISTORY OVERVIEW

Collaborative research and writing across disciplines and institutions happens frequently in discipline-based research. However, opportunities for cross-collaborative scholarship in teaching and learning is limited in comparison (Kahn et al., 2013; MacKenzie and Myers, 2012). Yet the value of larger scale, team-based approaches to scholarly writing is well recognised in building networks and in providing a deeper understanding of a topic as informed by multi-disciplinary and/or international perspectives (Marquis et al., 2014; 2015; Matthews et al., 2017). It is for these reasons that the International Collaborative Writing Groups (ICWG) program that crystallises around the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) conference is so valuable. ICWGs bring together academics, professional staff, and students to co-author learning and teaching articles on topics of shared interest. The aims are two-fold: 1) to build capacity of participants to work and write with international collaborators, and 2) to contribute meaningful and topical perspectives to the SoTL literature.

This special section of *Teaching and Learning Inquiry* (TLI) publishes the work of the members of the third ICWG (2019), a group that met face-to-face in Atlanta, USA prior to the ISSOTL 2019 conference. It builds on the work of two previous ICWGs, the first hosted in Hamilton, Canada in 2012 and the second in Melbourne, Australia in 2015.

The 2019 ICWG was modelled on the previous two. Writing groups worked at a distance over a period of approximately one and a half years, combined with a face-to-face, intensive, two-and-a-half-day residential event prior to the commencement of the ISSOTL conference. Our participants included both students and staff from a diversity of disciplines, geographical locations, and levels of experience. Members were assigned to groups based on their topic preference and with the goal of group diversity in mind, thus providing scope for exchange of international perspectives as well as mentorship and support, both critical components of the ICWGs.

As in previous years, a key component of the ICWG experience was the development of a sense of community and comradeship. The face-to-face time in Atlanta enhanced the relationships that had begun to form virtually, with social events and shared lunches providing additional opportunities for additional connections. The majority of participants reported that not only did they form valuable new professional relationships, but also they formed new personal friends in the process.



Top left and right: Groups at work processing feedback from other groups; Bottom left: Prize winners at the Sunday night dinner and social; Bottom right: The three co-leaders (Phillip Motley, Aysha Divan, and Lauren Scharff)

Whilst the aims, structure, and goals for the 2019 cohort were broadly similar to previous ICWGs (2012 and 2015), we deliberately made some changes based on prior experiences. One was to reduce the number of members in each group (prior average was eight, current average was six) to 1) address the well-documented challenge of scheduling meetings so that all can participate, and 2) better allow each member to contribute more meaningfully to the process and the outputs. This group-size modification supported our second change, which was to increase the number of groups and hence the number of papers presented in this issue—a change made possible by TLI’s move to an online format with fewer page limit constraints.

### *The resultant papers*

It’s amazing how quickly a year and a half will go by and how much dedicated groups can accomplish in that time! Despite the intrusion and chaos from COVID-19 during the spring of 2020, the groups pulled together and submitted their initial full drafts in mid-May. They received feedback in June and submitted revised drafts to us for review in July. Papers were due to TLI by 31 August. As we reviewed each group’s manuscript to provide the final round of feedback, we enjoyed a personal sense of professional and intellectual development from the wide variety of methods, topics, and perspectives shared in the papers. We hope our short overview here will further motivate you to dive in and enjoy the articles.

The array of methodologies we observed includes papers that gathered data from students and faculty centered on pedagogical topics within courses, conceptual and position papers, literature reviews, and an autoethnography effort. Some of these approaches required ethics approvals (those gathering student and faculty data, and the autoethnography paper), which can be especially challenging due to

the short timeline for full paper drafts after the face-to-face meeting, and the complexities of the approval process when multiple institutions are involved. We believe the variety of approaches nicely illustrates the flexibility of SoTL researchers in their quest to understand and enhance teaching and learning.

The variety of topics and perspectives was evidenced by:

- 1) *papers with a focus on classroom pedagogies and learning outcomes* ([impact of and best practices for giving feedback](#); [student and faculty perspectives related to efforts to develop critical reflection skills](#)),
- 2) *papers exploring aspects of SoTL itself* ([a literature examination of the relative focus on teaching versus learning](#); [a proposal for a new framework for SoTL mentoring](#); [a summary of reasons and considerations for sharing SoTL with students](#); [an examination of personal experiences leading to the conclusion that the presence of community supports the courage to engage in SoTL](#); [an analysis of how individuals cross multiple boundaries to connect and collaborate within SoTL](#)), and
- 3) *papers that expanded focus and recommendations to higher education at large* ([a proposal that SoTL could be key to reform in higher education through the creation of a t-shaped learning community](#); [an argument that SoTL should lead an effort to research the influence of power dynamics within higher education](#)).

Although this categorization places each of the papers within a single category, several papers crossed into more than one of these categories, illustrating how the scope of SoTL can bridge domains and connect what happens in our individual classrooms to the larger picture of higher education.

In addition to the impressive breadth of methodologies and topics we observed, we also noticed a salient theme within many of the papers—one that acknowledges the importance of emotional influences and social connections. For many years, educational research focused almost exclusively on the cognitive aspects of learning, but recently we have witnessed a growing awareness of the power of affect and human interactions in the retention and success of students (e.g. Chambliss & Takacs, 2014). Examples in this issue include Hill et al.'s paper—although their pedagogical topic is an exploration of feedback, a key aspect of their work focuses on the emotional impact of feedback on students and their subsequent responses. Friberg et al. propose a framework for SoTL mentoring opportunities, and in doing so, simultaneously explore the powerful influence of social connections. An even more direct exploration of social connections occurs in Smith et al.—they highlight personal impacts of engaging in SoTL and the importance of a supportive community.

We hope that you too will appreciate the collection of ICWG papers published in this issue. The ICWG experience is about far more than the final publication of the papers, but it feels great to see them come together and become available to provoke thought and inspiration across the SoTL community. Enjoy your read and consider becoming part of a future ICWG experience.

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