



*Greg Philip Thomas,  
Aberystwyth University*

As a PhD student in the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences in Aberystwyth University, the 2014 INLT Writing Workshop was a great success, both personally and professionally. Being in the first year of my PhD I had never participated in any form of collaborative writing before, so the whole process was new to me.

I was first made aware of the INLT after I submitted an abstract for the "Students as partners in the co-production of teaching, learning assessment" session at the 2014 RGS-IBG Annual International Conference. Upon reading the abstract Jennifer Hill encouraged me attend the weekend in Dorking, after doing a little research I thought that the weekend would be a really good opportunity to meet other academics at all stages in their careers, who all shared a passion for teaching. I expected the weekend to be a great learning opportunity; I hoped to be able to gain new skills and learn about new and innovative, teaching techniques whilst sharing my own limited experience.

I found the whole weekend beneficial, the group writing time was particularly enjoyable as it enabled me to really get to know the rest of the group and to discuss our own teaching and writing styles. The group work was also very useful in terms of the construction of the paper, it enabled us to cement our ideas together to come up with a clear structure and paper format of which to base our individual contributions.

One of best bits about the weekend was the fact that our group immediately agreed on the content, format and structure of paper, which allowed us to make effective use of the time and to finish the weekend with a clear idea as to where our paper was heading. The liquid café session was also highly beneficial as it meant that each group could gain feedback from the larger cohort furthering our progress.

It was great to meet so many different academics, at different stages of their careers, engaged in different aspects of the discipline, who all had a shared passion for education. One of the most surprising things was that the weekend created a unique social opportunity, where academics at all different career levels were able to talk to one another on a level playing field, as a result of this I picked up many new teaching techniques that I plan on using in Aberystwyth this academic year. This unique atmosphere created a networking environment that was more fruitful than any previous event or conference that I had attended and I was able to get a great deal of career advice as well as gain contacts that I will hopefully be able to call upon in a later stage of career.

As a postgraduate student the weekend was a great introduction to collaborative writing in a relaxed, friendly and supportive environment. The whole weekend was brilliantly organised and surpassed all my expectations, I met many people from many different areas of geography whom I would not have otherwise met and who I hope to be able to collaborate with in the future. Roll on the next event!



*Dr Nick Bearman,  
University of Liverpool*

The weekend after the RGS Conference I attended a collaborative writing workshop organised by the INLT. I had never attended a writing retreat before so I didn't know what to expect. I first heard about it from Helen Walkington at a HEA GEES (Higher Education Authority - Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences) workshop in Manchester on 23rd May, and she convinced me it would be a good idea to attend. There were a number of topics to choose from, including 'Spatial literacy & spatial citizenship' which was an area I was interested in and wanted to find out more about. Based on what I already knew about writing retreats, I was hoping to get a journal paper out of the event, and we had been told to plan on developing the paper we started at the weekend into a full paper for submission to JGHE. Once signed up, we did some work on our group topic (GIS Learning, spatial literacy and spatial citizenship) beforehand via email and Google Docs, although this was primarily to find out about the other participants in our group and jot down a few notes. It wasn't until we were all together in one the room that the ideas for our paper started flowing. A mixture of discussion sessions in our own group and sessions with everyone at the writing retreat enabled us to develop our ideas, get some very useful feedback and refine the ideas.

Strictly speaking, we didn't actually do much writing over the weekend, rather we discussed our ideas and made notes on what we were going to write. However I would say this is the most difficult part of writing (i.e. deciding what we're going to write and how we are going to lay the paper out) and completing this section in a group was much easier than trying to do it on my own! Now this is all decided, the actual writing of the paper should be fairly easy. As well as sessions with just our group, we also had communal sessions with everyone at the weekend, where the different groups presented their ideas and received feedback. On the Sunday we also had a 'liquid cafe' session where different groups could collect data / interview the participants on the specific area they were interested in. It was an ideal resource to have so many geography lecturers in one place at the same time and it was also illuminating to see what areas the different groups were working in.

As an early career researcher / lecturer, I think the most useful opportunity the writing retreat provided to me was an opportunity to meet some of the big names in the area I was looking at. As usual with academics, everyone was very friendly and approachable, and as well as discussing a wide range of topics around teaching geography, I was also able to pick their brains on issues such as securing lectureships with opportunities for researching teaching of geography (or GIS specifically in my case). Attending the writing retreat highlighted to me the wide variety of applications of Geography and I was surprised by how wide this was. I find it relatively easy to get stuck into my specific area of geography (GIS) and not spend enough time thinking about the wider subject. The writing retreat was a great opportunity to hear a wide range of ideas from this area and additionally to see how these ideas develop, which is not something you often see at a seminar/conference presentation or in a journal article.

Based on a shorter version at <http://www.nickbearman.me.uk/2014/09/inlt-writing-retreat/>



***Dr Emma Hill,  
Coventry University***

I found out about the INLT via an HEA/GEES event on teaching and learning I attended in the summer. Having really enjoyed that event the INLT retreat sounded like an excellent opportunity, on a number of fronts. As with the HEA/GEES event the writing retreat was a great opportunity to develop my (non-existent) academic network and to talk about all things teaching & learning related with people of a similar mind-set.

I've only recently (I'm going to have to stop describing it as that soon!) come back to academia. I completed my PhD in 2006 and went to work as an environmental consultant/advisor until September 2013. Although I'd written or contributed a number of corporate publications I never published anything from my PhD. So in the first instance the INLT writing retreat was an un-missable opportunity to work out exactly what it was that academic publishers look for and to do so in a safe environment. I also relished the chance to develop a collaborative article with a group of experienced academics, rather than sweating away at something that may or may not have been any good in the privacy of my own office.

In the run up to the event my group and I had numerous email exchanges to develop our topic area, attempt to clarify our views and determine the trajectory we thought we might want, or need, to take. We were looking at communicating the value of geography, a massive topic and one that varies depending on who you are communicating with. So trying to pin down either of those main elements was a challenge. We had compiled a number of thoughts and questions that we continued to build on, discuss, challenge and bounce off other groups during the course of the weekend. And, although we didn't arrive (or leave for that matter) with anything written (which I have to admit freaked me out a bit as some groups did), but we did come away a much firmer focus. As a result, two weeks later we had several thousand words written, that now just need a bit of tweaking in to a properly coherent structure. The focus of this paper, as we think that we may be able to get a few papers out of this topic, is at this stage more or a reflective synthesis. But with more research, possibly including gathering some actual data, we feel we can develop these themes.

The venue was excellent and I even managed to squeeze in a 17 mile run before the event started over the lovely North Downs. Being surrounded by beautiful countryside with the opportunity to pop up Box Hill at lunch time definitely helped the brain work. As a big wine fan (drinking it more than knowing lots about it!) a trip to the Denbies vineyard and dinner, with English wine, courtesy of the JGHE, was fantastic. I'd just like to say thanks to everyone that organised it, participated in it and welcomed me so warmly. I was quite nervous before hand as I felt very inexperienced. But the range of experience and the depth of passion that everyone had helped make the experience very positive.



New Mexico State University



***Prof Michael N. DeMers,  
New Mexico State  
University***

I have been a member of INLT for several years but until now I had been relatively inactive. As someone with a keen interest in both K-12 and University geography instruction I have been looking for a way to interact with others of similar interests, especially as this topic is of relatively little import among academics in the United States. This workshop seemed a perfect opportunity for interaction especially as I was on sabbatical and not preparing for classes.

When looking over the topics list and seeing GIS and spatial thinking included I was convinced that I needed to participate both in the meeting and in the writing. I anticipated a group of high-end GIS educators in that particular group and was subsequently honored to be asked to lead it. Interestingly the group consisted of younger GIS educators plus a couple whose interests were purely spatial thinking and not GIS. The result was magic. Having young faculty, especially non-US faculty gave me a totally different perspective on teaching and learning GIS and the two non-GIS participants were extremely insightful in their understanding of spatial thinking.

Several important consequences for me were the immersion in an international perspective on geographic education in general, a chance to learn of the incredible diversity and richness of the research going on, and an ability to talk to researchers at length in an informal setting. I found myself becoming re-energized and even more committed to geographic education as a focused research agenda. This is no small step for someone who has been a faculty member in variously sized geography departments whose focus is either applied or theoretical but who typically disdain the scholarship of learning.

Beyond the specific interactions based on the immediate goals and objectives of the workshop it was amazing getting the tours and field trips and being able to experience them with such a diverse group of geographers. The informal discussion, working lunches, and dinners provided a wonderful opportunity to discuss different perspectives on teaching methods, educational research, and geography in general. Also the formal presentations were extremely enlightening in exposing the different approaches to geography education research.

Unlike large, unfocused professional meetings, this workshop, with its clear focus brought together a group of like-minded and focused individuals who came to work. The team-work was amazing and self-sustaining. What astonished me was the ability of people with often wildly different interests and geographic traditions were able to drill down into a topic that was, in our case, a bit bigger than we expected, and then come to consensus and final direction for our paper. All-in-all a fabulous and very worthwhile experience.