

The Hospitality of the Commons: A Collaborative Reflection on a SoTL Conference

Laura Cruz,¹ Eileen Grodziak,¹ Diana Botnaru,² Deborah Walker,² Trent W. Maurer,² Alan Altany,³ Betty Abraham-Settles,⁴ Michelle Amos,⁵ Kimberly Bunch-Crump,⁶ Alan Cook,⁷ Heidi Eisenreich,² Diana Gregory,⁸ Michael L. Howell,⁹ Ioney James,⁶ Shainaz Landge,² Jane Lynes,² Joyce Pompey,⁴ Brendan L. Shapiro,¹⁰ Allison Smith,¹¹ Brenda Thomas,¹² Felicity M. Turner,² Ellen H. Williams,² Robin Gerchman,¹³ Miiriam Horne,¹⁴ Richard Hughes,¹⁵ Alandra Kahl,¹⁶ Rebecca Layson,⁸ David X. Lemmons,¹⁷ Jeffrey A. Stone,¹ Elizabeth VanDeusen,¹⁸ and Yue Zhang²

¹ Penn State

² Georgia Southern University

³ College of Central Florida

⁴ University of South Carolina Aiken

⁵ University of Central Missouri

⁶ North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University

⁷ University of Rio Grande and Rio Grande Community College

⁸ Kennesaw State University

⁹ Appalachian State University

¹⁰ College of Southern Nevada

¹¹ Johnson County Community College

¹² Florida Gulf Coast University

¹³ Rollins College

¹⁴ Champlain College

¹⁵ Illinois State University

¹⁶ Penn State Greater Allegheny

¹⁷ George Mason University

¹⁸ Augusta University

Received: 21 August 2023; Accepted: 9 November 2023

This is a large-scale, multi-author collaborative autoethnographic study exploring the concept of building a tangible teaching commons on the example of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Commons Conference. The project organizers sought to provide a big tent and extended an invitation to attendees to respond to a series of writing prompts about their conference experience. Collaborative writing took place asynchronously over an approximately 60-day period following the close of the conference and generated $\approx 20,000$ words. This corpus became the basis for a three-stage emergent coding process, conducted by the four-member steering committee, which led to the identification of three primary themes from the collective experiences of the 2023 SoTL Commons Conference attendees: SoTL as pedagogy, SoTL as a community of scholars, and SoTL as scholarship. Despite some limitations to what the sense of commons represents, the project highlighted the respondents' spirit of appreciative inquiry, a signature mindset of SoTL and engaged participants who were new to the field. We argue that it acted as a form of academic hospitality itself; enabling the sharing of practice, deepening of reflection, strengthening of research skills, fostering of social connections, and, by extension, the advancement of the field as a community of scholars.

INTRODUCTION

In their foundational work, "The Advancement of Learning" (2005), Carnegie Foundation scholars Mary Huber and Pat Hutchings describe the heart of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) as a teaching commons, i.e., "a conceptual space in which communities of educators committed to inquiry and innovation come together to exchange ideas about teaching and learning and use them to meet the challenges of educating students for personal, professional, and civic life" (Huber & Hutchings, 2005; Huber & Hutchings, 2006, p. 1). It is in this conceptual space, in other words, that the previously largely invisible work of teaching becomes visible (Shulman, 1993), exchanged with others, and the intrinsic goals of the SoTL movement advance. Indeed, the values that characterize the teaching commons space are sufficiently distinct from other realms of academic life, that philosopher Donald Schön argued it may require a full epistemological shift in order to embrace them (Schön, 1995). In the present study, we explore what it means to integrate the abstract idea of a teaching commons into a very real, tangible experience: the SoTL Commons Conference.

ACADEMIC HOSPITALITY AND THE SOTL COMMONS

The SoTL Commons Conference first began in 2007, when Alan Altany, then director of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at Georgia Southern (GS) University came up with the idea of hosting an interdisciplinary conference on their campus. The origins of the conference, and indeed its name, were explic-

itly tied to the concept of building a teaching commons. Through his own experience as an educator and educational developer, Dr. Altany "came to realize that many faculty wanted to discuss teaching with other faculty in formative ways, but often had little opportunity to do so in any organized manner." For this reason, the primary purpose of the conference was "to bring teaching out into the open for discussion, reflection, experimentation, and research... [to] open classroom doors to the investigation of teaching practices and mak[e] the results available to others." While ISSOTL and other teaching focused conferences (Lilly and American Association of Colleges and Universities) existed at the time, SoTL Commons was designed to provide faculty with an "intimate" community of inquiry, as well as to promote Georgia Southern as a national SoTL center.

It is one thing to build a teaching commons; it is another to have people participate in it. For this reason, the SoTL Commons conference organizers began to think strategically about academic hospitality in both the literal and figurative sense. As Diana Botnaru, one of the long-standing leaders of the conference, recalls, the event was moved from its original location on GS's Statesboro campus to the city of Savannah because the organizing team wanted to "involve as many and varied faculty as possible (at GS and beyond)". They believed that Savannah not only had "more non-conference sights and activities for attendees," but it also was considered the pinnacle of "Southern hospitality, you know". This rationale proved to be prescient and helped establish the conference as first a regional, then a national, and now an increasingly international venue.

The hospitality of the conference was not, however, limited to the amenities available in Savannah. Rather, the organizers became conscious of their roles as SoTL hosts, inviting their guests not only to a conference, but into all attributes of the field, from its material forms (a body of scholarship), social practices (interdisciplinary collaboration), and values (e.g., openness, student learning) (Imperiale et al., 2021; Phipps & Barnett, 2007). If SoTL represents an epistemological shift, in other words, then the SoTL Commons (and other conferences like it) serves as the physical site whereby that shift occurs, whether for individuals, the field at large, or both. For individuals, this is especially the case for early-career SoTL “tourists” who attend the conference in order to explore a new epistemic space; but it also holds for late-career SoTL scholars who may no longer be tourists, but who can serve as co-hosts. For example, Trent Maurer, a faculty member at GS who has attended every conference for the past 15 years, shared this story from one of his first conference presentations:

among the attendees were two of the keynote speakers at that conference. That was something I had never experienced before at any conference, and it was profoundly humbling to realize that these *giants of SoTL* would think our team might have something valuable to contribute to SoTL.

In 2023, the SoTL Commons organizers chose to add a new form of hospitality to the conference experience: collaborative writing. Collaborative writing has become an increasingly valued modality in SoTL, as evidenced by the sustained success of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) collaborative writing groups (Healey et al., 2013; Healy, 2017; Marquis et al., 2014; Marquis et al., 2017; Matthews et al., 2017; Seeley et al., 2019). In many ways, the structure of the writing groups is an extension of the trans-disciplinarity that early SoTL advocates envisioned for the commons, in which teaching practice serves to bring previously isolated disciplinary practices together in order to connect with and inspire others outside of their respective academic siloes. The writing groups can also serve as a form of academic hosting, as they are intended to provide newcomers with an open and relatively low-intensity pathway into the field. In the context of their writing projects, guests can also build social connections to a larger network of scholars while immersed in a (literal, figurative, and virtual) SoTL-defined space.

THE SOTL COMMONS WRITING GROUP

The present study takes the form of a large-scale, multi-author collaborative autoethnography (CAE) focused on the SoTL Commons experience for its attendees. A CAE is defined as “researchers pooling their stories to find some commonalities and differences and then wrestling with those stories to discover the meanings of the stories in relation to their sociocultural contexts” (Chang et al., 2016, p. 17; Chang, 2021; Ellis et al., 2011). It could be argued that a CAE is a form of group reflection-on-action, in this case of the conference experience, aligned closely with the reflective practitioner model embraced for both teaching and research practice in SoTL (Beaudoin, 2012; Motley et al., 2019; Potter & Kustra, 2011; Roy & Uekusa, 2022; Schön, 1987).

In the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic, CAEs have become increasingly popular forms of scholarly discourse, including multiple examples in and about engagement in SoTL (Badenhorst et al., 2022; Bennett et al., 2016; Cruz & Grodzia, 2021; Godbold et al., 2021; Ness et al., 2020; Pretorius, 2023; Suh et

al., 2022; Waller & Possner, 2023). Despite this surge of interest, there remains no standardized template for how CAEs are designed, and preferences vary across disciplines and even individuals. Two critical axes to be determined by CAE researchers are the extent to which the final work will reflect a single, shared voice or embrace a plurality of perspectives; and the relative balance between critical reflection and qualitative analysis (Hornsby et al., 2021). The present study constitutes a somewhat different approach which could perhaps best be described as a crowd-sourced CAE.

A typical collaborative writing group in SoTL might involve up to eight (8) participants (Marquis et al., 2014; Marquis et al., 2017; Healey et al., 2013; Scharff et al., 2021). After that, the addition of new members is believed to provide diminishing intellectual returns as well as more challenging logistics. On the other hand, a handful of qualitative researchers have been making the case for broader inputs, allowing for evidence to be gathered across a larger and more diverse base. Social scientists at the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam, for example, recently created “Panl” an online tool intended to collect data from larger and larger populations, stating that “we strive to bring research into the public and democratize the research process” (<https://research-panl.eu/>). The democratization process cuts both ways, applying to both the inputs into the study as well as the researchers who analyze those inputs (Hernandez et al., 2017).

For the present study, we aspired to capture the conference experience to the fullest extent possible, so all 2023 SoTL Commons conference attendees ($n=201$) were invited to share their previously largely invisible reflections with others and to participate in a unique collaboration project. Invitations to participate were extended both verbally (during the conference) and via email (See Appendix A). Participants (without otherwise specified roles) were asked to contribute either to the evidence base (a compendium of reflective writing), the qualitative data analysis, or both. The call yielded 25 participants. A typical participant was from a research university (R2 high research university 10 out of 25, 40%); had little (10 out of 25, 40%) or intermediate (up to 5 years) (11 out of 25, 44%) experience with SoTL, and were either first-time (11 out of 25, 25%) or recent conference attendees (2-4 years) (10 out of 25, 40%). The majority were from education fields (8 out of 25, 32 %) or the arts & humanities (9 out of 25, 36%), but most major super-disciplinary categories (e.g., STEM) had at least one representative. In addition, the four members of the project steering committee functioned largely as managing editors, but also contributed directly to multiple stages of research development, and three of the original conference founders/participants provided oral histories for greater context (one was also a member of the steering committee). As a result, we had 31 contributors to the entire process that took place over a period of approximately six months (February-August, 2023), in four stages, as follows:

Stage 1: Sharing Stories/Building the Corpus

Participants were first invited to contribute to a collaborative document, housed in Google, which provided general instructions as well as a series of writing prompts, framed as open-ended questions about their conference experience. In order to create a safe and open environment, contributors were identified by their Google identifiers, e.g., Anonymous Wildebeest or Anonymous Tuna, rather than their names.

The prompts were provided in three rounds, with additional inquiries added by both the members of the steering committee as well as the contributors themselves. Writing took place largely asynchronously over an approximately 60-day period following the close of the conference. Participants were encouraged to read each other's contributions, add any comments or questions, and connect their own responses to that of others. In the end, the complete corpus consisted of approximately 20,000 words.

Stage 2: Identifying Themes

The corpus generated in stage 1 became the basis for a three-stage emergent coding process, conducted by the four-member steering committee. It should be noted that two members of this group are not directly involved in the organization of the conference, which served as a check on potential bias within the coding process.

The group followed established procedures for qualitative coding (Charmaz, 2000, 2006, 2017; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), dividing the work into three rounds: individual, emergent coding (round 1); shared, iterative coding (round 2); and a final comprehensive round of coding conducted by one member of the group. The initial process revealed seven descriptive codes: hospitality, re-energizing, networking, collaboration, belonging, respect for SoTL, and evaluation of SoTL; six additional themes were added in the next iteration: novices, discuss/share, professional learning, multiple disciplines, recommendations from others, and publishing. In between each stage, the group met (virtually) and used peer interviewing techniques to assure further trustworthiness of the analysis.

Stage 3: Explicating Themes

For the next stage of analysis, the thirteen original themes were condensed into four super-themes: belonging (hospitality, re-energizing, belonging, novice), networking (networking, collaboration, multiple disciplines, recommendations from others), professional learning (professional learning; discuss/share) and scholarship (respect for SoTL, evaluation of SoTL, publishing). The organizers sent out a second invitation to all participants, inviting them to participate in one of four groups, each of which would work together to review the coded segments for each super-theme, analyze their contents, and write up that analysis as a section of the final manuscript. The response rate was high, with 16 out of the original group of 25 contributors (64%) continuing with stage 3. Each group consisted of 5 unique members, including one member of the project steering committee, who provided administrative oversight (e.g., scheduling) and expert guidance as needed. By the end of this stage, the four initial super-themes further evolved into three overarching (and final) themes: SoTL as pedagogy, SoTL as a community of scholars, and SoTL as scholarship. These teams are the primary authors of the findings section below.

Stage 4: Synthesis

In the fourth and final stage of the CAE process, the steering committee members worked together to knit the various components into a coherent and consistent manuscript. The draft that emerged from this process was shared (asynchronously, via a Google Doc) with all contributors for comment and review. The revised version of that manuscript is what appears before you (the reader) now.

THE FINDINGS

The process described above led to the identification of three primary themes from the collective experiences of the 2023 SoTL Commons Conference attendees: SoTL as pedagogy, SoTL as a community of scholars, and SoTL as scholarship. These themes are articulated in the following section.

Theme 1: SoTL as Pedagogy

Peter Felten and Nancy Chick differentiated between SoTL as a body of research and SoTL as pedagogy or the developmental, hopefully transformative, process that instructors undergo when they engage in SoTL work (Felten & Chick, 2018; Fanghanel, 2014). In many ways, the pedagogical benefits of SoTL engagement accrue whether or not a given individual becomes directly involved in the conduct of research; they can also occur through reading published SoTL work, or, perhaps most relevant to the present case, attending workshops and research presentations at conferences (Cruz et al, 2019; Newell et al., 2021).

Shared Discourse: Learning Sciences

The concept of a “teaching commons” suggests a shared space in which instructors from a wide range of disciplines, roles, and institutions can interact and gain insights from one another. In order to do so, however, there is a need for what Phipps and Barnett refer to as “linguistic hospitality,” i.e. a common vocabulary that can be used to talk within and across disciplinary, institutional, and professional realms (2007). Indeed, in their reflections, the conference participants appeared to adopt a common discourse. At one level, the vocabulary of the learning sciences seemed to function as a form of *lingua franca* (an historical term that refers to a language adopted by travelers or traders with many different native tongues). As one attendee noted, “I found the opportunity to seriously engage with people who take the act of thinking about how we teach seriously (the term *metacognition* was used in one panel—scholars who think about how we teach) deeply restorative and refreshing.” Several others suggested that they were able to deepen their vocabulary (“I’m familiar with the idea of the *knowledge gap* but not with this term (*knowledge translation*). I’d appreciate knowing more about what it means and how the term is deployed”; “The idea of knowledge translation is exactly what I do with students”). That said, the shared discourse was not limited just to terminology. It was also reflected in common perspectives (appreciative inquiry) and practices (critical reflection).

Shared Mindset: Appreciative Inquiry

In their collective reflections, the conference attendees appeared to embrace, both implicitly and explicitly, an appreciative inquiry mindset. According to Moore (2019), appreciative inquiry asserts that conventional problem-solving approaches have an unhealthy over-emphasis on trying to work on what is wrong instead of building on successful and positive strengths. Somewhat ironically, the participants frequently contrasted the appreciative inquiry lens of the SoTL Commons to the less positive environments that they experienced in discipline-specific conferences (“I felt like it was a more collaborative environment and less peer review/evaluation”; “there was none of the performative aggression or gatekeeping enforcement of rigor that I’ve come to expect from conferences in my discipline”). Participants also demonstrated this approach by recognizing supportive and encouraging interactions that affirmed the various perspectives of the diverse attend-

ees and presenters (“we were all here for the same purpose of improving student learning, and there seemed to be a genuine interest in supporting one another in that endeavor”; “colleagues from numerous states and varying institutions coming together to share ideas, learn from [others], and refine pedagogical skills is a beautiful sight”).

Shared Practice: Critical Reflection

Many of the attendees indicated that critical reflection is a key form of professional learning that is primed through the SoTL Commons Conference experience. This kind of reflection is demonstrated when instructors reflect on their instructional choices and activities and, at least informally, assess the success they have in contributing to learning. While this process was evident throughout the conference, one salient example came from a session on constructive failure. Even if the final outcome was a failure, the presenters argued, the instructor still learned many valuable skills (e.g., design, assessment), and gained new pedagogical knowledge along the way. Another presenter suggested that critical reflection served as motivation to share her work with others, i.e., “to coherently evaluate and articulate the successes and failures (or challenges remaining) related to the project.” A third attendee noted that critical reflection can be a shared activity:

...having a conference where others understand the importance of teaching and learning, rather than only focusing on their discipline is so helpful because people outside of our discipline may have different (and many times even better) ideas on how to improve our projects.

Theme 2: SoTL as a Community of Scholars

One of the primary goals of the teaching commons is to bring people together who may have previously felt isolated within their primary academic units and/or disciplines. By extension, a SoTL Commons exists to bring together people who are interested in SoTL but may not have others within those same units who share their interests. In this sense, SoTL can be defined not as a concept (theme 1) or body of scholarship (theme 3), but as a community of scholars who are connected to one another through both research and practice. Several recent studies have emphasized the social, or relatedness, aspect of SoTL engagement and how this has become one of its most valued aspects (Cornejo-Happel & Song, 2020; Kim et al., 2021). For the host, this means that academic hospitality should include opportunities not only to connect ideas but also to provide meaningful engagement with others on both a personal and professional level.

Networking

Many of the attendees identified networking as a primary benefit of their participation in the conference. For some, networking was primarily about the exchange of useful ideas (“I can talk to people about ideas... for my own teaching and research”). For others, the conference was a place to identify potential collaborators for future SoTL studies (“I am seeking to collaborate with other researchers on issues that advance my teaching and learning in the classroom”). In addition, a number of respondents indicated that the conference provided opportunities to connect with others in person and make professional connections without necessarily having any direct outcome other than the relationship itself (“during the conference I have had the pleasure of meeting other attendees which may develop into long-term intercolle-

giate bonds”; “this is the first in-person conference that I have attended since COVID. It brings excitement to reconnect with fellow professionals”).

The attendees identified key features of the design of the conference as being especially conducive to networking. For example, the following observation received multiple endorsements: “due to the size of the conference, the presentations are intimate and make it easy to connect with others of similar interests”. Indeed, the word *intimate* was used at least six times to describe various aspects of the conference experience. Another respondent observed “the smaller size of the conference helps to foster these bonds, nurturing them with positivity, empathy, and inclusiveness”. There was also similar support for the more informal morning poster sessions as social enablers (“I enjoy how low stakes the poster presentations are in the morning. We can walk around and chat with others about research, make connections, and have space to just chat one on one”).

While the benefits of networking were expressed by participants from all levels of prior experience, those who were relatively new to the field often identified immediate benefits of local connections. For example:

I have been pushing myself to work on a SoTL project and have felt overwhelmed in getting started, but this year I was able to talk and connect with several of the attendees who were encouraging and offered several good ideas on how to get a small project started.

They also expressed a growing awareness of the larger SoTL community (“I’m new to this discipline, so that network will be crucial to me as I continue to think about how I engage in this work”). Inviting these novice guests into the field was expressed as an explicit role for more experienced scholars (“I love introducing SoTL to novices and seeing them get excited about the possibilities”; “over the years, I have made a point to interact extensively with novice attendees; I empathize with the feeling of uncertainty that comes with attending a new conference.”)

Resiliency

Perhaps the strongest benefit of social connection that emerged from the collaborative reflection process was a sense of resiliency, or the capacity to “bounce back” after challenging situations (Auburn et al., 2016). The cultivation of resiliency may be especially salient in the wake of widespread faculty burnout following the period of remote instruction under the global COVID-19 pandemic. Many attendees discussed how the conference restored their enthusiasm for pedagogy and enhanced the resiliency required for perseverance through challenging academic circumstances. As one attendee noted, “I found it rejuvenating to be amongst teaching scholars, focusing on working ‘smarter not harder’ as teachers.” Another indicated, “I’m hoping to come away from the conference feeling confident in my abilities and motivated to get it done.” Other attendees discussed rejuvenated feelings related to their teaching and learning, noting:

I found the conference regenerative. I inhabit teaching spaces where the people I work with do not take SoTL seriously or simply do not consider it an activity worth investing in. By contrast, I found the opportunity to seriously engage with people who take the act of thinking about how we teach seriously, deeply restorative and refreshing.

A seasoned attendee noted, “it was reinvigorating...the conference was just the JOLT to get us re-motivated and enthusiastic about our work again.”

Theme 3: SoTL as a Body of Scholarship

In addition to being a conceptual framework and a community of scholars, SoTL is, perhaps above all else, a body of scholarship, which largely manifests in the form of published academic research. When Ernest Boyer first conceived of the idea of SoTL, he did so largely to recognize and reward teaching as a fundamentally scholarly activity and to provide institutions that value teaching with a mechanism by which to do so (Boyer, 1996). In this sense, the SoTL Commons conference serves to invite attendees to become researchers in this field (if they have not done so already) and contribute to the shared body of knowledge that it represents. Martin, et al. (1999) suggest that these contributions can take the form of three interrelated activities: engagement with existing knowledge on teaching and learning, critical reflection on teaching and learning in one's discipline, and public sharing of disciplinary ideas about teaching and learning.

Engagement with Current and Future Knowledge

Conference attendees clearly identified engagement with existing knowledge, and many went further, expressing appreciation for “meeting different people who are passionate about teaching” and the value placed on the “art of teaching,” (“I hope to learn from scholars who think about the art of teaching (because it is an art) because they consider it valuable to do so”). Additionally, attendees appreciated learning about SoTL (“I am excited to learn more about the types of research that SoTL scholars engage in!”) as much as they did about teaching. These professional responsibilities seamlessly integrate, as stated by one attendee, “SoTL brings together the idea of research excellence with the idea of teaching excellence.” Notably, comments about teaching and research proved challenging to disentangle during qualitative analysis as participants consistently acknowledged the dual importance of this practice-based research. The majority of contributing authors are novices, yet remarkably, they already value SoTL as “a tool” to “inform the pedagogical practices that help our students learn, grow, and succeed.”

Conference participants suggested that contemporary higher education sits at a crossroads with “our institutions...set to undergo dramatic upheavals in the near future.” Included in these impending changes was greater scrutiny regarding student learning and student success. A similarly dramatic change was described in terms of student demographics, (dis)engagement, and learning needs. For participants, SoTL work presents the ideal mechanism to assess students' evolving needs directly and in real-time, informing changes to pedagogies that could facilitate student learning and their subsequent success. In the words of one participant, “As long as we are concerned about our students' learning, there is a role for SoTL.”

Critical Reflection as SoTL

Attendees' written responses also showed surprising gaps centered around two areas – critical reflection on the specifics of pedagogical theory/practice and the challenges of the multidisciplinary nature of SoTL. Participants demonstrated much enthusiasm for learning from the conference (“I've really enjoyed the sessions I've attended in the past, and they spark a lot of thought for me”), yet specific concepts learned or critical reflection on participants' own teaching/scholarship were largely absent, and

where present, described only vague thinking about participants' research (“I had a chance to think about different changes to my [current] research”). In terms of pedagogy, only one respondent provided specific examples of techniques or ideas acquired at the conference (“the escape-room challenge and the role-playing exercise”), while repeated prompts for further clarification went unanswered.

On the second topic, multidisciplinary, respondents appreciated the chance to escape the limits of their disciplines, and to learn about perspectives on teaching from other fields (“I chose to attend this year to experience that networking and interaction. Doing so reminds me that scholarship, teaching, and learning is multidisciplinary”). There was a general sense that SoTL ought to focus on “common” teaching problems, and questions about the difficulties of translating those lessons across disciplines. However, there was less evidence of a willingness to consider the deeper challenges posed by engaging in multidisciplinary research or efforts made to explore/understand the epistemological sensibilities that other disciplines might bring to the table. This omission is perhaps indicative of the relative depth to which academic hospitality can be extended; as well as the extent to which the role of the host becomes superseded by the responsibilities of the guests.

Public Sharing

One of the defining principles of good practice in SoTL is that it must be made public in an appropriate manner (Felten, 2013). While the public sharing of SoTL can take many forms, the conference participants commented especially on publishing in academic journals. For example, the respondents indicated that the conference was instrumental in helping participants learn more about this side of SoTL work (“I learned what step I need to take next”, “how to frame it for publication or where to publish it”, and “my favorite session was publishing your article/work session”). Clearly, making research public is a skill that many novices find challenging in their SoTL work, yet for tenure-track faculty (and even some full-time teaching faculty), publishing their research is crucial for advancement (Gansemer-Topf et al., 2022).

While conference attendees appreciate the importance of SoTL research, not all home institutions esteem this work. In other words, the value ascribed to this practice is not universal. The espoused theory is that an institution's mission is reflected in the relative importance of teaching and scholarship in the promotion and tenure process; in reality, these requirements can become competing commitments rather than integrated roles. SoTL has the ability to integrate teaching with scholarship, yet, as observed by one respondent, “all too often, institutions extol the virtues of SoTL and innovative learning practices but fail to follow through in terms of valuation.” Participants agreed that SoTL is not universally valued and “does not count toward promotion and tenure within some colleges at many institutions.” In this, there is cause for optimism that higher education may be moving to formally “count” SoTL. One respondent noted that “Boyer's Model of Scholarship was recently embedded into my institution's collective bargaining agreement, fostering university-wide excitement/collaboration” lacking “when the research is not universally respected.”

DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This manuscript is the product of a grand experiment in conducting a crowd-sourced autoethnography focused on the shared experience of a long-standing academic conference: the SoTL Commons. While we have used the lens of a teaching commons, drawn from the pioneering work of Huber and Hutchings (2005, 2006), to frame the design of the conference as well as the research study focused on that design, it should be acknowledged that there are distinct limitations to what either sense of the commons represents. The conference itself is relatively expensive (especially the hotel) and occurs during the regular academic year, which limits access to those with sufficient resources to attend. Similarly, the project participants were self-appointed volunteers with sufficient bandwidth to engage in an experimental research project over a six-month time period. More broadly, a number of SoTL's critical friends have suggested that its transdisciplinary stance may be more of an ideal than a reality, and the field itself has persistent barriers to access that may apply to particular disciplines (perhaps especially those in the arts and humanities), academic roles, institutional types, or geographical regions (Chick, 2014; Chng & Looker, 2014; Chng & Mårtensson, 2020; Hewson & Easton, 2022; Potter & Raffoul, 2023; Potter & Wuetherick, 2015).

In this spirit, the outcome of the project was not just to provide incisive insights into how an embodied SoTL Commons functions; but rather to act as a form of academic hospitality itself; enabling the sharing of practice, deepening of reflection, strengthening of research skills, fostering of social connections, and, by extension, the advancement of the field as a community of scholars (Blalock & Akehi, 2018). By providing a very "big tent" (a term originally used by Huber and Hutchings, 2006) for potential participants, the project organizers sought to provide a level of collaborative insight that prioritized inclusivity over generalizability (McSweeney & Schnurr, 2023). In other words, the intention was to provide participants with an opportunity to learn more about what engaging in a collaborative SoTL project/CAE might be like while distributing the workload sufficiently widely that participation would not require enormous commitments of time or emotional energy, both of which are likely in small supply for the majority of instructional faculty, regardless of context.

Opening up the space to so many contributors does, however, present certain trade-offs, especially in terms of the ability of the members of the group to form meaningful connections with one another. While anonymous Wildebeest and anonymous Tuna may have been able to exchange comments in a Google Doc, in other words, this brief dialogue did not necessarily lead to deeper bonds being forged. The inclusiveness of Stage 1 was, however, balanced by the small groups that were formed as part of Stage 3. The latter not only afforded closer collaboration on the project itself but also led to more sustained engagement afterward. In fact, several of these smaller groups plan to present their work together as part of the 2024 SoTL Commons conference. Perhaps the secret lies in creating spaces for multiple pathways and levels of engagement, allowing potential participants to balance these trade-offs for themselves. As several respondents pointed out, their engagement in this project itself functioned as an extension of the commons, i.e., a shared space beyond the physical conference, that they would like to see sustained and developed over time.

By engaging in that shared space, the organizers believe that this project served as a learning experience for its participants, albeit in a number of different ways. There is not, however, more tangible evidence not only of what the participants gained, nor of what the long-term impact of any form of conference participation might be. While the collective reflections are full of aspiration and energy, we simply do not know much about what happens after the conference disbands. As one project contributor pointed out, while participants "reported that the plenary prompted them to think about making changes to teaching practices as a result of learning about the significance of the physical classroom environment, the data collected makes it impossible to assess if such changes occurred." Indeed, there is comparatively little research on the long-term impact of academic conferences in general, and SoTL conferences in particular (some notable exceptions include Green et al., 2020; MacKenzie & Meyers, 2012) suggesting possible avenues for future inquiry and research.

That suggestion made, it is also possible that the primary goal of a SoTL Commons may not be a demonstrable impact, the latter indicative of a particular epistemology of both scholarship and practice. Within some circles, the act of reflection, as demonstrated throughout this project, is viewed as a scholarly activity in its own right (Cook-Sather et al., 2019; Nelson, 2003; Ng & Carney, 2017; Regassa, 2009). The qualifier of "in some circles" is important, however, as reflective work has struggled to gain acceptance as a legitimate form of scholarship in many other domains. The use of collaborative, or, in this case, crowd-sourced reflection further complicates questions of legitimacy---how much credit should one receive, for example, for being one of 31 authors? In fact, two potential participants in the project were informed by their respective unit heads (at different institutions, in different disciplines) that this publication could not be counted towards their advancement in rank, one because of its reflective nature, the other because of multiple authors.

In her popular book, the *Art of Gathering*, author Priya Parker suggests that the primary secret to hosting successful events is to do so thoughtfully (2020). It is one thing to bring people together and provide them with all of the ingredients of a good party; but to make their coming together meaningful, she argues that there needs to be thoughtful design around a shared purpose or, perhaps better said, purposes (plural). In the case of the present study, we sought to shed light on the previously largely invisible experiences of an intentionally wide range of instructors and professional staff who participated in the 2023 SoTL Commons conference. Our collective reflections highlight how the SoTL commons space, both literally and figuratively, serves as a locus of academic hospitality, also both literally and figuratively. By listening closely to all of our guests, we argue, we, as hosts, can become more adept at providing opportunities to strengthen, deepen, and extend the SoTL commons not just as a conference, but as a concept, a curriculum, and, perhaps most importantly, a vibrant teaching and learning community.

CONTACT

Diana Botnaru <dbotnaru@georgiasouthern.edu>

REFERENCES

- Auburn, G., Gott, M., Hoare, K. (2016). What is resilience? An Integrative Review of the empirical literature. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 72(5), 980-1000. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.12888>.
- Badenhorst, C., Arnold, C., Halfyard, J., & McLeod, H. (2022). Unguarded moments: Eavesdropping, arts-based practices, and transformative teaching spaces. *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching and Learning Journal*, 15(2).
- Beaudoin, B. (2012). Creating community: From individual reflection to SoTL transformation. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 6(1), 17.
- Bennett, R., Hobson, J., Jones, A., Martin-Lynch, P., Scutt, C., Strehlow, K., & Veitch, S. (2016). Being chimaera: A monstrous identity for SoTL academics. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 35(2), 217-228.
- Blalock, A. E., & Akehi, M. (2018). Collaborative autoethnography as a pathway for transformative learning. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 16(2), 89-107.
- Charmaz, K. (2000). Objectivist and constructivist methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 509-535). Sage Publications.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Sage.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. Sage.
- Charmaz, K. (2017). The power of constructivist grounded theory for critical inquiry. *Qualitative inquiry*, 23(1), 34-45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800416657105>
- Chang, H. (2021). Individual and collaborative autoethnography for social science research. In *Handbook of Autoethnography* (pp. 53-65). Routledge.
- Chang, H., Ngunjiri, F., & Hernandez, K. A. C. (2016). *Collaborative Autoethnography*. Routledge.
- Chick, N. L. (2014). 'Methodologically sound' under the 'big tent': An ongoing conversation. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 8(2), 1.
- Chng, H. L., & Looker, P. (2013). On the margins of SoTL discourse: An Asian perspective. *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*, 1(1), 131-145.
- Chng, H. H., & Mårtensson, K. (2020). Leading change from different shores: The challenges of contextualizing the scholarship of teaching and learning. *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*, 8(1), 24-41.
- Cook-Sather, A., Abbot, S., & Felten, P. (2019). Legitimizing reflective writing in SoTL: "Dysfunctional illusions of rigor" revisited. *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*, 7(2), 14-27.
- Cornejo-Happel, C. A., & Song, X. (2020). Facilitators and barriers to engagement and effective SoTL Research collaborations in faculty learning communities. *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, 8(2), 53-72.
- Cruz, L., Cunningham, K., Smentkowski, B., & Steiner, H. (2019). The SoTL scaffold: Supporting evidence-based teaching practice in educational development. *To Improve the Academy*, 38(1), 50-66.
- Cruz, L. E., & Grodzia, E. M. (2021). SOTL under stress: Re-thinking teaching and learning scholarship during a global pandemic. *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, 9(1), 3-13.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: an overview. *Historical social research/Historische sozialforschung*, 273-290.
- Fanghanel, J. (2013). Going public with pedagogical inquiries: SoTL as a methodology for faculty professional development. *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*, 1(1), 59-70.
- Felten, P. (2013). Principles of good practice in SoTL. *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*, 1(1), 121-125.
- Felten, P., & Chick, N. (2018). Is SoTL a signature pedagogy of educational development?. *To Improve the Academy*, 37(1), 4-16.
- Gansemmer-Topf, A. M., Marcketti, S., Hengesteg, P., & Freeman, S. A. (2022). A decade in the making: Examining the evidence of SoTL through promotion and tenure artifacts. *Teaching and Learning Inquiry* 10(July). <https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearningqu.10.24>.
- Godbold, N., Irving-Bell, D., McSweeney-Flaherty, J. M., Prusko, P. T., Schlesselman, L. S., & Smith, H. (2021). The courage to SoTL. *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, 9(1), 380-394.
- Green, C. A., Eady, M. J., McCarthy, M., Akenson, A. B., Supple, B., McKeon, J., & Cronin, J. G. (2020). Beyond the conference: Singing our SSONG. *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, 8(1).
- Hewson, K., & Easton, L. (2022). Packing up the big tent: Que(e)rying and decolonizing SoTL. *Imagining SoTL*, 2(1), 63-78.
- Healey, M., Marquis, B., & Vajoczki, S. (2013). Exploring SoTL through international collaborative writing groups. *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*, 1(2), 3-8.
- Healey, M. (2017). Reflections on the development of International Collaborative Writing Groups (ICWGs) about teaching and learning in higher education. *The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 8(2).
- Hernandez, K. A. C., Chang, H., & Ngunjiri, F. W. (2017). Collaborative autoethnography as multivocal, relational, and democratic research: Opportunities, challenges, and aspirations. *alb: Auto/Biography Studies*, 32(2), 251-254.
- Hornsby, E. R., Davis, A., & Reilly, J. C. (2021). Collaborative autoethnography: Best practices for developing group projects. *InSight: A Journal of Scholarly Teaching*, 16, 104-114.
- Huber, M. T., & Hutchings, P. (2005). The Advancement of Learning: Building the Teaching Commons. Jossey-Bass.
- Huber, M. T., & Hutchings, P. (2006). Building the teaching commons. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 38(3), 24-31.
- Imperiale, M. G., Phipps, A., & Fassetta, G. (2021). On online practices of hospitality in higher education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 40, 629-648.
- Kim, A. S., Popovic, C., Farrugia, L., Saleh, S. A., Maheux-Pelletier, G., & Frake-Mistak, M. (2021). On nurturing the emergent SoTL researcher: responding to challenges and opportunities. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 26(2), 163-175.
- Marquis, E., Healey, M., & Vine, M. (2014). Building capacity for the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) using international collaborative writing groups. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 8(1), 12.
- Marquis, E., Mårtensson, K., & Healey, M. (2017). Leadership in an international collaborative writing groups (ICWG) initiative: Implications for academic development. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 22(3), 211-222.

- Martin, E., Benjamin, J., Prosser, M., & Trigwell, K. (1999). Scholarship of teaching: A study of the approaches of academic staff. *Improving student learning: Improving student learning outcomes*. pps. 326-331. C. Rust (ed.). Oxford: Oxford Centre for Staff Learning and Development, Oxford Brookes University.
- Matthews, K. E., Marquis, B., & Healey, M. (2017). International collaborative writing groups as communities of practice. *Implementing communities of practice in higher education: Dreamers and schemers*, 597-617.
- MacKenzie, J., & Meyers, A. (2012). International collaboration in SoTL: Current status and future direction. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 6(1), 4.
- McSweeney, J., & Schnurr, M. A. (2023). Can SoTL generate high quality research while maintaining its commitment to inclusivity?. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 17(1), 4.
- Moore, C. (2019, April 27). *What is Appreciative Inquiry? A Brief History & Real Life Examples*. PositivePsychology.com. <https://positivepsychology.com/appreciative-inquiry/>
- Motley, P., Divan, A., Lopes, V., Ludwig, L. O., Matthews, K. E., & Tomljenovic-Berube, A. M. (2019). Collaborative writing: Intercultural and interdisciplinary partnerships as a means of identity formation. In *Critical Collaborative Communities* (pp. 212-227). Brill.
- Nelson, C. E. (2003). How could I do scholarship of teaching & learning?. *Improving College & University Teaching*, 29, 109-114.
- Ness, V., Duffy, K., McCallum, J., & Price, L. (2014). Getting published: Reflections of a collaborative writing group. *Nurse Education Today*, 34(1), 1-5.
- Newell, A. M. B., Crowe, H. A., Erickson, D., Pratt, B., & Davidson-Aviles, R. (2020). Cross-cultural competencies in a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning process. *Journal of Transformative Learning*, 7(1).
- Ng, L., & Carney, M. (2017). Scholarly personal narrative in the SoTL tent. *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*, 5(1), 133-145.
- Parker, P. (2020). *The art of gathering: How we meet and why it matters*. Penguin.
- Phipps, A., & Barnett, R. (2007). Academic hospitality. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 6(3), 237-254.
- Potter, M. K., & Kustra, E. D. (2011). The relationship between scholarly teaching and SoTL: Models, distinctions, and clarifications. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 5(1), 23.
- Potter, M. K., & Vuetherick, B. (2015). Who is represented in the teaching commons?: SoTL through the lenses of the arts and humanities. *Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 6(2), 2.
- Potter, M. K., & Raffoul, J. (2023). Engaged alienation: SoTL, inclusivity, and the problem of integrity. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 17(1), 2.
- Pretorius, L. (2023). A harmony of voices: The value of collaborative autoethnography as collective witnessing during a pandemic. In *Research and Teaching in a Pandemic World: The Challenges of Establishing Academic Identities During Times of Crisis* (pp. 25-33). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
- Regassa, L. (2009). A personal reflection on the 2008 ISSOTL Conference. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 3(1), 5.
- Roy, R., & Uekusa, S. (2020). Collaborative autoethnography: "Self-reflection" as a timely alternative research approach during the global pandemic. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 20(4), 383-392.
- Scharff, L., Divan, A., & Motley, P. (2021). Foreword: 2019 international collaborative writing groups (ICWGs). *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, 9(1).
- Schön, D. A. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for teaching and learning in the professions*. Jossey-Bass.
- Schön, D. A. (1995). Knowing-in-action: The new scholarship requires a new epistemology. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 27(6), 27-34.
- Seeley, J., Frahm, T., & Lynch, E. (2019). Just show up: Reflections from a motley writing group. In *Critical Collaborative Communities* (pp. 43-52). Brill.
- Shulman, L. S. (1993). Teaching as community property: Putting an end to pedagogical solitude. *Change Magazine* 25: 6-7.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research techniques* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Suh, J. S., Centea, D., Eyles, C., Fleisig, R., Grisé, C. A., McAteer, T., Meadows, K. N., Savage, P., Simmons, N., Wainman, B. C., & Fenton, N. E. (2022). Gathering: Stories of scholarship of teaching and learning at McMaster University. *Where learning deeply matters: Reflections on the past, present, and future of teaching at McMaster University*, 1(1).
- Waller, K. L., & Prosser, M. (2023). The rapidly changing teaching and research landscape: The future of SoTL and the teaching-research nexus. In *The Educational Turn: Rethinking the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (pp. 27-41). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.

APPENDIX A

Invitation and First Round

Good morning—

We would like to invite you, an attendee of the 2023 SoTL Commons Conference, to participate in a collaborative writing project based on your anticipation and experience of this year's conference.

This project arose from a conversation during a workshop session last year, in which participants were asked to speculate on what a multi-author reflective essay on the conference itself might look like. We decided to turn that suggestion into a reality and develop **a collaborative reflection that could be submitted for publication**.

This is where you come in. We invite you to be a contributor and co-author of this collective reflection:
Perspectives from a SOTL Conference

How do you contribute?

Simply click on the Google document linked below, which includes prompts and specific directions. You will be asked to contribute in the document—as it evolves—before the conference, during the conference, and after the conference (though you are welcome to add more).

What is your commitment?

We know everyone has much on their plates, so we are trying to make it as easy for you to participate as we can, as the project will benefit from incorporating as many different perspectives as possible.

- We are not imposing word count minimums or maximums, but we do anticipate that an average contributor will provide approximately 500 words of reflective writing overall, including feedback, comments, and conversations with the other contributors.
- Your writing may be fully anonymous. Simply log out of your Google account to enter the document anonymously. In order to include you in communications and provide author credit, we invite you to enter your name, etc. in an Author Information Survey
- Your participation will be fully asynchronous--there are no meetings or set times when you need to be available. We will communicate with each other entirely through writing in the document.
- We are suggesting the following project timeline:
 - Initial input on your ANTICIPATION BEFORE the conference to be added by FEBRUARY 15, 2023
 - Input on your EXPERIENCE DURING the conference to be added by FEBRUARY 17, 2023
 - Input on your REFLECTION AFTER the conference to be added by MARCH 16, 2023

What are the writing prompts?

- Your **ANTICIPATION** before the conference
 - Pre- Prompt 1: Why did you choose to attend this year's SOTL Commons Conference?:
 - Pre- Prompt 2: As you look forward to the upcoming SOTL Commons conference, what are you seeking to gain from your participation?
 - Pre- Prompt 3: Briefly describe a recent example of how you used or engaged in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

- Your **EXPERIENCE** during the conference
 - During- Prompt 1: Please describe your overall experience during the conference
 - During- Prompt 2: What are some common themes that you see emerging from the conference sessions?
 - During- Prompt 3: What other questions might you propose to extend the conversation on the lived conference experience?
- Your **REFLECTION** after the conference
 - Post- Prompt 1: How did your experience of the conference compare to your expectation leading up to the start of the conference?
 - Post- Prompt 2: Please describe an example of something you learned at the SOTL Commons conference that you intend to integrate into your own practice. What did you learn? How are you planning to integrate it?
 - Post- Prompt 3: What role do you see for SoTL (Scholarship of Teaching and Learning) in the future of higher education.

What are the benefits of participating?

As we see it, there are multiple potential benefits to your participation in this project.

- Research has shown that reflective writing can be a powerful catalyst for professional learning. The process is intended to enable you to get the most out of your conference experience.
- From its inception, the SoTL movement has emphasized community building, and several high-profile international projects have demonstrated that collaborative writing can connect you to others in deep and enduring ways.
- You will be given co-author credit for the publication. Because the writing itself is anonymous, you will be asked to fill out a separate author form so that we may give all contributors full credit. Authors will be listed in alphabetical order in the final publication.
- If you are new, or relatively new, to the scholarship of teaching and learning, we intend for this project to be a low-stakes way for you to gain additional experience in writing for publication. Experienced SoTL scholars may benefit from engaging in the collaborative writing modality.

If you have any additional questions about the project, we are happy to answer them. Otherwise, if you choose to participate, you simply need to open the Perspectives from a SoTL Conference Google document and start writing.

Many thanks for your consideration,

Debbie Walker, Diana Botnaru, Eileen Grodziak, and Laura Cruz