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Traversing the Borderlands of SoTL as a Transdisciplinary and Transnational Practice

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to make sense of our experiences participating in an International Collaborative Writing Group (ICWG) through the use of a collaborative autoethnography. We drew on multiple sources of data to glean insights into the meanings we have constructed as contributors to the ICWG, both individually and collectively. We identified three themes using thematic analysis that demonstrated this sensemaking of our experiences as contributors to the ICWG: (1) navigating the complexities, (2) moments of tension and growth, and (3) future possibilities for exploration. We invite the reader to join this journey as we seek to situate our experiences from the ICWG within the broader landscape of practice across national contexts and grapple with SoTL's transdisciplinary potential along the way. Although our journey continues, we conclude by offering some reflections on the importance of both discomfort and structure in this work.

KEYWORDS

transdisciplinarity, borderlands, dialogue, identity, collaborative autoethnography

INTRODUCTION

As SoTL scholars, we frequently navigate productive yet potentially challenging cross-disciplinary relationships and conversations. To explore SoTL's inclusive potential, which embraces all disciplinary epistemologies and methodologies while fostering transformative dialogical interactions within higher education, Anna and Sara facilitated conversations among international SoTL scholars. These discussions culminated in the co-editing of a special issue for the journal *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching and Learning Journal*. In the opening of this special issue, Santucci Leoni and Nasrollahian Mojarad (2024) suggested, "SoTL's transformative potential as a transdisciplinary field lies in its constant state of emergence, which yearns to be fed forward by diverse perspectives" (i). This yearning brought together an international group of educational developers, scholars, faculty, administrators, and graduate students to form an International Collaborative Writing Group (ICWG), led by Anna and Sara. The group grappled with SoTL's transdisciplinary potential through discussion and reflection over the span of a year. Yet yearning, unsurprisingly, drew us in multiple, complex directions, as we sought to understand and even advance transdisciplinary insights and directions in and for SoTL. The same special issue mentioned above also investigated the complexities involved in

considering the transdisciplinary possibilities of SoTL; as such, this group's explorations build from and expand on the scholarship in that volume. In this article, we use collaborative autoethnography to examine our localized experiences of engaging in the ICWG as well as our broader experiences within the context of SoTL. It highlights the complexities and the nuances of our yearnings while we traverse the borderlands of SoTL as a transdisciplinary and transnational practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A dedicated special issue of *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching and Learning Journal* recently reviewed the burgeoning literature. The issue attempted to “explore SoTL’s transdisciplinary potential” (Santucci Leoni and Nasrollahian Mojarad 2024, i). Some of its authors extended an invitation to embrace transdisciplinarity in SoTL across its dimensions as a body of scholarship, a community, and a pedagogy (Cruz, Santucci Leoni, and Nasrollahian Mojarad 2024). In response to and as an extension of that invitation, this article offers a complementary review of the meaning and functioning of transdisciplinarity in higher education in order to ground our autoethnographic reflections on related implications for SoTL. For our purposes here, we will employ a broad conception of SoTL as “systematic reflection on teaching and learning made public” (McKinney 2013, 1). Transdisciplinarity reflects a general set of observations about how, why, when, and where students learn in the context of a shifting knowledge landscape within contemporary society (Russell, Wickson, and Carew 2008). A brief review of transdisciplinarity in relation to teaching and learning in higher education reveals that the term is not crisply defined but instead consists of several intellectual considerations one encounters when juxtaposing SoTL and transdisciplinarity: epistemological, ontological, positional, and normative. After sharing such a brief overview, this section also highlights relevant literature about the “borderlands,” a particularly useful metaphor for our article’s purposes, and about communities of practice, as this is key to the approach of our study and helps introduce our methodology.

Transdisciplinarity in higher education

Transdisciplinarity in higher education is deeply tied to epistemological considerations that shape knowledge production. Thompson Klein (2014) outlined three key knowledge assumptions: transcendence, problem-solving, and transgression. Scholars are increasingly interested in the notion of transcendence for a synthesis of fragmented knowledge (Lawrence and Després 2004). The problem-solving approach extends interdisciplinarity by fostering a new scientific identity to tackle societal challenges (Darbellay 2015). Meanwhile, transgressive epistemology positions transdisciplinarity as a critique of existing knowledge structures. These perspectives suggest a shift from theoretical knowledge to applied, context-driven engagement, which in turn necessitates a transformation in teaching and learning that prepares students to address complex social problems (Haynes, Kelley, and Arce-Trigatti 2024).

The ontological nature of transdisciplinarity in SoTL raises questions about whether SoTL is or is not inherently transdisciplinary. While SoTL is at least interdisciplinary in scope, it often operates in the interstitial spaces between disciplines, prompting debates about identity, belonging, and academic tribalism (Becher and Trowler 2001; Fanghanel 2012). Indeed, scholars have long debated whether SoTL should be situated within, between, among, or across disciplinary boundaries (Cruz, Cunningham, Smentkowski, and Steiner 2019). Scholars continue to interrogate whether SoTL ought to be transdisciplinary and what implications such a shift would have (Santucci Leoni and Nasrollahian Mojarad 2024). This tension underscores the dynamic nature of SoTL, as it navigates between disciplinary traditions and broader transdisciplinary aspirations. SoTL has even been referred

to as an act of reading or “raiding” from diverse teaching practices across disciplinary norms and habits (Morreale and Huber 2023).

Positional considerations in transdisciplinary SoTL focus on when and how transdisciplinary dialogue occurs. Metaphors like the “big tent” or “trading zone” illustrate the need for SoTL to foster cross-disciplinary conversations (Chick 2013). However, scholars caution against insularity, warning that SoTL should not become a self-referential “family table” or be consumed by singular disciplinary paradigms (Löfgreen 2023; Shulman 2004). Instead, SoTL might embed a transdisciplinary stance at the outset of research or pedagogical design, cultivating metadisciplinary exchanges and meaning-making across diverse educational contexts (Horcea-Milcu, Leventon, and Lang 2022). Furthermore, many analyses of disciplinary “signature pedagogies” (Shulman 2005) acknowledge that the act of “signing on” to a tradition often grounds SoTL, but these analyses nevertheless call for an opening up toward metadisciplinary exchanges as a valuable extension and adaptation that seeks to “understand how meaning is made and expressed in different cultures” (Gurung, Chick, and Haynie 2009, xv). Such exchanges may also require SoTL scholars to look beyond work that explicitly identifies as SoTL and engage discipline-based scholarship on teaching and learning that can offer valuable insights across disciplinary boundaries (Abbot 2025).

Within the normative considerations, scholars debate whether transdisciplinarity should be an institutional and academic value. Many argue that it is an imperative response to complex societal challenges, requiring scholars to adopt more collaborative and reflexive approaches to knowledge production (Arce-Trigatti, Kelley, and Haynes 2022). However, critics question whether transdisciplinary research fundamentally reshapes scientific practice, arguing that empirical evidence of its effectiveness remains inconclusive (Hessels and van Lente 2007). Despite this, transdisciplinarity continues to gain traction as a strategic framework for addressing contemporary knowledge structures and social demands. Transdisciplinarity in higher education is driven by three primary forces: knowledge-intensive economies, environmental imperatives, and public engagement (Russell et al. 2008). Universities are increasingly expected to integrate transdisciplinary approaches into curricula and research agendas (Tejedor, Segalàs, and Rosas-Casals 2018). While challenges remain, transdisciplinarity represents a promising paradigm for fostering collaboration, addressing complex problems, and reshaping the role of higher education in society.

Advocates of transdisciplinarity may not present a codified argument for what it is, how it should be practiced, or even whether it ought to be a way forward to make sense of higher education’s responsibilities in relation to complex and socially distributed global challenges. As a field that has historically cultivated strong awareness and broad willingness to engage in respectful dialogue across disciplinary boundaries in the “big tent,” SoTL may provide a very useful roadmap to advance advocacy in this area, particularly in relation to the willingness to hold tensions, openness to embrace a diverse array of views and contradictions, and ability to operate in the “borderlands.” SoTL may be particularly able to embody the sorts of knowledge production so valued in transdisciplinarity, as the discipline heeds recent calls toward what Nancy Chick and Jennifer Friberg (2023) characterize as essential work in *Going Public Reconsidered: Engaging with the World beyond Academe through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*.

The borderlands

Borderlands, as theorized by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), represent spaces where multiple cultures, identities, and perspectives intersect and create dynamic—often contested—areas of negotiation and transformation. These spaces are not only physical or geographical; they are also metaphorical sites where power dynamics, identity formation, and cultural exchange play out in

complex ways. Theorizing the borderlands involves recognizing the fluidity and permeability of borders and understanding them as spaces of both conflict and creativity. In these liminal spaces, traditional boundaries—whether geographic, cultural, or disciplinary—are blurred and lead to the emergence of hybrid identities and new ways of knowing as each of us “experience[s] oneself as multiple” (Lugones 2003, 60).

The concept of the borderlands, then, can be a lens to conceptualize transdisciplinarity in SoTL. Within that scholarly endeavor, borderlands manifest as the intersection of diverse academic traditions, cultural backgrounds, and disciplinary perspectives and foster a rich dialogue that transcends conventional academic silos (Cruz 2024). Nancy Chick (2013) drew on the concept of the borderlands when she wrote that it “. . . encourages all of us (not a few) to bring our disciplinarity with us in all its richness and complexity as we inhabit a territory that’s even richer and more complex as a result” (21). Research conceptualizing SoTL as a landscape of practice similarly positions scholars as boundary crossers who bring disciplinary expertise with them while negotiating belonging, legitimacy, and development across communities (Kensington-Miller, Webb, Gansemer-Topf, Lewis, Luu, Maheux-Pelletier, and Hofmann 2021). Scholars are called to rethink and reframe our understandings of teaching, learning, and scholarship in ways that can lead to innovative SoTL approaches that are inclusive and integrative across transnational contexts. These borderlands are crucial for fostering the growth of new, complex identities and practices, particularly in spaces where diverse groups come together (Abbot 2024).

Communities of practice

Communities of practice (CoPs) are a possible way to explore borderlands. CoPs are groups of individuals with a shared domain of interest who come together to deepen their knowledge and expertise through ongoing interaction. Coined by Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger (1991), the concept emphasizes mutual engagement, shared repertoire, and joint enterprise as core components of these communities. Members collectively navigate the boundaries of their practice, contributing to and benefiting from the collective knowledge generated within the group. CoPs thrive on the principles of situated learning, where knowledge is not merely transferred but co-constructed through participation in authentic activities, like dialogue and reflection (Wenger 1998). This participatory framework enables individuals to build a sense of belonging and identity within the group, fostering both personal and communal growth (Jawitz 2009).

CoPs have become pivotal for fostering collaboration and innovation, particularly in the context of educational development (Arthur 2016). They provide a structured yet flexible platform for contributors to engage in meaningful dialogue about teaching, learning, and scholarship. Structured SoTL initiatives can similarly create opportunities for faculty to learn through mentoring, collaborative inquiry, and engagement with colleagues across disciplinary boundaries (Fisher, Repice, Dufault, Leonard, and Frey 2014). In educational development, CoPs enable participants to share strategies, reflect on challenges, and co-create solutions to advance institutional goals (Kelley 2025). For instance, faculty engaged in SoTL have used CoPs for support (Cruz, Atterholt, et al. 2024), adopting inclusive pedagogies (Kelley, Arce-Trigatti, and Garner 2020), and to promote curricular reform within departments (Gehrke and Kezar 2017). These groups empower participants to address complex issues through shared expertise and collective problem-solving, often leading to transformative professional development experiences. By cultivating an environment where members learn from and with each other, CoPs serve as levers for sustainable change in higher education (Abbot, Lukes, Henry, and Wheeler 2024). The ICWG described in this article, for instance, is a manifestation of a CoP where

colleagues convened to learn and grow via the co-construction of knowledge around transdisciplinarity and SoTL.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this article is to make sense of our experiences participating in an ICWG through systematic and reflexive inquiry that is intended to be “methodologically sound” (Felten 2013, 123). We drew on multiple data sources to glean insights into the meanings we have constructed as contributors to the ICWG, both individually and collectively. These meanings are relevant because they offer a glimpse into the learnings that occur within a community of practice (Tierney, Aidulis, Park, and Clark 2020), the ways in which knowledge creation is negotiated among scholars (Wilson-Mah, Axe, Childs, Hamilton, and Palahicky 2022), and the potentialities for intentional partnerships that transform institutional habitus (Williams et al. 2013). As such, we used collaborative autoethnography to understand the intricacies of our experiences within the broader landscape of practice (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2014) across national contexts.

Context

Our ICWG aimed to explore the potential of SoTL to be nurtured as a transdisciplinary and transnational practice through co-constructed understandings of how we negotiate epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies inherent in disciplinary ways of being that too often guide SoTL. Beginning in June 2023, we convened monthly via Zoom to foster a collaborative environment where contributors could share perspectives. The conversations occurred in English and included colleagues from multiple countries, disciplinary backgrounds, employment roles, and institutional types. This journey culminated in a face-to-face gathering in Utrecht in November 2023, marking the pinnacle of our collective efforts to advance SoTL beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. Following the conference, we continued to meet to refine our understandings and to capture those musings on paper. Of course, we were all situated in various local contexts that shaped our understandings and insights.

Positionalities

Because we focused on our own experiences as contributors to an ICWG, it is important to consider how we came to this initiative. In particular, we must grapple with how our identities and lived experiences position us in relation to our work and others. This commitment to awareness about our positionality is crucial for SoTL, because it allows scholars to “more deeply understand the problem, reflect on their relationship to the problem, collect meaningful data, and be ideally poised to enact change rooted in their authentic way of being as an educator and scholar” (Santucci and Vaccaro 2024, 20). Below we have attempted to capture the relevant aspects of our identities in order to make sense of our experiences:

- Jacob is a PhD student in the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology at Auburn University in the United States. His SoTL publications—all completed as partnerships—have investigated critical thinking in sociology, empathy in pharmacy, project-based learning in finance, and creative problem-solving in management. While each of these publications have been situated in a disciplinary context, he is inspired to consider how SoTL might transcend those boundaries.
- Susan is a senior lecturer and course director in the Department of Management at Monash University in Australia. Her SoTL interests relate to designing courses that help students understand and research complex global issues, sustainability, and the grand challenges

facing society within the Monash Business School. She came to the ICWG in order to explore transdisciplinarity and engage in international collaborations to develop her SoTL interests.

- Gavin is a senior lecturer at the University of New South Wales in Australia. He is a recipient of several teaching awards and, as a Nexus Fellow, focuses on educational innovation and pedagogic response to disruptive change. Gavin practices transdisciplinarity when delivering a large general studies program, which requires consistent consideration of how to cultivate equitable engagement for students across disciplines.
- Sara is an associate director at the Center for Teaching at the University of Iowa in the United States. With a social science background, Sara's passion for SoTL centers on its potential to nurture a pedagogical praxis from disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary perspectives in order to transform teaching and learning discourse in those areas throughout the context of higher education.
- Anna Santucci was a senior lecturer in the Centre for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (CIRTL) at University College Cork in Ireland, where she directed an MA in teaching and learning for higher education. Originally from Italy, she developed her academic identity in participatory arts and humanities and her professional identity as an educational developer in the United States. She is passionate about SoTL as an international field of theory and practice that encourages epistemological awareness and dialogical engagement across difference due to its critically transdisciplinary nature.
- Alison is the interim dean of arts & sciences at the University of Alaska-Southeast, a small regional-comprehensive in the United States. She also has professional experience as a full-time educational developer as well as a faculty member. Her SoTL work has explored disciplinary ways of reading, gender in the political science classroom, and equity-minded high-impact practices.

Autoethnography as a method

While the contributors of this ICWG occupy specific roles in their institutions and are located in various national contexts, each of us is also situated in the broader culture of higher education. Our experiences in the ICWG not only have localized meanings; they have globalized implications within higher education as a complex web of organizations, discourses, and practices (Manning 2017). Thus, we used collaborative autoethnography to interpret and represent those meanings in an intentional way that contributes to the emergent theorizations on/of/as transdisciplinarity in SoTL (Cruz, Santucci Leoni, et al. 2024). Ellis and Bochner (2000) defined autoethnography as “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (739). Autoethnography empowers, enables, and emboldens scholars to use their experiences as a means to investigate the larger culture to which they belong (Adams, Ellis, and Jones 2017; Keleş 2022; Patton 2015). Given the relational (McGowan, Woolmer, and Santucci Leoni 2024) and dialogical (Santucci Leoni, Yeo, and Rune Stalheim 2024) nature of our ICWG, we chose to pursue the writing of this article as a collaborative autoethnography in order to strengthen and elevate the co-constructed meanings we have attached to our shared experiences (Chang, Wambura, and Hernandez 2013).

Broadly speaking, ethnography is rooted in epistemologies that emphasize knowledge generation through immersion in and engagement with cultural contexts (Denzin and Lincoln 2018). Within this tradition, autoethnography builds on the ethnographic commitment to meaning-making by centering the researcher's own positionality as both observer and participant (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2010). Unlike traditional ethnography, which often seeks to represent “the other,”

autoethnography acknowledges that the researcher is inextricably embedded in the culture they study and that their own experiences are a valid, essential source of knowledge. Collaborative autoethnography integrates multiple voices, thereby disrupting singular narratives and reinforcing ethnography's relational and dialogical nature (Chang, Ngunjiri, and Hernandez 2013). In this sense, our methodological choice aligns with broader ethnographic epistemologies that elevate co-constructed knowledge and recognize the partial, situated nature of all inquiry (Haraway 1988). By engaging in collaborative autoethnography, we contribute to an ongoing tradition in ethnographic research that values reflexivity, reciprocity, and the shared construction of meaning through experience (Lapadat 2017).

Hutchings and Huber (2008) argued that SoTL "is strengthened by its methodological and theoretical pluralism, and by having, as a consequence, the potential for lots of lively exchange across fields and contexts" (233). Likewise, Cruz and Grodzia (2021) challenged scholars to consider and share their own stories navigating higher education--and life--during tumultuous times. Collaborative autoethnography, then, answers those calls to action, because it delves into our collective experiences to "illuminate in fresh ways the 'messy,' nuanced arena of teaching and learning" (Ng and Carney 2017, 143). Reflective forms of inquiry are particularly well suited to representing the inherent uncertainties, in-process interpretations, and emotional dimensions of teaching and learning that conventional scholarly discourse can obscure (Cook-Sather, Abbot, and Felten 2019). Furthermore, we find a rationale for collaborative autoethnography in Chick and Poole (2013) when they indicated that such an approach "chronicles and even celebrates the ongoing sense of becoming and its confluence of diverse and serious inquiries from specific contexts" (1).

Collaborative autoethnography, like most qualitative inquiry, necessitates that scholars grapple with reflexivity (Ellis et al. 2000) and ethics (Edwards 2021) throughout the lifespan of the project. Lapadat (2017) suggested that those who engage in reflexivity "acknowledge that their own objectivity is a fiction and embrace the idea that any account they provide is a partial perspective as seen through their own point of view at a particular place and point in time" (592). Simply put, scholars should interrogate how their identities, roles, and commitments shape the very nature of the project. We approached reflexivity for this collaborative autoethnography by striving to be explicit about how each of us showed up to our gatherings, a crucial practice given the diversity of contributors in the ICWG. It is important to note that the differences present in the ICWG, including disciplinary logics, sometimes made our dialogues on transdisciplinarity in SoTL challenging. In accordance, we aimed to center openness, care, and reciprocity as core values for the ICWG (Ellis and Rawicki 2013).

Data generation

Our evidence comes from our work together in multiple phases during the first year of the ICWG. The first phase (referred to as pre-conference) took place before we met at the ISSOTL conference in Utrecht and consisted of transcripts from our online synchronous dialogues, preliminary writings on foundational concepts, and notes from our gatherings. The preliminary writings tasked each contributor with exploring the literature and synthesizing ideas that would guide our work together. The second phase (referred to as conference) took place during the ICWG workshop at the ISSOTL conference in Utrecht and consisted of photos from the ideation sessions. The third phase (referred to as post-conference) took place after we met at the ISSOTL conference in Utrecht and consisted of transcripts of our online synchronous dialogues, reflective writings from each contributor on our experiences thus far, and notes from our gatherings. We decided to keep the post-conference reflective writing in free form so that each of us could unpack the meanings attached to our

experiences without having to conform to a predetermined structure. The topics of each online synchronous dialogue varied and depended on what we decided to discuss in real time based on insights and resonances from our reflective writings. An online technology produced the transcripts of our online synchronous dialogues from the audio recordings. This diversity of data sources, then, added trustworthiness to our project through triangulation (Mathison 1988).

Data analysis

We deployed one strategy for analysis to make sense of our experiences, but we acknowledge that the nature of the phenomenon we are investigating—transdisciplinarity in SoTL—necessitates multiple ways of knowing. We used thematic analysis, which is “a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke 2006, 79). We began by reading the entirety of the data corpus in order to develop broad understandings. We then moved to re-reading the reflective writings in order to establish codes using descriptive coding; we then established labels (i.e., codes) that summarized chunks of text within the data corpus (Saldaña 2021). After coding the reflective writings, we also coded the transcripts of our online synchronous dialogues. By identifying patterns between the codes, we crafted the themes that best represented the sensemaking of our experiences. Throughout the analysis, we engaged in member checking with the other contributors in order to provide trustworthiness to our project by reviewing the representations of our experiences as provided in this article (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

FINDINGS

We identified three themes using thematic analysis that illustrate the sensemaking of our experiences as contributors to the ICWG on transdisciplinarity in SoTL: (1) navigating complexities, (2) moments of tension and growth, and (3) future possibilities for exploration. In many ways, these three themes can be thought of as representing epiphanies. Kim (2019) suggested that the autoethnographer “writes about our past experiences in retrospect. We will select particular epiphanies from our past experience. Epiphanies are sudden leaps of understanding of events that have significantly impacted the trajectory of our life” (23). These epiphanies, then, illustrate the ways in which the ICWG has shaped and informed our SoTL practice.

Navigating complexities

This theme represents a medley of intricacies that we negotiated during the ICWG. More specifically, it refers to the multiplicitous pathways into, within, and beyond SoTL. Alison noted, “Teaching and learning are too complex of subjects for there to be just one way of studying them.” She went on to discuss the variety of theories and methodologies—many of which come directly from the disciplines—that can examine teaching and learning. Jacob also recognized the nature of SoTL and appreciated the viewpoints that the ICWG brought together. He stated, “[T]his diversity has enabled us to approach SoTL as a discourse from various angles and has fostered a more comprehensive analysis of its complexities.” In this section, we consider the complexities that we navigated as part of the ICWG on transdisciplinarity in SoTL.

From the onset of the ICWG, it was clear that our identities in higher education (broadly) and in SoTL (specifically) were major determinants of the complexities we navigated. Alison indicated, “SoTL as a transdisciplinary practice is clearly about identity—how we craft identities in the academy and hold onto them even as we have to reshape them to fit our new contexts and realities.” Susan echoed this sentiment when she declared, “this world is a bit of a mystery to me, and I still do not quite know how to locate myself in this space . . . I felt (and still feel) like an ‘outsider’ in the SoTL world.” Gavin

acknowledged that he is “often inspired by the insights of other disciplines in how they address issues such as feedback, wellbeing, industry engagement.” Anna finds liberation and inspiration in SoTL. She noted, “Throughout my academic journey and career, I have always felt restless within the confinements of any single discipline.”

Each of us brought a set of assumptions about SoTL to our dialogues in the ICWG. The cultural, institutional, and scholarly contexts in which we are situated also informed our assumptions. Jacob explained how the contributors pushed against assumptions about SoTL. He stated, “We have worked together to disrupt, dislodge, and dismantle assumptions about SoTL. We have asked the big questions. What is SoTL? What does it mean to be transdisciplinary? What value does transdisciplinarity in SoTL have in a culture defined by disciplines?” Sara probed, “But what does that mean in practice to incorporate more perspectives in SoTL?” Likewise, Anna reminded us to be mindful about our assumptions toward others that we encounter as part of the SoTL discourse. She posited, “. . . with maturity come habituated patterns generated through experience and socially constructed notions of expertise, which risk rarifying and eventually forgetting how to speak and relate with those who have not been part of such a field or space for a long time.”

Moments of tension and growth

A key term in this area was “community,” with connotations of transversality, intersectionality, and plurality. Most contributors resonated with Gavin when he indicated that his “. . . daily experience of SoTL is transversal, cutting across disciplines, with a focus on the best pedagogic strategy for the task.” That different communities of SoTL overlap in complex ways called us to reflect on hybrid ways of knowing and working together. As Susan wrote, “[I]ndividually and as a group, we had to navigate and hold our uniqueness and difference so that they both mattered. This takes time, awareness, reflection, and emotional effort and for me, I found it unsettling and exhausting.” Although dialogue was identified frequently in the coding process, we suspect this is both because we spent so much time talking and because we yearned for a better way to talk to each other across the “uniqueness and difference” that seemed to keep us from moving forward. Both transdisciplinarity and SoTL unsettle, exhaust, yet in a way that encourages us to move forward together rather than giving up. Alison noted, “. . . we furled and unfurled the problem—and many related problems—struggling to find one core argument that could possibly hold all of our perspectives, even as putting them into dialogue began to transform them.” Yet, most of us remain interested in continuing the dialogue. Sara noted that she has come to view transdisciplinarity in SoTL as “a means to have more respectful engagement with each other as different disciplinary identities in order to answer bigger questions.”

Given the inherent messiness that comes with bringing together a group of scholars to discuss an emerging topic, many of the contributors felt that uneasiness was part of our discussions. Jacob explained, “One of the key tensions I have encountered is the balance between certainty (rooted in disciplinary knowledge) and curiosity (inherent in transdisciplinary work). Navigating this balance has been an ongoing challenge.” He went on to recognize that he is now able to “see the value in both certainty and curiosity” that is necessary for transdisciplinary engagement in SoTL. Susan felt this uneasiness as well; she discussed how she “engaged in the delicate dance of hearing, listening, attending to, (trying not to) judge, contributing, while trying to work out how to position myself in relation to where individual group members ‘came from’ professionally, institutionally, personally, and SoTL-ly.”

Aside from the challenges of time zones and disciplinary ways of knowing, power also produced experiences of liminality in our group. Thinking about what languages, hemispheres, methodologies, and even metaphors hold power in the world of SoTL gave us some tools to analyze

hierarchies, and we had a range of precarity and career paths as a group that includes tenured faculty, administrators, staff, and graduate students. This is evident in Susan's statement that she "... lived and experienced the challenges of working in the borderlands of transdisciplinarity in SoTL." While Jacob came to "enjoy being in many places all at once and nowhere at the same time," we were also sometimes reminded of the people and perspectives not embodied in our group, or in SoTL at large. Considering the roles of SoTL scholars, but also those who are not in any formal roles at all, continues to be essential to imagining a transdisciplinary practice.

Future possibilities for exploration

Throughout our conversations, we returned to the sense of excitement and potential that the topic raised. This yearning for and interest in (a more) transdisciplinary SoTL united experienced scholars and those new to the field and suggests that the research questions we might examine through overlapping global SoTL communities should have embedded transdisciplinarity sub-questions. This might be about the identity of researchers; if we have already learned to add "for whom?" to the classic question "what works?" to help us consider the experiences of differently situated students (Felten and Geertsema 2023; Nielsen and Miraglia 2017), should we not also add reflections on the positionality, methods, and sociopolitical implications of SoTL work? As Anna wrote, transdisciplinarity thought in this way might be "an incredibly generative way of looking into SoTL's potential to foster more just, inclusive, and equitable spaces." Sara also posed the question, "How do we continue to develop these common grounds?"

Others hold more of a longing for innovative approaches to studying teaching and learning that might allow us "to formulate evidence-based SoTL that can be shared and implemented across disciplines" as Gavin holds. For these thinkers, there is a dream of, if not a unifying theory, of a shared conversation between SoTL, Discipline-Based Educational Research (DBER), and other educational research communities, including in schools of education. Still others might locate possibilities at the level of reaching out toward academic sub-fields and movements, like those of the Global South or post-colonial studies, Indigenous studies, and critical pedagogies and theories, that are still marginalized in SoTL. Jacob alluded to this when he called for us "to seek out more partnerships and collaborations ... By working with scholars from diverse backgrounds and disciplines, we can enrich our understandings of SoTL and bring new perspectives to our scholarship."

DISCUSSION

We found our international cohort on SoTL as a transdisciplinary endeavor to be both invigorating and essential. The convergence of diverse perspectives challenges us to navigate the complexities of learning in ways that transcend disciplinary boundaries. For many, transdisciplinary thinking is necessary for addressing global challenges in higher education and beyond. While we approached this work from our own localized contexts, we remained attuned to broader global perspectives, recognizing that SoTL thrives at the intersection of local and global inquiry (Healey and Matthews 2017). This journey embodies the kind of "world-traveling" that Maria Lugones (1987) champions by requiring us to navigate disciplinary and cultural borderlands with both curiosity and criticality.

Transdisciplinary approaches to SoTL require an exploratory disposition, willingness to share, and readiness to translate knowledge and understanding for the purposes of improving the experience of teaching and learning. Such attention to identity resonates with research suggesting that faculty professional identities are continually negotiated through pedagogical experiences, institutional expectations, and professional communities (Kelley 2025). In this article, we reflected individually on

our own insights and contexts and then collectively challenged and reimagined them through a collaborative lens in order to uncover deeper, common insights. Transdisciplinary dialogue in SoTL is complex because it requires a better understanding of both our own and others' identities. Such identity negotiation is consistent with research showing that participation in collaborative SoTL communities can help scholars move through liminal professional spaces, develop confidence, and cultivate a stronger sense of belonging within the field (Healey, Morrissey, and Healey 2026). Brokering across disciplinary and institutional boundaries can likewise strengthen scholars' sense of identity, legitimacy, and community within SoTL, even as such movement requires them to navigate tensions associated with occupying liminal academic spaces (Kensington-Miller, Webb, Maheux-Pelletier, Gansemer-Topf, Lewis, Hofmann, and Luu 2024). Furthermore, it is important to consider the philosophical underpinnings of scholarship (Hamilton and McCollum 2024) and the motivating factors behind our work (Cruz, Kelley, et al. 2024).

Each of us experienced a sense of being outside of or uncomfortable with these processes throughout the journey. Similar experiences have been documented among SoTL scholars who described feelings of marginalization, exhaustion, uncertainty, and dislocation (Godbold, Irving-Bell, McSweeney-Flaherty, Prusko, Schlesselman, and Smith 2021). We felt this discomfort and disorientation throughout this process, and not just as side effects—they were vital, unsettling elements that pushed us to confront the limitations of our disciplinary confines and venture into the wilds of transdisciplinary thought. It requires a trusting and supportive collaborative environment in order to explore the constraints of our own disciplinary perspectives and be open to the practice of exploring, or maybe even inhabiting, transdisciplinary borderlands (Marquis, Healey, and Vine 2016; Healey et al. 2026).

Through our collaboration, we found ourselves frequently grappling with broader epistemological questions relating to the knowledge systems of SoTL. Disciplinary ways of being and knowing, including signature pedagogies, have a strong presence in SoTL. Yet disciplinary expertise need not constrain scholars within established ways of knowing; engagement in SoTL can foster methodological pluralism and greater capacity to move across disciplinary approaches (Felten and Chick 2018). Some scholars have observed that efforts to traverse transdisciplinary approaches will be drawn back by the gravitational forces into the stability of discipline-based approaches (Löfgreen 2023). For scholars entering SoTL, crossing these boundaries may also involve navigating unfamiliar research methodologies, making collaborative and mentored spaces particularly important (Fisher et al. 2014). To truly innovate, however, we must muster the courage to challenge these entrenched assumptions and inspire students to break free from disciplinary constraints, especially when solving complex, interdisciplinary problems (Kelley, Arce-Trigatti, and Haynes 2021).

Our international exploration was complex and, at times, uncomfortable. Such complexity and discomfort led us to a more profound understanding of how to tackle the Grand Challenges of SoTL, as outlined by ISSOTL (Scharff and Hamshire 2022). Transdisciplinarity in SoTL encourages creative and critical thinking in both learners and teachers. It requires a self-conscious approach to cultivating enriched and engaged modes of teaching and learning. It requires a deliberate approach to crafting rich, engaging learning experiences that embrace complexity without losing sight of clarity. It demands reflective approaches for teachers and learners that help us, through this awareness of our identities, discover common interests and shared goals. The complexity of our joint experience both exemplified and reinforced our belief that transdisciplinarity is a challenging but increasingly necessary mode of enhancing the practice and growth of SoTL.

Implications beyond our ICWG

Our findings highlight the necessity of transdisciplinary engagement in SoTL, not as an abstract ideal but as a practical approach to address complex educational challenges. SoTL's history of openness to diverse disciplinary perspectives positions it as a natural leader in fostering transdisciplinary collaboration (McKinney 2013). However, our experiences suggest that achieving this requires more than intention. It demands institutional support, structured opportunities for cross-disciplinary dialogue, and a willingness to embrace discomfort as part of the learning process (Webb, Kensington-Miller, and Abrahamson 2026). Earlier reflections on ICWGs similarly identify willingness to collaborate amid uncertain outcomes, openness to questioning one's assumptions about SoTL, empathy across cultural contexts, and a willingness to make space for sustained collaboration as important dispositions for participants (Healey 2017). Transdisciplinarity thrives in environments that foster exploration and have the capacity to hold ambiguity, enabling scholars to challenge their own disciplinary assumptions while developing richer, more inclusive ways of thinking about teaching and learning (Cruz, Santucci Leoni, et al. 2024). For leaders and scholars in higher education, this means recognizing that true innovation often emerges from these tensions, necessitating policies and practices that encourage collaboration across traditional academic boundaries.

The concept of borderlands (Anzaldúa 1987) offers a valuable lens for understanding this work. In SoTL, borderlands represent the intellectual and cultural spaces where disciplinary perspectives intersect; they sometimes clash, but also generate new ways of knowing (Chick 2013). Our collaborative autoethnography illustrates how navigating these spaces requires both an openness to diverse viewpoints and a willingness to sit with uncertainty. Boundary crossings in SoTL can likewise create opportunities for new learning while also producing questions of legitimacy across communities (Kensington-Miller et al. 2021; Kensington-Miller et al. 2024). Rather than seeing disciplinary differences as obstacles, borderlands encourage scholars to view them as sites of creative potential. This perspective shifts the focus from defending disciplinary identities to leveraging them for collective meaning-making (Nasrollahian Mojarad, Santucci Leoni, Manarin, Miller-Young, and Yeo 2024). As our ICWG contributors discovered, inhabiting these borderlands fostered a transformation in how we approached teaching and learning, broadening our sense of scholarly identity and deepening our understanding of the interconnectedness of teaching and learning across contexts.

One tangible possibility for fostering and sustaining transdisciplinary engagement in SoTL are CoPs (Tierney et al. 2020). Our ICWG functioned as a CoP, an intentional space for scholars across disciplines and institutions to collaboratively explore SoTL's transdisciplinary potential. CoPs provide the structure for long-term engagement while remaining flexible enough to allow for emergent and co-constructed knowledge. They offer a supportive environment where scholars can share strategies, refine ideas, and develop innovative approaches to teaching and learning (du Plessis, Schreck, Bisschoff, Coetzee, Kahts-Kramer, and Oosthuizen 2025). Cross-disciplinary learning communities, reading groups, and collaborative research groups have similarly been identified as important mechanisms for supporting SoTL and extending its influence within institutions (Cruz et al. 2019). Cross-institutional CoPs can also extend this work beyond individual participants by supporting strategic planning, knowledge sharing, and sustained efforts to cultivate institutional SoTL cultures (Abbot et al. 2024). For SoTL scholars and other leaders, investing in such communities—whether within institutions or across them—ensures that transdisciplinary discourse is an ongoing practice, not a one-time effort (Cruz, Atterholt, et al. 2024). By cultivating these spaces, SoTL scholars can continue pushing boundaries, engaging in meaningful collaboration and expanding the field's impact beyond disciplinary silos.

The transnational nature of our ICWG adds another layer of complexity and richness to our exploration of transdisciplinarity in SoTL. Working across national, cultural, and institutional contexts required us to navigate disciplinary differences as well as variations in educational systems, pedagogical traditions, and epistemological assumptions (Healey et al. 2017). This diversity expanded our collective perspective, reinforcing the idea that SoTL cannot be confined within a single national or institutional framework; instead, it must be understood as a global, context-sensitive practice. It demonstrates the importance of developing transnational SoTL networks that foster inclusive dialogue, challenge dominant paradigms, and incorporate perspectives from majority-world and minority-world countries (Behari-Leak 2020). Broadening the disciplinary and linguistic boundaries of SoTL may also help amplify scholarship produced in historically marginalized academic contexts that can be overlooked when the field relies on familiar terminology and scholarly conventions (Abbot 2025). With this type of cross-border scholarly exchange, SoTL practitioners can better address global challenges in teaching and learning by ensuring that innovations and frameworks are informed by a broad spectrum of experiences rather than being shaped by a singular cultural or institutional lens (Chng, Mårtensson, and Leibowitz 2020). Thus, this work underscores the need for more intentional efforts to cultivate transnational SoTL collaborations, recognizing that the future of teaching and learning in higher education depends on fostering global conversations (Chng and Looker 2013).

CONCLUSION

We conclude this article with an acknowledgement that the conversation is not “over.” As a group, we feel like we have just started this journey of considering the interconnections between SoTL and transdisciplinarity; yet through our unsettling and exhausting journey, we emerge stronger in awareness of the need for, and commitment to, navigating complexities, embracing moments of tension and/as growth, and engaging future directions for exploration. Engaging this work in a community of practice energized many of us, and we have come to deeper understandings of our own roles, disciplines, and scholarly orientations. While our group continues reflecting and planning our next steps, we hope that the insights offered in this article will help others who are interested in transdisciplinarity in the context of SoTL as they consider how to navigate complexities in their own work, how they grow through moments of tension, and what future directions for exploration emerge during that process. We invite our readers to join us along the expeditions toward such future directions of exploration: may they be as beautifully unique and different as each of us are as scholars and humans and may both their uniqueness and difference foster the flourishing of SoTL’s transdisciplinary potential.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Much appreciation to our colleague Peter Alston for his thoughtful contributions to and engagement in this ICWG, which enriched the collective learning that took place among us.

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