Pushing boundaries and crossing borders
Self-study as a means for researching pedagogy

Dawn Garbett and Alan Ovens
Editors
Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP)
Pushing boundaries and crossing borders: Self-study as a means for researching pedagogy

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At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lit the flame within us.

- Albert Schweitzer

With sincere thanks to all of those people who have kept the fires burning.
Acknowledgements

Editing this book on behalf of the S-STEP community has been an opportunity to contribute to and disseminate the rich and diverse understanding of practice exemplified in this book. In addition to the contributors who spent much time writing their chapters, we would like to acknowledge the community’s contribution to the rigorous peer review process. 126 proposals were double-blind peer reviewed in the first instance for possible inclusion. Of these, 78 proposals were returned to authors with an invite to contribute a full 4,000-word chapter. These chapters were again double-blind peer reviewed. In all 485 reviews were completed by self-study researchers in 15 different countries. 60 chapters have been included in this book making the final acceptance rate 48%.

We thank most sincerely the following members of the research community who generously offered their time and expertise to review the chapters:


We also take this opportunity to thank Angela Tsai who has typeset and helped edit this book so professionally and efficiently. Angela has responded to our every suggestion and additional correction with aplomb. Reading each of the chapters has been a job which fell largely to Dawn since Alan took responsibility for organising the conference registrations and accommodation. We are lucky that one of us has been able to eek out a little more time to focus on the myriad of tasks when the other was flagging or busy with teaching commitments.

Thank you for your unfailing commitment and enthusiasm to push boundaries and cross borders.
The term “fifth columnists” was new to us when we started writing this introduction. It originated in a remark attributed to a General in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). He said that they were marching on Madrid with four columns of troops, and that there was a “fifth column” of sympathizers within the city ready to help. Fifth columnists engage in espionage or sabotage to actively support a wartime enemy of that country from within. You may identify with this sense of being in a fifth column, railing from within - we certainly do. Even though we are not certain who we are fighting against, we do know who we are fighting for.

One of our archenemies is time. Allan Feldman (2000) claimed there was a “time crisis” in teacher education for the following reasons.

There is not enough time to do what is being asked of us and what we feel responsible for or obligated to do. Teacher education is a caring profession. To do it right means to have enough time to work directly with students and teachers, to listen to what they say, and to use our expertise to give reasonable advice. But teacher education has entered the mainstream of the university, and we, as teacher educators are required to “produce knowledge” through research and other scholarly activities… for many of us… engaged in self-study of our teacher education practices, our desire to engage in these activities has a moral basis. We want to inquire into our practices to learn more about the nature of teaching, teachers and teacher education because we believe this will lead to better lives for students, teachers and the others engaged in schooling. (p. 63)

Many of us, caught up in institutional demands and crises, can relate to this call to engage in a fight to make a difference but feel the pressure to measure performativity in other ways. We hope that this book inspires you with research by teacher educators who are pushing boundaries and crossing borders alongside you. We are ever hopeful that our column swells through our collective contribution.

The connection of the fifth column to this introductory chapter comes from Alfred Bader’s story. You may well ask, “Who was Alfred Bader?” Born in Vienna to a Jewish father and Catholic mother in 1924, Alfred was raised by his paternal aunt. In 1938 he was one of 10,000 Jewish youngsters allowed to enter Britain from Austria to escape Nazi persecution. Two years later, Churchill, alarmed by the possibility of ‘fifth columnists’ among the many German speaking refugees, decided to round them up and sent many as “enemy aliens” to internment camps in Canada and Australia. This was the reason why Alfred was sent to Quebec as a 16 year old. While in the camp, Alfred sat matriculation exams and applied for entry to three Canadian Universities.
McGill rejected him because their Jewish “quota” was filled. The University of Toronto rejected him because the chemistry department was doing sensitive war work. Queen’s University accepted him and it was in there that he completed his BSc in Engineering Chemistry (1945) and a BA History (1946) followed by a Master’s degree in Chemistry (1947) before moving to Harvard for his doctoral studies in Organic Chemistry. Alfred started a chemical company quite literally in a garage in 1951 which grew to become a multimillion dollar business.

In 1949, Alfred met Isabel, the love of his life on board a ship when they were travelling back to England. A nine-day whirlwind courtship resulted in a marriage proposal, which Isabel regretfully declined because of religious differences. Her book, *A Canadian in Love*, was based on the 80 letters she wrote to Alfred between 1949 and 1950 when she broke off their relationship. Alfred met and married his first wife and together they had two sons. Nearly 30 years later Alfred reconnected with Isabel, who had never married. She had worked as a teacher close to Herstmonceux at Bexhill in Sussex since their parting. Alfred’s first marriage broke down and he married Isabel in 1982. Isabel and Alfred have since dedicated themselves to investing in research and scholarship and supporting the arts. Folklore has it that Alfred bought Herstmonceux Castle for Isabel but in a magnanimous act of philanthropy, they donated it to his alma mater – Queen’s University.

Not content with gifting a 15th century Castle, the Baders then invested in modernising it and helped build an accommodation block in order for it to become an international study centre for students from Queen’s University and around the world. The vision that underlies the Bader International Study Centre (BISC) reflects the Baders’ “commitment to offering students a challenging global education infused with social justice, a thirst for knowledge, and civic responsibility” (https://www.queensu.ca/bisc/about-us/heritage/ and https://www.queensu.ca/encyclopedia/b/bader-alfred-and-isabel).

Social justice, thirst for knowledge and civic responsibility are themes that weave their way through this collection of self-studies. This book is a result of sending an invitation to contribute all around the world. Each proposal is scrutinised to ensure that it is anonymised before it is sent to three other contributors for their critique and appraisal. Only those that “speak” to the reviewers in the introductory proposal have the opportunity to pass the first hurdle.

Acceptance at this point is an opportunity to commit to writing a full 4,000-word paper within a set time. These papers are sent for another masked review. Reviewers are asked to offer constructive criticism to strengthen the paper and their recommendations are returned to the authors for revision. Typically, some authors do not produce a 4000 word paper that fits within the accepted parameters or miss the deadline due to the lack of time. In some cases innovative ideas for workshops or exhibitions are mooted for inclusion in the wider programme. The contributions in this book support the 12th International self-study of teacher education practices Castle Conference. The chapters are intended to be “the first part of a two-part communication, the second part of which is the 50-minute presentation each presenting author makes at the Castle Conference itself” (Lighthall, 2004, p. 199). We are mindful that readers of this collection are likely to miss many of the accompanying presentations even if they attend the conference. The discussion and critique generated at the Castle builds on this written work. If a particular chapter resonates with your own experiences and causes you to question or pause for thought, we urge you to email the authors. Knowing that there is support marching to a similar drumbeat or that someone has read and thought about your work is a fillip for fifth columnists everywhere.

The theme in the first section develops this sense of camaraderie. Self-study is a generative site for nurturing and fostering our collective passion for understanding teaching and contributing to our knowledge about pedagogical practices. While it is true that self-study may no longer occupy the same kind of outside status that it had throughout the 1990’s (Bullock & Peercy, 2018), many who research their practice find it difficult to be prophets in their own land. For us, this is one of academic life’s great mysteries. Why is it that knowledge hard won from self-study research still needs to be defended to our colleagues? Is it because, as the Japanese proverb states, “only the nail that sticks up needs to be hammered down”? Chapters in this section will fortify those new to self-study and those more seasoned campaigners alike.
The second section of the book brings together chapters that coalesce around the theme of social justice. These authors give voice to those that are subdued, silenced, or marginalised. Readers gain access to how others grapple with noticing and responding to issues in their teacher education classes that are common to all. Even when issues seem so context specific that on first reading you see little commonality, read them again to better understand another’s perspective. Through these chapters we are urged to be bold, to make the familiar strange, and to appreciate diversity for the richness and value that it brings to our work. In our efforts to improve our teaching we uncover truths about our own ways of understanding the world and uncover blind spots and assumptions in our practice. As Freese and Makaiau (2012) realised through their self-study “issues of drugs, racial biases, violence, disability, and marginalization are not somewhere else, but are right in our own classrooms” (p.116).

The third section brings together projects that explore the use of self-study as a way of developing local knowledge. Like fifth columnists working from within to understand the lay of the land, they emphasise that expertise must take account of local constraints, issues, cultures, and assumptions. There is a tension inherent in extending personally developed knowledge for a wider audience. As has been noted, this is a case of “I tell my story for me, you hear my story for you” (East, Fitzgerald & Heston, 2009, p. 61). These are stories we all know and tell – made powerful through being told again, in new ways, by writers with scholarly intent.

All in all, these are purposeful projects that go beyond stories from the trenches to expand our understanding of what makes self-study research authentic, relevant and meaningful. They add to our collective knowledge about practice in ways that enable us to take an informed stance. As John Loughran (2008) asked:

How do we continue to challenge our work in relation to views about the nature of the knowledge we produce from both a personal and collective perspective? How do we intend to push the boundaries of what we have learnt from self-study so that it can be structured and shared in ways that will invite further interrogation and development? It is crucial that we do not stop questioning the so what of self-study. (p. 220)

This book contains practical and theoretical messages of support from around the world. Many more tales from the Castle can be accessed from castleconference.com and a synopsis is included in the second handbook of self study (Garbett, Fitzgerald & Thomas, forthcoming). We urge you to follow Stephen Hawking’s advice and take heart - “Look up at the stars and not down at your feet. Try to make sense of what you see, and wonder about what makes the universe exist.”

It seems fitting to conclude this introduction with words from Alfred Bader. “Whenever I have contemplated any achievement in my life, I have marvelled how many and how diverse are the people who have made it possible.” Thank you to the authors for their unfailing commitment and enthusiasm to push boundaries and cross borders.

References


Section one

Nurturing a passion for understanding teaching

Self-study is a generative site for nurturing and fostering our collective passion for understanding teaching and contributing to our knowledge about pedagogical practices. While it is true that self-study may no longer occupy the same kind of outside status that it had throughout the 1990’s, many who research their practice find it difficult to be prophets in their own land. For us, this is one of academic life’s great mysteries. Why is it that knowledge hard won from self-study research still needs to be defended to our colleagues? Is it because, as the Japanese proverb states:

Only the nail that sticks up needs to be hammered down
Crossing boundaries to challenge self-study methodology: Affordances and critiques

Shawn Michael Bullock¹ and Megan Madigan Peercy²

¹ University of Cambridge, England
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We believe that it is difficult to claim that self-study methodology occupies the same kind of outsider status that it had throughout the 1990s. We acknowledge the foundational work of early self-study scholars and appreciate that, particularly in the wake of the struggle to establish qualitative research as “legitimate,” early self-study research was difficult to publish, present, and receive recognition for. It is indeed ironic that some critiques of self-study research, particularly those related to rigor, seem to be identical to those made of qualitative research just a short time before. With nearly 30 years of scholarship in a variety of journals and conferences, books and book series, a second edition of a handbook on the way, and over ten years of a flagship journal (to say nothing of the Castle Conference itself); self-study methodology has hit all the markers of being a field that has reached a certain level of maturity. Samaras, Guðjónsdóttir, McMurrer, and Dalmau (2012) highlighted both the sense of community and the opportunities for personal and professional development as cornerstones for the continued growth of the methodology and its communities. Yet we sense some concern within the community and within the literature about the degree to which self-study work engages with the wider fields of educational research and the degree to which self-study has successfully “crossed boundaries” to encourage researchers from both related fields and from non-English speaking contexts to contribute to our work.

A decade ago, Zeichner (2007) framed a number of challenges to the self-study community that continue to provoke discussion. In part, he was concerned that self-study research might embrace an “extreme” form of postmodernism or poststructuralism, which he equated with a “reluctance to claim that we can accumulate any knowledge across studies” (p. 43). Perhaps more controversially, he positioned self-study as “isolated as an exotic form of inquiry that is separate from other research about teacher education” (p. 43). We expect that this critique still rings sharply to many, but we argue that his paper does serve as a useful “turn” in discussions of self-study methodology.

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An examination of the Loughran et al. (2004) S-STEP handbook reveals pervasive issues related to establishing and articulating the theoretical (epistemological, pedagogical, and moral) and methodological foundations of self-study. Since then, the understanding, use, and stature of self-study methodology have increased, and the relevance and affordances of self-study increasingly recognized, as it has become clear how little we know about the work of teacher educators and teacher education (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 2005; Conklin, 2015; Goodwin et al., 2014). Nevertheless, there remains room for growth as self-study remains somewhat misunderstood and marginalized by the field, and for instance, does not yet appear among the lists or explanations of the major methodological frameworks in social sciences research (e.g., Cresswell, 2009). Self-study of teaching and teacher education practices has now progressed sufficiently in both its use and in the ways in which it is understood within the larger field of teacher education to merit further examination of where it is as a methodology. In this paper we explore its methodological trajectory and share some implications for the future development of self-study and further research involving self-study. To be clear, we see these two statements as articulating slightly different positions. In the former case, we explore the development of self-study as a field of inquiry, as “the methodology.” In the latter case, we explore the idea that self-study might be drawn from methodologically in other kinds of work without necessarily being the methodological focus, or even more than a passing few paragraphs in a methodology section to establish a particular kind of warrant for a paper. We see these ideas as part of what Gee (2000) would refer to as d-discourse and D-discourse identities and we are particularly interested in addressing the strengths and weaknesses of both the ways in which self-study research is implemented, and its use to address particular questions or “chains of inquiry” (Zeichner, 2007) in conjunction with work using other methodological approaches.

Methods and objectives

Our paper will examine the following questions: What critiques of self-study methodology have been raised internally (within the self-study literature) and externally (within the broader literature on teaching and teacher education practice)? What do these critiques raise for the field to consider as it moves forward into a new maturity/era/stage/new developmental stage? How has the community responded to said critiques?

For our larger project, we are in the process of reviewing literature published in peer-reviewed journals, books, book chapters, and Castle Conference proceedings. For purposes of our review, we decided to consider literature published since 2005 for the following reasons:

1. The first edition of the Handbook was published in 2004;
2. Studying Teacher Education was founded in 2005; and
3. Zeichner’s (2007) critique, we believe, was a turn in the literature that reflected self-study’s maturity as a field of research.

We define critiques raised “internally” as those found in Castle proceedings, Studying Teacher Education, the previous SSTEP handbook (2004), the Springer series edited by Loughran, and Sense books explicitly framed as self-study work or explicitly directed at the self-study community (see Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015 for a similar framing of their review). We define critiques raised “externally” as work found in peer-reviewed journals that focus on teacher education and that are likely to contain self-study work given the journal’s aims and scope (Teaching and Teacher Education, Teachers and Teaching, Professional Development in Education, Teacher Education Quarterly, Action in Teacher Education, and Journal of Teacher Education). Due to space limitations of this paper, we focus our discussion on journal articles that we have reviewed while simultaneously arguing that the general frameworks presented are useful ways of thinking about other literature published on and about self-study.
Outcomes

We have framed our preliminary analysis of the literature as a tension between feedback for the self-study community and feedback to the self-study community. We further posit that this tension can be productively interpreted through Argyris and Schön's (1974) lenses of single- and double-loop learning.

1. Feedback for self-study: Currently, much of the work in self-study seems to prefer “single loop” approach (Argyris & Schön, 1974), in which we see scholars using the methodology to make a reflexive turn. In other words, internal feedback exists in the form of the extant literature within the self-study community, in which the scholarship draws primarily on other internal work. We argue that this needs to be pushed into more dialogic engagement between self-study methodology and other [primarily qualitative] frameworks that can further inform the reflexive work of teacher educators considering their own practice.

2. Feedback to self-study: Many critiques from the broader research literature on teacher education seem to encourage self-study researchers to consider what their work contributes to non-self-study literature. Concurrently, several self-study scholars have argued that self-study research needs to take a “turn” on the reflexive turn (e.g., Loughran, 2010), meaning that self-study researchers need to move beyond individual stories in which they have made a reflexive turn and toward an explanation of how such a turn changes their practice and contributes to research more broadly. We argue that these kinds of critiques might be understood within Argyris and Schön’s (1974) “double loop” approach because they both represent an extra level of feedback beyond the immediate community (hence “double-loop”) and they align with Argyris and Schön’s ideas about the behaviours of communities who engage in double-loop learning.

In any form of literature review, exclusion and inclusion criteria need to be defined and justified. Although the division between feedback for and feedback to might seem like an arbitrary division, we think it justifiable given the field’s emphasis on making work available to the self-study community and frequent critiques, from within and without, of the impermeability of self-study as a field to those who might not already know someone who is well-entrenched in the community and thus able to act as a guide. Additionally, we note that not all who write about self-study participate regularly in conferences or write within our journal or book series; similarly, there are those whose main scholarly interest is to participate in self-study focused pursuits. Given the enormity of the literature in self-study that now exists, we decided to limit our review to pieces of work that explicitly shed light on both affordances and challenges of self-study within the same piece of work. We are indebted to two graduate students, Colleen Gannon and Megan Stump, for their able assistance in this task.

Feedback for self-study

Our search parameters yielded 25 journal articles, mostly from Studying Teacher Education. We argue that the affordances and challenges of self-study, as identified within the community itself, can be further understood through 3 themes in each of affordances and challenges.

Affordance 1: The value of discovering one’s professional voice as a teacher educator

An overwhelming theme in the articles was the necessity of analysing one’s own personal and professional voice as a teacher educator. For some, the process was clearly one of discovery in which they came to new understandings of their selves in relation to others and/or in relation to new practices (Dinkelman, Margolis, & Sikkenga, 2006). For others, the process was quite grounded in the idea of claiming a space within institutional and/or political discourses that limited their perceived ability to enact their roles as teacher educators (Kosnik, 2005). Since the beginning of self-study there has been a tradition of new academics and new teacher educators finding their voices through self-study (Williams, Ritter, & Bullock, 2012).
Affordance 2: The value of collaborative research

LaBoskey (2004) comments that self-study research is self-initiated and self-focused but not solipsistic. Self-study researchers frequently write about the value that working with colleagues, and occasionally teacher candidates, brings to their understandings of their practice and their identities. Fransson and Holmberg (2012), for example, suggest that collaboration in self-study is essential for going beyond their initial background and expertise. Much less clear are the borders between collaborative self-study, conducting self-study work with a critical friend or critical friends and, more recently, conducting self-study as a member of a professional learning community. We are not certain that clear borders exist around these concepts, although early on it did seem like a critical friend was someone who was somewhat removed from the practice in question. East, Fitzgerald, and Manke (2010) provide valuable insight into the longitudinal tensions that emerge and play out within collaborative self-study group work over 14 years, arguing in part that there were different expectations and definitions of self-study at play. In a relatively uncommon piece, Nilsson (2010) highlighted the utility of self-study after working as a critical friend with six colleagues in engineering in order to help them to develop further their scholarship.

Affordance 3: The value of “walking our talk”

We borrow a phrase from Tom Russell, who liked to speak of the value of “walking our talk” when arguing for the importance of practicing the same approaches in our own practices that we encourage in our teacher candidates. Many articles argue that self-study research provides an enhanced understanding of the conceptual underpinnings and pragmatic necessities of reflective practice, and that reflective practice requires one to be truly present within the crucible of practice. White (2009), for example, highlighted the potential of self-study research to focus clearly on the emotional experiences of learning in a teacher education classroom. Hamilton and Pinnegar (2015) argue that studying our own practice as teacher educators, and thus walking our talk, requires a willingness to be “publicly vulnerable to questions about the viability of the practice, the evidentiary and interpretive basis of the assertions for actions, and the understandings revealed in the study of the selected practice,” which in turn requires a “public commitment to attend to the trustworthiness of the research” (p. 182).

Challenge 1: Self-study is still not recognized as “real research”

A perennial challenge in the self-study community is the degree to which it is considered “proper” or “real” academic research outside the community (Alderton, 2008). We find it noteworthy that this challenge persists despite the undeniable academic footprint that self-study now has, and we wonder about the degree to which these perceptions are being affected by processes such as perceptions around institutional requirements for promotion and tenure and research assessment exercises in places like the U.K. and Australia. Self-study researchers, both new and experienced, frequently share concerns about the ways in which the work may not be recognized, and frequently construct arguments that might be used by those who wish to criticize their work. We notice a strong tendency to begin self-study work with a defense of the methodology, something that we do not feel is so common in other academic traditions that focus on self-inquiry, including autoethnography and narrative traditions.

Challenge 2: Self-study researchers often do not go beyond their own experiences

Many articles published within the community have highlighted the challenges inherent in focusing solely on the experiences of authors of the paper. Related critiques include a tendency to not make explicit links between what was learned by conducting the self-study that is of value to others and, as Sandretto (2009) warns, the possible tendency to assume there is a single core “self.”

Challenge 3: The tenets of self-study methodology are often unclear

It is relatively common to read that self-study methodology is, at least to some extent,
unde definable. There are methodological characteristics, frameworks, and guidelines for quality, but self-study researchers are quick to point out that they are rather unwilling to state that there is a particular way self-study work should be done. As a result, self-study researchers sometimes express frustration that self-study methodology is misunderstood by others, perhaps particularly by those who are new to the field. As Hamilton and Pinnegar (2015) warn, “the abbreviated moniker of self-study can lead to a severe misunderstanding about this genre of research” (p. 182).

Feedback to self-study

Our search parameters yielded 44 journal articles; the fact that we found nearly double the articles written “outside” the community that spoke about both the affordances and challenges of self-study might be revealing. To be clear, many of these articles were written by self-study researchers writing for different audiences, and that many of the challenges of self-study have perhaps been more fully explored in book chapters rather than journal articles. It may also be that “insider” self-study researchers feel a need to write in different ways when constructing arguments for “external” journals. We argue that the affordances and challenges of self-study, as identified by sources external to the community itself, can be further understood through 3 themes in each of affordances and challenges.

Affordance 1: Self-study allows one to discover one's professional voice as a teacher educator

Labaree (2000) commented that teaching was a set of difficult practices that look easy and Loughran and Russell (2007) argued that teaching was often not viewed as a discipline because it seems so straightforward to the outside observer. We find it significant that both internal and external feedback to the self-study community seems centered on the importance and value of self-study methodology for finding one's voice as a teacher educator, which in part suggests that the teacher education research community as a whole is sympathetic to and enthusiastic about self-study's willingness to speak to the historically marginalized status of research on the practices of teacher educators.

Affordance 2: Self-study allows for the personal professional development

At first glance, this might seem similar to affordance 1 of this section, but the articles that were reviewed frame the issue of voice quite differently from the issue of personal professional development. The latter is focused on the practice of the teacher educator, particularly the complexity of learning to teach teachers when one often only has prior experience as a schoolteacher to rely on, if anything. Authors such as Zeichner (2007) recognize that the complexities of teaching future teachers requires some sort of professional development and recognize self-study as a method for creating a space for that development.

Affordance 3: Self-study changes practice

In a staggering realization, we found that it tended to be external literature that argued self-study methodology was a catalyst for changing professional practices of teacher educators (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 2005). Many articles clearly applaud self-study for its focus on making the practices of teacher educators explicit, valued, and visible – particularly when such practices are subject to change in response to academic scrutiny.

Challenge 1: Self-study is not generalizable

The most frequent critique of self-study methodology, by far, was that it was at best a collection of case studies that were not generalizable and at worst idiosyncratic and prone to egocentric writing. Additionally, researchers such as Galguera (2011) argue that self-study methodology promotes procedures that cannot be replicated—although he was writing within the context of using self-study for his research. Davey and Ham (2010) highlighted that self-study seems to focus quite narrowly on specific issues, purposefully.
Chapter 1: Crossing boundaries to challenge self-study methodology: Affordances and critiques

Challenge 2: Self-study does not engage with the broader literature in teacher education

Many external authors, even whilst sympathetic to the larger goals of self-study research, worried about the methodology seeming like a rather disconnected set of individual pieces of work. This makes both internal and external comparisons to other literatures difficult (Korthagen, Loughran, & Lunenberg, 2005) and it is unclear the extent to which self-study researchers are able to situate their work within larger chains of inquiry.

Challenge 3: The voice of the teacher educator tends to dominate

Despite claims of not being solipsistic, self-study methodology does seem to be vulnerable to external criticism that suggests it prioritizes the teacher educator’s voice and personal experiences over the voices of others, including other teacher educators, teacher candidates and pupils (Cuenca et al., 2011). This critique further limits self-study research’s ability to make claims about its impact on the practices of the teacher candidates who are working in schools with children.

Future discussions

Our paper is premised on the idea that a review of literature from “inside” and “outside” the field is generative for thinking about the affordances and critiques self-study would do well to address as it moves forward as a methodology, a set of communities, and a vital contributor to research in teacher education. At the outset of this project, we expected to read very different sets of critiques from inside and outside the methodology of study—not only were we incorrect in our hypothesis, but it seems that there was a remarkable coherence to the field regardless of literature. It is clear from the literature, for example, that self-study methodology offers a valuable way to develop professional voice as a teacher educator in multiple contexts, within multiple kinds of pressures. The methodology provides a conduit for a variety of kinds of collaborative work and a way of engaging in the professional development of teacher educators. It is also clear from the literature that self-study is haunted by concerns of relevance within the broader discussion in teacher education; a claim that we find interesting given the number of people writing about self-study outside of the “internal” academic work.

We wonder if, perhaps, part of the issue with self-study is a different kind of nomenclature problem from the frequently-cited challenge associated with the term “self.” Perhaps there are new opportunities to talk about the ways in which self-study might be enacted differently if it exists for purposes of professional development, as compared if it is framed for the purpose of contribute to knowledge of teaching teachers connected to particular literatures. Or perhaps that would risk rendering self-study practices instrumental in some way. Part of the reason we argue, at the beginning of this paper, for more of an engagement with the ideas associated with double-loop learning is that such ideas require behaviours that, as Argyris and Schön (1974) argued, are fundamentally open to communities’ exploring basic feelings about their theories-of-action and their theories-in-use. Perhaps the gap between what self-study says about itself, and what others say about self-study, is not as wide as we tend to think.

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Self-Study, Action Research: Is that a boundary or border or what?

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Do we indeed want to have the type of self-study scholars who were called to submit proposals to the 12th Castle Conference: “committed to pushing the boundaries through fresh thinking, never settling for ordinary and always challenging ourselves to exceed expectations”? (https://mailchi.mp/22b8168e709/castle-conference-newsletter?e=4918ed6663). For our evolution beyond just becoming established, we might take the short story as an example. Before the 19th century, a short story had to be realistic. However, Edgar Allan Poe, a creator of influential impressionist techniques, believed the short story’s definitive characteristic was single effect. In reviewing Hawthorne’s Twice-Told Tales, Poe wrote that Hawthorne has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents—he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tends not to the out-bringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. (Poe, 1842)

Poe’s critique concerned craftsmanship and artistic integrity. It did not create boundaries on subject matter or dictate technique. As such, Poe left the short story form open to experimentation and growth while requiring that it show evidence of artistic diligence and seriousness. Perhaps the same philosophy should be applied to self-study.

A case for the self-study field to use to learn about its boundaries comes from the dissertation experience of the first author, Julie Klein. In a session at the 2017 AERA in San Antonio, Texas, the second author, Linda Fitzgerald, who happened to have reviewed some of the papers being presented, was puzzling over what made the methods under discussion self-study or not. Suddenly

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Linda was struck by the response of a senior self-study scholar to a doctoral student. The student reported that she had been told to add a self-study chapter to her dissertation. The senior scholar unhesitatingly said that one should not just add a self-study chapter to a dissertation; it was either all self-study or not. And the senior scholar added a caution to not do a self-study dissertation under the direction of a professor who was not a self-study researcher. What struck Linda so hard was that she was in that very position as a junior member on Julie's dissertation committee. As a doctoral student, Julie already had done peer-reviewed self-studies, the first one of which had been co-authored by Linda and presented at AERA in an S-STEP session. However, under the supervision of a professor who was not a self-study researcher, Julie was adding a self-study chapter to her dissertation. Taking to heart the senior scholar's cautions, Linda shared the concerns at a pre-defense committee meeting and Julie ended up editing her self-study chapter to replace “self-study” with “action research.” In hindsight, both authors have experienced confusion, regrets, frustrations, and second thoughts about what had happened.

**Aims of the study**

Now that Julie's dissertation has been completed and approved (Klein, 2017), our story can serve as a case to test the strength of the senior scholar’s warnings. In addition, it can provide an occasion for participants in the Castle Conference session to interrogate the boundaries defining self-study or not self-study. As Loughran (2007) has reminded us, “There is not one way, or correct way of doing self-study. Rather, how a self-study might be done depends on what is sought to be better understood” (p. 15). Thus, in keeping with this year's theme of “Pushing boundaries and crossing borders,” this particular dissertation research may help “to explore how the methodology of self-study can be challenged, enriched, and/or extended by new theories and ways of thinking” (https://mailchi.mp/22b81683e709/castle-conference-newsletter?e=4918ed6663). On the one hand, this study raises the issue of how best to deal with the discomfort and/or confusion with what counts or does not count as self-study or action research, especially for those who have recently come to self-study. And another question to explore is whether a critical friend has to be conversant with self-study. In this case, could Julie's co-teacher be guided by her in the critical friend role and chair a self-study dissertation even if it is she and not he who is the self-study researcher?

**Context of the dissertation in the case**

Both authors have been associated with a North American university where the dissertation process is led by a chair or co-chairs who work/s with a committee consisting of two or three other members whose roles are varied or not completely defined. Julie's major professor not only co-chaired the dissertation committee but also co-designed, co-taught, and co-implemented with Julie the literature course researched in the dissertation. Even though he was not a self-study scholar, he met self-study criteria for a critical friend: “A critical friend acts as a sounding board, asks challenging questions, supports reframing of events, and joins in the professional learning experience” (Schuck & Russell, 2005, p. 107). Every week he and Julie met for such purposes. The other co-chair managed the details of the dissertation to fit the institutional guidelines, and served to a lesser degree as another critical friend. He had done self-study 20 years ago, but has not remained active in the field. Linda, while active in self-studies for over 20 years, played a junior role on the committee for a variety of political reasons. The fourth committee member has more recently begun contributing to self-study. All four committee members had to sign off to approve the dissertation.

Julie was studying her own practice in a Dissertation in Practice, “a scholarly endeavor that impacts a complex problem of practice,” following the principles of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (http://www.cpedinitiative.org/page/AboutUs). Julie studied an innovation in undergraduate Introduction to Literature courses, which she co-taught with her major professor. The blend of face-to-face with technology-mediated instruction that resulted now provides a model for other courses in the discipline at her university. Complex adaptive blended
learning systems (CABLS) (Wang, Han, & Yang, 2015) served as the theoretical lens for the dissertation. Unlike other more linear blended learning models, CABLS promoted a systemic and holistic perspective. In the CABLS model, blended learning is a system consisting of six essential subsystems (the learner, the teacher, the content, the technology, the learning support, and the institution). Within the teacher subsystem, CABLS supplied a prominent place for the teacher self.

To capture the richness of blended learning and thoroughly investigate the problems of practice driving the dissertation, the complexity of CABLS required a mixed methods design with both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data came from student pre- and post-tests, student surveys, student assignments, classroom observations, videos, student interviews, the university’s Assessment and Course Evaluation, and self-study data from journal entries and from conversations with the major professor/co-teacher serving as critical friend. Methods triangulation was obtained by using these various collection methods to help Julie check out the consistency of her findings and elucidate complementary aspects of the same phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The self-study chapter Julie had planned to use in her dissertation grew out of three AERA presentations that had passed peer-review for the S-STEP SIG. The dissertation chapter was designed to meet the LaBoskey (2004) criteria of self-study: “it is self-initiated and focused; it is improvement-aimed; it is interactive; it includes multiple, mainly qualitative methods; and it defines validity as a validation process based on trustworthiness” (p. 817). As required for a Dissertation in Practice, it was a study of her own teaching.

**Methods**

Besides the mixed methods used in the newly completed dissertation, the data contributing to this inquiry include excerpts from Julie’s emails and phone calls as well as journal entries from both authors, especially those reflecting on conversations between them. Informed by a variety of sources of self-study methods (such as Lassonde, Galman & Kosnik, 2009; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009; Samaras, 2011; Tidwell, Heston, & Fitzgerald, 2009), and action research methods (such as McNiff, 2010; Mills, 2014; Whitehead, 2017), Julie and Linda used the archival data to illuminate the dissertation process, including choices of and justifications for methods, to examine whether the dissertation was action research, self-study, both or neither. One question guiding the search of the data was, in the case of writing in which the author is visible and reflective, like action research involving one’s own curriculum and/or pedagogy, how much or how little is needed to qualify as a self-study? Another was, how much deployment of methods, or use of which methods, counts as self-study?

**Outcomes**

During and after writing the dissertation Julie found herself constantly asking “How does self-study differ from action research?” Summarizing some of the analysis for this paper, Julie applied definitions of self-study and of action research, and shared these with Linda, who drew conclusions:

1. The dissertation as a whole could count as self-study because in both self-study and action research methodologies, the researcher inquires into problems situated in practice, engages in research cycles, and systematically collects and analyzes data to improve practice. However, self-study may incorporate other methods, such as personal history, memory work, narrative inquiry, reflective portfolios, or arts-based methods (LaBoskey, 2004; Samaras & Freese, 2006).

2. On the other hand, the dissertation as a whole would be more action research according to Feldman, Paugh, and Mills (2004), who argued that a critical way to differentiate the two research genres is to focus on the relationship of action to research, and self to study. When the accent is on action, it is assumed that the primary purpose of conducting action research is that the collection and analysis of data are used to guide the development of a
plan of action or to articulate a critical analysis of the individual and institutional barriers that are shaping their lives. However, when the accent is on the word self, then the self becomes the focus of the study and this is a “distinguishing characteristic of self-study as a variety of practitioner research” (p. 953). Even in the chapter originally designed to summarize the self-study methods and data, as well as throughout the dissertation, the primary focus was on the practice rather than the self, with a narrative voice predominately neutral rather than clearly first person.

3. Feldman, Paugh, and Mills (2004) further explained, “action research provides the methods for the self-studies, but what made these self-studies (italics in original) were the methodological features” (p. 974). Self-study researchers use their experiences as a resource for their research and “problematic their selves in their practice situations” with the goal of reframing their beliefs and/or practice (Feldman, 2002, p. 971). Action research is more about what the teacher does, and not so much about who the teacher is. By this criterion Julie’s whole dissertation was self-study, with the researcher-self documenting the response of the teacher-self to the challenge of changing from traditional face-to-face to blended pedagogy. Then again, the preponderance of data collected and analyzed was what the teacher and co-teacher did, and what the student outcomes were, rather than problematizing the self in the practice.

4. Another important difference is that self-study focuses on improvement on both the personal and professional levels. Self-study builds on the personal processes of reflection and inquiry, and takes these processes and makes them open to public critique. Self-study is not done in isolation, but rather requires collaboration for building new understandings through dialogue and validation of findings. Self-study research requires openness and vulnerability since the focus is on the self. And finally, self-study is designed to lead to the reframing and reconceptualizing of the role of the teacher (Samaras & Freese, 2009). In these public and collaborative ways a dissertation process can tip the balance of an action-oriented inquiry about a pedagogical change process to self-study. Although the co-teacher of the course was not engaged in self-study per se, he served well the Critical Friend role. And in the doctoral procedures of Julie’s university, the study methods, data, analysis, and conclusions were open to a public proposal hearing and a public dissertation defense, as well as to at least three meetings with all four members of the dissertation committee, among whom all but the major professor/co-teacher had published at least one self-study.

The multiple methods met the criterion shared by Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) and Whitehead (2017), that self-study demands a deep commitment to checking data and interpretations with colleagues to broaden possibilities and challenge perspectives to increase the study’s validity and credibility. Using methods that included data from students, systematic conversations with the major professor/co-teacher, and feedback from the other co-chair and committee members broadened possibilities and challenged perspectives to increase trustworthiness.

Julie felt she had met criteria for a self-study, more than action research. And what she did was due to who she was as the teacher. When Linda challenged this conclusion in a full dissertation committee meeting before the public defense, invoking the added criteria that the senior self-study scholar at the 2017 AERA meeting had argued for a dissertation to be self-study, confusion ensued. The committee decided, given looming deadlines, to advise that Julie just swap out all uses of “self-study” for “action research” in the dissertation rather than do other rewriting to make the self-study clearer throughout. Interestingly, it was easy to make action research the “back up” category for self-study, while vice versa not as well.

Besides the lack of clarity about which definition the dissertation met better, self-study or action research, a strong thread emerged from the data that included confusion, regrets, frustrations, and second thoughts experienced by both authors. Julie felt frustrated about being told not to use “self-study” in her dissertation. She felt that the knowledge about how one’s identity impacts
and is impacted by one’s practice teaching a blended learning course was lost. A key finding of Julie’s dissertation was that a good blended learning course cannot be reduced only to technique; it involved, too, the identity and integrity of the teacher. She became more confused when Linda had second thoughts about this matter.

After changing “self-study” to “action research” as requested, Julie phoned the co-chair who was more familiar with self-study, to express her fear that she was not worthy to be a doctoral candidate. He assured her it was normal to have doubts about oneself when writing the dissertation. He added that the decision was up to Julie to use self-study or action research. Because she had already changed the wording to action research and had final dissertation deadlines approaching, as well as having to deal with the serious illness and death of her best friend, a fellow doctoral student, at this very time, Julie “caved in” with the easier solution of action research.

Furthermore, Julie’s painful experience lead to her being overwhelmed with questions. How is self-study different from action research? When does the research become too much self and not enough study, or conversely, too much study and not enough self? Is there one or many different selves in each person? In cultures that differ in where they draw the boundaries of self, which is the self of self-study? Should I have a purist or pragmatist approach? In not purely qualitative studies, at what border does a mixed methods study tip too far into quantitative methods to not be considered a self-study?

Julie also realized that sometimes her story about herself is just story, not engaged in a conversation that matters in the literature [see Loughran’s (2010) challenge to go beyond story answered in the special issue of Studying Teacher Education (volume 6, number 3)]. Sometimes her dissertation was so engaged in the literature, that the passive research voice eliminated herself as the researcher. She wondered if this is a binary, like good and evil, self-study versus study without a central self? And how about studies using performance? Are these continuums from disembodied “where is the self” research on one side to “where is the study” performances -- drama, collage, photography, drawing, jazz trumpet, dancing -- on the other, with autobiographical writing falling on both sides of self-study in the middle? Or are they just a menu of choices for specific purposes, including self-study to improve my own practice as well as research to convince policymakers to change the bigger context of the practice overall? Or might self-study be a developmental trajectory, in which one starts out as a researcher outside of self-study, but later begins to engage in self-study and over time develops a self-and-study balance? And can that only happen if an author of a study in which the self is not visible can be encouraged to come out rather than be discouraged by outright rejection as not self-study?

In the midst of editing the dissertation for the defense, Julie lost so much confidence in herself as a self-study scholar, she declined when asked to be a reviewer for the Castle Conference: “I am only a doctoral student. It would be best if I am not reviewing. Thank you for considering me” (email, October 16, 2017). How could Julie review self-studies when she did not seem to have grasped what made a self-study for her dissertation? She may have been lost to self-study forever if she had not received an email reply that same day that included the following:

I appreciate your email and concern that you may not be sufficiently experienced enough to review a proposal for the Castle Conference. However, you are never “only a doctoral student.” I would expect my doctoral students to be fully involved in all aspects of academic life and have confidence in their perspective and academic knowledge. I do think you are in a position to judge whether the proposal has anything to say and whether does so in a way that is methodologically sound. Each proposal will be judged by three people independently and we hope that each reviewer brings a different perspective to the task- so the decision won’t be all yours to make, but you will provide an informed judgement that will help us. In addition, we view the self-study community as an inclusive group of scholars who work collaboratively to support and critique each other’s work. If you want to be part of the community, then take the plunge and review a proposal. Of course, I would also suggest you discuss this with your doctoral supervisor or advisor since they know you better than I do. I see you are on a paper
with Linda, so I would suggest seeking her advice and support. She is one of our experienced and expert Self-Study scholars. I know she will give you some sound advice on whether to review or not. Once you have done this, let me know your final decision.

Little did the writer know that the person he suggested Julie talk to was the second author. After getting in contact with Linda, Julie decided to do the self-study reviews.

In the process of doing this self-study, Julie somewhat rebuilt her confidence as a self-study scholar. Her vulnerability has become a strength. Instead of just assuming her dissertation is or isn’t a self-study, she had to think through why it is or isn’t.

An interesting “dance” exists between an author claiming self-study and a reviewer affirming a piece is self-study. It is easy for reviewers to say a submission is not a self-study when the writing has no first-person reference, as in quantitative studies with an emphasis on objectivity. But action research, which predates self-study as a research approach, may not focus on the self of the researcher, and may not have much if any first-person narrative, but often has other characteristics in common with self-study. Not all self-studies are action research, but some are, and vice versa. Also, for purposes of inclusion in self-study conferences or publications, does it matter where the boundary is between self-study and action research?

The authors hope that the tensions in this dissertation process will serve as a springboard for discussion in a Castle Conference session. One result could be work on guidelines for reviewers who need to determine whether or not a proposal or paper is a self-study. Or perhaps the conclusion could be that defining self-study defeats the purpose of pushing boundaries by making boundaries that much harder to push? And another set of conclusions might be ways that more senior self-study scholars can be more supportive of the new generation of self-study scholars while still maintaining whatever boundaries might be necessary.

References


Putting posthuman theory to work in collaborative self-study

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We are a self-study collective consisting of four educators in three states (California, New Jersey, and Maine) and in different teacher/leader education contexts. Katie teaches research courses in an Educational Leadership for Social Justice EdD program at a state university in northern California; Tammy teaches courses in teacher education, including assessment and multicultural education, at a research-intensive university in New England; Linda is a teacher educator at a professional development agency that supports early career high school science teacher-leaders in virtual and physical settings across the country; and Charity is the Director of Teacher Education Admissions and Retention at a state university outside New York City.

Over the past six years and through multiple self-studies (e.g., Abrams, et al., 2014; Strom, et. al., 2016), one theme we continually return to is “putting theory to work” to help us think and teach differently. One common point of agreement between the four of us is that the linear, reductionist thinking that continues to dominate education research is inadequate for inquiring into self study and teacher education phenomena (Strom, 2015), and thus we have been drawn to complex theories that reframe the world, and our collective existence and movement with/in it, as multiplistic, relational, vital, and materially embedded. As a self-study community, drawing on complex theories, such as rhizomatics and new materialisms, has aided us in theorizing our own collective development since our doctoral studies. In previous collaborations regarding putting theory to work, however, we have foregrounded inquiry into the research practices of our self-study group, with connections to other professional activity. In this collaborative self-study, we turn a more purposeful lens on how theory shapes our instructional practices and our subjectivities as teacher-researchers. We inquired, “How does theory affect our practices? How does theory affect us as educators-researchers?”

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Chapter 3: Putting posthuman theory to work in collaborative self-study

Putting posthuman theory to work

Theories (explicit or implicit) and related concepts affect what we do as teachers—they materialize, or come to matter, in our instructional activity and interactions, in the materials we create and use with students, through our language, and so on. Iteratively, the materialization of theory in our practices morphs, deepens, and produces differently our understandings of those theories. “Putting theory to work” (Strom & Martin, 2013) is a phrase we use deliberately to refer to a process of making the materiality of theory in practice visible--attending to its enactment, or how it comes to matter in different types of practice (in our research, our instruction, our lives). However, we also employ it as a mode of moving forward an agenda of using different theories in ways that allow the making of “oddkin”--that is, to make connections with heterogeneous and unexpected ideas, things, and places (Haraway, 2016)--to help us, and other teacher educators, think different thoughts, actively problem-solve, and transform our practices/ourselves. By putting theory to work in our practice, and particularly, ontologically-different theories of connection and expansion (e.g., Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2013), we can interrupt dominant frames of thought that function as ideologies and affect multifaceted justice issues at both individual and institutional/societal levels.

By “ontologically-different theories of connection and expansion” we refer to a set of perspectives that fall under the umbrella of posthumanism. Posthumanism draws on monist philosophies to rethink the world, and the way we live in it, to resist and disrupt dominant binary thinking that has characterized Western logic for over four centuries (Braidotti, 2013), and that continues to drive reductionist thinking in fields like education today (Strom, 2015). The posthuman turn makes several shifts in perspective. One includes moving from a dualistic view of the world as either on the one hand, objectively there, or on the other, completely socially constructed, and instead explicitly acknowledges and attends to materiality and its entanglement with discursive forces (Barad, 2007). This disrupts the traditional opposition of nature/culture and instead creates a natureculture continuum (Braidotti, 2013). Another major shift moves the reference point of the world from human actors to heterogeneous assemblages, or mixtures, of human, non-human, and discursive elements that work together in particular ways (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Strom, 2015). Assemblages are creative; they produce particular happenings and transformations, or “becomings” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) that are both a becoming-different (than what was before) as well as a becoming-with (Haraway, 2016) happening in relation to all the other elements in composition.

Methodology

For our collaborative self-study, we draw on LaBoskey’s (2004) criteria for self-study research (self-initiated, aimed toward transformation, drawing on multiple qualitative methods, and grounded in description of practice). While multiple conceptions and methods of collaborative self study have been offered (e.g., Bullock & Ritter, 2011; LaBoskey, et al, 1998; Louie, Drevdahl, Purdy, & Stackman, 2003), we view our self-study as work done together to better understand how we, our relationships, our practices, and our world are co-constituted. Within this methodological frame, we sought modes of inquiry that aligned with a posthuman frame of productive difference. Therefore, we turned to diffraction (Barad, 2007/2014; Haraway, 2004), which, scientifically, refers to the way phenomena change upon meeting a barrier (for example, the way wave patterns change when passing through the gap in a harbor sea wall; Barad, 2014). As a mode of inquiry, mapping diffraction patterns requires attending to not just instances of difference, but also their effects—that is, what they produce (Haraway, 2004). Barad (2014) refers to this as “differentiation-entanglement,” or the processes of becoming-different or becoming-otherwise in relation to a constellation of material and discursive factors.

We developed common guiding questions for our inquiry and, at regular intervals over three months, we met online to share data we had collected in our local contexts. During those meetings we served as each other’s critical friends and engaged in a “coming to know process grounded in dialogue” (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2017, p. 12). At the end of the academic year, we
met to collectively discuss and engage in shared writing about the data we produced during and in-between our meetings, which included meeting recordings, emails, text messages, artifacts of practice, and research memos. We did this both virtually and in writing on a shared Google Doc. We avoided conventional qualitative practices like coding because they tend to reduce to sameness rather than attend to difference (MacLure, 2013). Instead, we experimented with collaborative meaning-making as a diffractive method, using the data described above, to collectively identify, articulate, and story our processes of differentiation and what they produced. In this way, analysis was a discursive process that included synthesis through dialogue and collaborative, as well as individual, narration of effects of difference.

**Findings**

*Producing our practices differently*

Based on the notion that materialities of place open and shut possibilities of becoming (Jones & Wolgum, 2016), Tammy used the documentary *Chef’s Table* to complicate pre-service teachers’ commonsense conceptions of instruction and assessment. In each documentary, top rated, Michelin-starred chefs narrated their learning journeys of “becoming chefs” by sharing their visceral and material experiences with and connection to their cultural histories; the land of their heritage; the taste, feel, smell of ingredients and food; the affect and emotion demonstrated through food--in sum, how the materialities of place opened and shut possibilities of their becoming-chef. Inserting these different materialities into the constellation of human/non-human intra-actions helped students of teaching think differently about enactments of learning in and out of classroom spaces. Many had not thought about instruction and assessment outside of classroom spaces and conceived of classrooms only as highly structured, measurable, school-based entities, and Tammy hoped to use the chef’s narratives to open spaces of learning in public and private lives that would help students “contemplate the ways bodies-and-places emerge together to create ways of being” (Jones & Wolgum, 2016, p. 77). She scaffolded the activity by helping students map each chef’s intra-actions (Barad, 2007) making visible the relationships among their emotions, places, bodies, food, families, and desires, creating material tracings of chef’s “becomings”. These activities helped students think differently about instruction, assessment, and learning, see the constraints and possibilities of “becoming with” the materialities of place, and offered an entrypoint for further conversations about how materialities of place opened and shut possibilities of becoming in their lives and those of their future students.

Katie pursued activities that were directly informed by posthuman concepts (Braidotti, 2013; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), such as one she developed in a research course that problematized the dominant narrative that the researcher is separate from her research, and thus able to produce a “vision from everywhere and nowhere,” as well as tackled head-on the ethical problems that stem from these “god tricks” (Haraway, 1988, p. 584). Examining sample narratives of researchers and their research projects, students identified multiple shaping factors from the researcher (e.g., her positionality, her theoretical perspective, where she locates the research problem, the methodological decisions she makes) and elsewhere (e.g., influences from the researcher’s institution, her access to particular contexts and participants, current political trends, available funding). These activities were interactive and heavily scaffolded through a jigsaw, and, seeing students successfully grasp the concept of research as a connected assemblage with multiple elements and distributed/collective agency, she recognized that participatory pedagogy could be used to make posthuman theory more accessible and thus was an important tool for disrupting mainstream thinking.

In her work with early career teachers scattered across the United States, Linda recognized teachers’ relationships as a source of support across time, place, and circumstances (Barad, 2007) that inspired acts of resistance and agency within local teacher communities. When she analyzed data collected during an in-person meeting and a subsequent group chat, Linda understood ways teachers’ willingness to invest in each other’s experiences and to ask for and provide support was co-constituted by their in-person meetings and online when technology mediated their interactions (Braidotti, 2013).
Charity, in a course regarding atypical development, experimented with arts-based pedagogies as a different entrypoint. One activity, “What made me who I am?” was intended to facilitate students’ appreciation of the full range of diversity in children's experiences, expressions, and capabilities, as well as offer the idea that there are multiple pathways for positive developmental outcomes. To engage in this discussion differently, Charity asked students to complete an “outline of person,” illustrating the things that they believed influenced their identity development. Students filled in their own characteristics (e.g. physical; personality; relational) and as a group, they compared and contrasted the visually-represented shared influences and patterns of development. Through discussion it became evident that they developed an appreciation of the range of diversity in their experiences of family, schooling, expressions of characteristics and capabilities. Moreover, Charity and her students discussed that nearly every factor they had identified had been influenced by both biological and environmental factors. To determine how her pedagogical intentions were experienced by students during this session, Charity added two questions to the course evaluation, asking explicitly if students benefited from the incorporation of art-based pedagogies. The course evaluations demonstrated that they overwhelmingly felt these pedagogies furthered their understanding of constructivist socio-cultural perspectives on learning/development, and students described their desire to incorporate art into their future classrooms as a means of promoting positive developmental outcomes for all students.

Practices producing us differently

A diffractive analysis of professional and personal data that she had collected helped Linda to understand ways she was being produced within a fluid entanglement of material, temporal, and discursive elements with her teacher-mentees and in her relationship with her daughter. During a Google Hangout four months after her daughter's first hospitalization for postpartum depression, a teacher, seated in her classroom, asked Linda, who was at her home, for advice regarding making teaching more sustainable without becoming a “slacker”. Linda encouraged the teacher to re-think the dichotomies she had set up—great/bad teacher and teaching/living—as a first step in finding ways that teaching and living might be reconceived and enacted as both/and. That conversation produced an understanding that Linda was not following her own advice regarding that binary. Days later, as Linda sat in an Adirondack chair at the edge of a lakeside dock she wrote, “The sound of the birdsong is so beautiful this morning, making me aware of the loss of so many mornings of being here as a whole person...I have ignored, even left my body at times when my daughter's illness and work became overwhelming. Being here in this moment with the birds, the lake, and my emotional pain reminds me that I am more”—that is, more than occupying only the binary of teacher educator/caretaker. These data points both demonstrate the entanglement of Linda’s subjectivities and practice.

Charity, after infusing art-based pedagogies such as self-portraiture into her teaching practices, began to expand her own notions of identity—such as exploring her insecurities as a scholar pushing herself to draw a future post-dissertation version of herself, one embracing new possibilities and power, and trusting her perceptions and voice. While researching art-based pedagogies Charity posted a quote above her desk to remind herself: “In artful development, enforced conformity is reclaimed by self-chosen, experienced, embodied change. As teachers explore change as feeling and form, they intuitively, imaginatively, and confidently come to trust themselves as their own reliable agents of change” (Diamond & van Halen-Faber, 2005, p. 81). Subsequently, Charity challenged herself this year to focus on incorporating creative methodologies in her research. For example, she used Gilligan’s Listening Guide in her dissertation study, a methodology that focuses on voice, creating I poems from participants’ stories, and identification of contrapuntal tensions layered below the surface of the participants actual words. This work has helped Charity transform the way that she listens to others and to herself and her inner voice. As a teacher, researcher, partner, woman, mother, sister, friend, and colleague, Charity has fundamentally started to trust her own voice after engaging in the multi-layered “listens” of not just her participants but her own reflections during her dissertation journey.
Drawing on mutant pedagogies, as described in the last section, helped Tammy realize the nature of her becoming as a multiplicitous, continuous process interconnected with that of her pre-service teacher-students as rural teacher, teacher educator, and educational researcher. In addition, putting theory to work with her students by locating instruction and assessment outside the classroom and attending to materiality of place amounted to making learning oddkin (Haraway, 2016), which produced Tammy as a qualitatively different teacher educator-researcher-theorist hybrid. Likewise, Katie experienced a similar process of differentiation. Even as she delved deeper into ontologically-different ideas that were seemingly abstract, she became even more firmly committed to practicing them, allowing her to pursue a becoming-hybrid rather than being boxed into the dichotomy of academic researcher/practitioner. One way she did so was to advocate for ongoing professional development in the form of “teaching talks” in which, during their monthly meetings, a designated faculty member opened their practice as a site of inquiry. Katie led two of these talks, each time facilitating and debriefing an interactive lesson that put both posthuman theory and sociocultural pedagogy to work.

Engaging differently with the world-beyond-the-classroom

Linda and her daughter, through co/autoethnography (Coia & Taylor, 2013), have begun to process their experiences from her daughter’s treatment for postpartum depression. Reading their individual texts “diffractively into each other” (Taguchi, 2012, p. 265), helped them to identify the powerful material effect of societal discourses and having to perform “normally” in the world, in her daughter’s case, and “professionally” in the office, in Linda’s case. They recognized that women who dare to show a self not conforming to these norms are storied as unnatural, unhinged, and unprofessional. In the process, they were able to relocate themselves “in relations with multiple others” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 50) through ever widening circles of support and influence, including human (the new baby, doctors, family, friends, colleagues, etc.) and material (medication, smartphones, roads, etc.) elements in their assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and reconstituted the meaning of their experiences.

For both Tammy and Katie, putting different theories to work as an ethical imperative in the era of Trump and rise of global fascism (Strom & Martin, 2017) has pervaded their (intra)actions with a sense of urgency. For Tammy, that produces a desire to read, listen to podcasts, attend conferences, have conversations, engage in thinking/writing, and respectfully enter indigenous spaces, however uncomfortable those spaces may be, to remain open to possibilities of the material intra-actions that may occur and help create resistances to status quos of education in her state. For Katie, this translates to building a research-and-practice-beyond-the-classroom agenda of infiltrating and interrupting mainstream as well as exclusionary philosophical thinking by writing and presenting in both types of spaces. For instance, she recently published an article in a philosophy journal that, blending personal narrative and posthuman theoretical discussion, made an explicit argument for making theories like rhizomatics accessible to a wider audience. Second, she led a practice-based conference for a consortium of over 100 educational doctorate programs across the country, and created the theme and keynote presentation regarding putting posthuman theory to work to think differently about preparing educational leaders.

Conclusion

Although we made “cuts” (Barad, 2007) to present the ideas above as distinct, in putting theory to work we have come to realize that these processes are entangled and co-create each other. As such, we are distributed throughout these processes as expanded, relational selves (Braidotti, 2013) constructing new modes of interconnection with each other, our students, and the range of other human, non-human, and incorporeal elements comprising the assemblages of our practice and beyond. We explain these ideas in detail next.

Putting theory to work creates new modes of educator subjectivity and practice—we are teaching-otherwise, assessing-otherwise, researching-otherwise, and so forth. Thus, putting theory to work is a relational, multiplistic process of thinking, teaching, and becoming that
disrupts harmful binaries, which for us, included the oppositions of theory and practice, researcher and practitioner, professional and personal, and art and science. In moving beyond binary and embracing a “both/and” perspective, we forge territories that both create new, unthought-of possibilities and worlds, as well as help process pain imposed by a world of separations and hegemonic Eurocentric, patriarchal ways of knowing and being (Braidotti, 2013). In the process, we also produce augmented selves, such as Charity developing a confident researcher-voice, Linda developing practices that sustain the range of her subjectivities, and Tammy and Katie experiencing hybridized researcher-theorist-practitioner becomings. These processes demonstrate the agentic, vital material impact of theory. Put another way, theory is not an abstract concept, but an immanent, active agent in producing us, influencing our work, and shaping possible futures.

In the tradition of self-study, the binary of researcher/researched is already blurred (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2009). Through our diffractive self-study method, we also disrupted the binary of you/me, or self/other—in other words, interrupting the notion of the individual, autonomous, bounded self that is one of the very foundations of Western culture (Braidotti, 2013) and informs harmful narratives in education, such as ones evoking “bootstraps” and “grit” (Gorski, 2016). From a dualistic perspective, this project might have been viewed as four separate self-studies. However, through our collaborative and ongoing processes of joint meaning-making through a diffractive method, we have morphed our understanding of collaborative self study. The individual imposed boundaries of our separately collected data and writing became porous and “leaked” into each other, producing new, and qualitatively different, understanding that was more than the sum of its parts. In creating this new understanding, we continue to be produced differently—we are augmented by our collectively produced affect (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). And as we fold these understandings back into our individual instructional practices, we teach and connect with students differently. In this revised enactment of collaborative self-study, we are reclaiming an “excluded middle” (Semetsky & Masny, 2013) and embracing entanglement and hybridity.

Self-study has been a site of resistance to traditional norms of inquiry and practice for two decades. In this paper, we suggest that theory, particularly in these “post-truth” (Peters, 2017) and “post-theory” (Braidotti, 2013) times, can also be a site of resistance and create opportunities for thinking/becoming-otherwise in educational settings and beyond. In particular, a posthuman lens offers powerful tools for employing theory in ways that matter, and in conjunction with self-study, holds immense potential for disrupting status quos in education and beyond that maintain and expand systems of oppression. In sum, inspired by both our theory and diffractive method, we suggest embracing patterns of difference in self-study holds potential for fostering creativity and opening up as-yet-unimagined ways of teaching and inquiring.

References


Not-so-secret stories: Reshaping the teacher education professional knowledge landscape through self-study

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This chapter is inspired simultaneously by Clandinin and Connelly’s (1995) metaphor of professional knowledge landscapes for describing the nature of teacher educator professional knowledge and our experiences of the transformative potential of self-study methodology. In this chapter, we propose a conceptual re-visioning of the professional knowledge landscape of teacher educators and the unique role of self-study research not only as a means for knowing pedagogy, but for nurturing, preserving, and shaping the terrain of teacher educator expertise.

This chapter builds on two previous empirical studies in which we (authors) applied Clandinin and Connolly’s (1995) metaphor of teachers’ professional knowledge landscapes to investigate our work as teacher educators (TEs). In the first study (Berry & Forgasz, 2016), we explored the metaphor to articulate how our “secret stories” of professional learning defied the “sacred stories” about TE professional knowledge. Sensing the significance of publicly sharing our counter-narratives about TE professional learning, we concluded by encouraging others to share their stories too:

“We hope that sharing our narratives may provoke other teacher educators to consider possible resonances with their experiences and insights and to investigate their own stories of becoming. In this way, collectively, we might succeed in challenging the dominant discourses of teacher education and offer new ‘stories to live by’ as teacher educators.” (Berry & Forgasz, 2016, p. 97)

Presenting our study at an Australian teacher education conference, we ended with an invitation for interested colleagues to join our project. Four colleagues responded, which instigated study two (Berry, Forgasz, Brandenburg & McGraw, 2017). Initially, we focused on our different motivations to participate in the project and our interpretations of the story metaphor in relation to our work as TEs. Each of us expressed concerns about increasing external accountability and
control measures within our education work and that our tasks as TEs appeared more akin to those of service providers than professional educators. We drew on self-study methodology to investigate and make explicit the stories that we encountered and lived as TEs negotiating an accountability environment. Two categories of insight arose from this study: 1) recognizing the kinds of stories that we construct and live by as TEs and, 2) the role of self-study within the professional knowledge landscape of TEs working in a standards-based regime (Berry et al, 2017).

Here, we further elaborate our ideas connecting professional knowledge landscapes with the work of self-study research and teacher educator knowledge and practice. We do so through a conceptual exploration. First, we present the two main constructs framing our work: the metaphor of professional knowledge landscapes (PKLs), with specific reference to TEs; and the emergence of self-study as a means of drawing attention to the professional role of TEs. We then locate our work within the Australian teacher education context, highlighting the ways in which policy initiatives are reshaping TEs work (including our own). This sets the scene for our argument about the increasing marginalization of TEs’ own perspectives and voices in the (re)production of knowledge about teaching (the flattening of the landscape) and our challenge to TEs to publicly participate in articulating and sharing their professional knowledge of practice through self-study (the reshaping of the landscape). Our two preceding self-studies were based on empirical data drawn from our practice. In this chapter, we build on these studies, further theorizing the relationship between PKLs and self-study methodology.

Theoretical framework

Professional knowledge landscapes

Clandinin and Connelly (1995; 1996) use the evocative metaphor of a landscape to describe the nature and composition of teacher professional knowledge. This metaphor is particularly helpful for conceptualising teacher professional knowledge since it accounts for the multiple, contradictory and dilemma-ridden contexts and places in which teachers undertake their work. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) differentiate between “two fundamentally different places on the landscape: the one behind the classroom door with students and the other in professional places with others” (p. 25). As they traverse the boundaries of these different places, teachers learn to “live, tell, retell and relive” (Clandinin & Huber, 2005, p. 46) different stories of their professional knowledge.

In the perceived safety of their classrooms or other private places, teachers live and share their “secret lived stories” of practice (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25) which reveal the tentative, thoughtful and uncertain nature of teacher knowledge. This view of teacher professional knowledge is consistent with conceptions of the teacher as reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983) and of teaching as inherently complex and problematic (Berry, 2004). The broader working landscape of school, however, is “littered with imposed prescriptions” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25) about teaching. These prescriptions represent the sacred stories, the official stories of teacher professional knowledge espoused in public policy and theory. Sacred stories are “funneled down” to teachers from a range of seemingly indisputable external authorities, including “[r]esearchers, policy makers, [and] senior administrators” (ibid, 1996, p.25). When teachers interact in out-of-classroom places, they live and tell cover stories through which they present an impression of their professional knowledge that fits “within the acceptable range of the story of school being lived in the school” (op cit, 1996, p.25).

Clandinin and Connelly’s notion of teachers’ professional knowledge landscapes (PKLs) has been applied extensively in teacher research. We see similar potential for framing the complexity of teacher educator professional knowledge, as evident in Craig’s (2010) study of her personal-professional change in the face of an accountability driven environment.

Self-study methodology

Self-study formally emerged as a field of research in the early 1990’s from the efforts of TEs
who were openly questioning whether/how their approaches to teaching made a difference to their students’ learning (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998). Importantly, as these TEs sought to improve their practice, they recognised the difficulties, contradictions and dilemmas of consistently enacting their beliefs and ideals. They pushed back against a prevailing transmissive view of educating teachers, and an academic culture that separated the role of teacher and researcher. They sought to bring greater attention and value to the role of TE as a knowledge-maker and to take control of their professional activity and professional status as TEs through researching and publishing about their own educational practices. They documented the complex nature of their work, including challenging the various assumptions and expectations of teacher education and its practices (for a full account see Loughran, 2004). Hence self-study, as a form of ‘insider research’, evolved as a means to pay careful attention to and value teacher educators’ knowledge as it is understood and lived within the immediate context of practice and within the wider educational, organizational and structural contexts of their work.

**Context**

*Australian teacher education*

As TEs working in Australia, we are encountering significant structural reforms to teacher education that are reshaping the landscape of TE's professional knowledge. For example, the recent introduction of a national accreditation system for initial TE programs in Australia aims to standardise “program development, program delivery and program outcomes” and thus to “quality-assure” the preparation of “classroom ready teachers” (AITSL, 2015, p.6). Under this system, TE institutions must provide detailed evidence of how individual courses are meeting the specified (37) standards for graduate teachers, with TE institutions held accountable according to “a rigorous and nationally consistent accreditation process” (AITSL, 2015, p.1.). While we point out that we are not opposed to the notion of standards *per se*, we see important implications of this reform for the work of teacher educators and teacher education as a field. Green, Reid and Brennan (2017) similarly highlight this challenging situation for Australian teacher education: “Abstracted, reified, denatured and increasingly devalued in policy, teacher education is indeed struggling to thrive as an intellectual and practical endeavour in a policy context that increasingly seeks to render it as an instrumental field” (p.39).

In this view of teacher education, TEs are positioned as technicians, delivering externally prescribed outcomes, and kept accountable to these outcomes through externally imposed assessment measures. As a consequence, TE's knowledge becomes increasingly deprofessionalised, standardized, and deprivatised, leaving few private spaces and few opportunities for teacher educators to exercise either autonomy or professional judgment. In Clandinin and Connelly’s terms, the “secret lived stories” of teacher educators’ professional knowledge are being progressively squeezed out of the educational landscape.

**Conceptualising self-study as secret-story telling**

As experienced teacher educators, we see that it is increasingly difficult to tell and share these stories of our ‘insider’ knowledge. Also, like Dunn (2016), we see the effect of the policy environment on others, especially beginning TEs; “this policy context, rife with accountability measures and threats to traditional teacher preparation, has a reverberating impact on novice teacher educators’ experiences” (p. 23). We wonder what opportunities exist for new TEs to understand teacher educator expertise as anything but a flat, unerring landscape? What opportunities remain for recognising and paying attention to the bumpy uncertainties and dilemmas of practice as valuable aspects of learning about teaching, when TEs’ main task is to instruct teacher candidates along a straight, uncomplicated and heavily surveilled road to “classroom ready” (AITSL, 2015) teacher knowledge, signposted by externally prescribed standards?

Among the findings of our previous collaborative self-studies of the sacred and secret stories we were living as TEs was our reawakened appreciation of the significant role of self-study
scholarship within the broader TE professional knowledge landscape. In this study, we further theorise our understanding of self-study as a form of secret story telling that enables TEs to resist the deprofessionalisation of their roles and reclaim the landscape of teacher educator professional knowledge. Building on the implications of our previous studies, we arrived at these three conceptual propositions about the value of secret story telling through self-study within a policy climate of standards-based reform:

(i) **Self-study as stance:** valuing secret stories as a dimension of teacher educator professional knowledge;
(ii) **Self-study as methodology:** discovering and formalising the secret stories of teacher educator professional knowledge;
(iii) **Self-study as not-so-secret-story telling:** reshaping the contours of the teacher educator professional knowledge landscape.

(i) **Self-study as stance: valuing secret stories as a dimension of teacher educator professional knowledge.**

Thinking of self-study scholarship as secret story knowledge is helpful in reminding us of the fundamental commitments of self-study in terms of its stance towards knowledge, and its purposes for producing knowledge. Just as Clandinin and Connelly's secret stories ascribe value to teachers' individual, lived knowledge of practice, so too does self-study assume that teacher educator professional knowledge is developed by teacher educators themselves through the enactment of practice, as opposed to normative (sacred story) definitions of what should happen in that practice. This view does not grow out of a hierarchical privileging of practitioner knowledge per se. Rather, it reflects a moral stance towards teacher educator professional knowledge making in which 'improvement' must be concerned with what is 'good for these students in this moment', as opposed to what is technically proficient.

Self-study research resembles secret story knowledge not just because of who produces it (the practitioner), but perhaps more significantly, because of the kind of knowledge it produces. Charteris and Smith (2017) remind us that in Clandinin and Connelly's original conception of secret stories, teachers are revealed to be "tentative, thoughtful and uncertain" (p. 6). Thinking of self-study as secret story knowledge in this regard reminds us that "the work of self-study acknowledges ... and rejoices in the uncertainty of the current world" (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998, p. 235) and that "the aim of self-study research is to provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm and settle" (Bullough & Pinnegar 2001, p.20). This is evident, for example, in the representations of knowledge utilized by self-study researchers such as "paradoxes" (Wilkes, 1998), "axioms" (Senese, 2002) and "tensions" (Berry, 2004); or other representations such as personal theories or understandings about practice, for example, "principles of learning to teach teachers" (Bullock, 2009) or "assertions for practice and understanding" (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015). In this sense, we are reminded that the aim of self-study researchers is not to be the producers of new sacred stories of certainty about teacher education practice. Indeed, the spirit of self-study is concerned with challenging the taken-for-granted and encouraging others (students, colleagues) to do the same. A self-study stance positions the researcher as an inquirer who questions practice, is willing to look into that which is uncomfortable, feels a responsibility to persist with investigations in the face of vulnerability and feels a sense of openness, willingness and responsibility to make findings public even when these may contradict the received wisdom of sacred stories. A self-study stance is consistent with that of Schön's (1983) reflective practitioner who actively questions "the definition of his [sic] task, the theories-in-action that he[sic] brings to it, and the measures of performance by which he [sic] is controlled" (p.337).

Over twenty years ago, Clandinin and Connelly (1996) argued that, given the highly individualised, contextual complexity of each educator's professional knowledge landscape, "there is at best a modest place for the research-based purveyor of generic effective teaching practices" (p. 29). Nevertheless, we find our work is increasingly impinged upon by new sacred stories of teacher education and we have seen the subsequent rise of the cover story in both individual and institutional teacher education practices. Like Clandinin and Connelly (1996), we recognise
that something significant is at stake here, because “the telling and living of cover stories may give the impression that teachers [and TEs] do not know that they know. But they do” (p. 28). In this context, it is especially important that self-study researchers maintain a stance towards knowledge as flexible, experiential, responsive, and contextually situated; and a stance towards teacher professionalism as contextual, tentative, and uncertain, even though characterising our practice in these ways “can be professionally damaging in a climate where certainty, competence and confidence are highly valued” (Charteris & Smith, 2017, p. 6).

(ii) Self-study as methodology: discovering and formalising the secret stories of teacher educator professional knowledge

Clandinin and Connelly (1995) proposed secret stories as essentially private forms of teacher knowledge, enacted behind the closed doors of their own classrooms. If teachers choose to share their secret stories, they tend to tell them “to other teachers in other secret places” (p. 25). By remaining internal or shared only in private places, the value of secret story knowledge is limited, both in terms of its educative possibilities for the individual ‘teller’ and also in terms of broader recognition of secret story knowledge as valid and valuable. We contend that the methodology of self-study offers a powerful means of both coming to know and formalising secret story knowledge. Thinking of self-study in this way opens up opportunities for TEs not only to discover, share and learn from their secret stories, but also as a form of rigorous research, self-study methodology formalizes and legitimizes secret stories as valid and important forms of teacher knowledge that shape our collective understanding of the professional knowledge landscape.

Features of self-study methodology that enable the discovery of teacher educators’ secret story knowledge include:

- A focus on context: Emphasizes that contexts shape actions, interactions and understandings so the local and particular is crucial.
- A focus on self, and self-in-relation: Emphasizes the person of the educator within the context of the teaching/learning relationship.
- A focus on the ‘problematic’: Emphasizes identifying and clarifying problems of practice and working towards deeper understandings of these problems through planned and purposeful inquiry. Because it is not always obvious, particular tools such as assumption hunting, examining alignment between beliefs and practices and paying attention to the unexpected are approaches regularly used in self-study to bring to light aspects of practice that may otherwise go unnoticed.
- Seeking alternate perspectives: Investigating practice through a range of perspectives, can bring new and deeper insights about practice. The point here is not to confirm, but to uncover new ways of, and angles into learning about practice.

Hence, the main purpose of self-study is not in solving problems or creating solutions (creating sacred story knowledge) but in clarifying, extending understanding, or further questioning what can be known. Knowledge is never taken for granted, but is continually developed and refined as a consequence of engaging with and undertaking the study.

Features of self-study methodology that enable the formalising of teacher educators’ secret story knowledge include:

- Systematic data collection: The methodological approach is purposeful, rigorous and explicit.
- Commitment to checking data: Through intentional collaboration, meanings and relationships can be challenged and revised.
- Form: Research accounts go beyond anecdotes or description to communicate knowledge in a form that is useful, useable and relevant for others (working in a similar situation). Importantly, even though the aim is to formalise knowledge, maintaining that secret story stance towards knowledge (as tentative, uncertain, etc) is paramount, therefore not necessarily resolving problems, but evoking continuous investigation and
inquiry.

In its specific focus on self, self-study can be distinguished from other genres of practitioner research.

(iii) Self-study as not-so-secret story telling: reshaping the contours of the teacher educator professional knowledge landscape

Story has long held a prominent place in self-study work because stories help us understand the self and self-in-relation to others. However, while there is a powerful place for story in research accounts, the task of self-study researchers is not just to collect and tell stories, but to pay explicit attention to the stories that are told and the insights and understandings developed through the study and how these may be meaningfully shared with others. Unlike Clandinin and Connelly’s secret stories that remain within the private spaces that teachers inhabit, self-study requires the public sharing of study outcomes in order to make them “informative for others and available for critical debate” (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2016, p.509). Through making secret story knowledge public through self-study, the insights and understandings that are developed can be challenged, extended, transformed and translated by others. At the same time, a major challenge for the community is not to strip the knowledge of its contextual particulars or reduce what is learned to a set of propositions or templates for practice, but to communicate it in ways that capture and hold on to the nature of the knowledge as uncertain, ambiguous, complex and changing.

Conclusion

In light of their extensive review of self-study literature, Vanassache and Kelchtermans (2015) proposed that by contributing “a broader, more ‘pedagogical’ understanding of teacher education practices” self-study scholarship “holds strong promises[sic] for critically challenging the policies in many countries that have furthered a rather narrow and instrumentalist view of teacher education practice and scholarship (e.g. Darling-Hammond, 2010; Murray, 2008)” (p.521). To fulfil this potential, however, we have argued that we must undertake particular kinds of self-study inquiry. Like Cole and Knowles (2004), we argued the need for “going public and being political” with self-study research that transcends the “immediate agenda of self-study aimed at improving practice” and advocates instead “for educational change in a broad sense” (p.478).

If there is a zealousness driving our argument, it is not that of the self-study gatekeeper determined to define and delimit the field, but that of the teacher educator determined that teacher education cannot and should not ever be understood merely as the technical application of knowledge to practice. In this chapter, we made a case for teacher educators contributing to broader conversations about the contextualised, relational and moral aspects of their professional knowing as a form of professional resistance. To do so, we reconsidered the nature and place of self-study scholarship using Clandinin and Connelly’s conception of the professional knowledge landscape. We described the ubiquitous spread of sacred stories on the teacher education professional knowledge landscape, the subsequent rise of the cover story and the impending sense that our secret stories are being squeezed out of the landscape altogether. Thinking about self-study research as a form of secret story telling clarified our understanding that: as a stance, self-study values the contextualised, enacted and contingent nature of teacher educator professional knowledge; as a methodology, self-study enables teacher educators to discover, develop and refine their personal professional knowledge of practice; and that through impactful public dissemination, self-study scholarship can offer powerful counterpoints to the instrumentalist-technicist discourses about teacher education that dominate current policy and practice. In other words, while self-study provides a means to know and articulate teacher educators’ secret story knowledge, it also compels us not to keep our stories secret, but to tell them, and to tell them in ways that position teacher educators and their students as active and legitimate knowledge makers.
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Amanda Berry and Rachel Forgasz
Chapter 4: Not-so-secret stories: Reshaping the teacher education professional knowledge landscape


Jumping the Dragon Gate: Experience, contexts, career pathways and professional identity

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“Somewhere in one of the rivers of the land, there is a great and powerful waterfall; it is so high and so vast that it is as if water was gushing from a cut in the heavens. At the top of that waterfall, beyond anyone’s view, is the Dragon Gate” (Lin, 2009, p. 93). Atop the gate sit dragon ornaments holding “the secret to the Dragon Gate...For if ever a fish is able to swim up the waterfall and pass through the gate...its spirit enters the gate...changing the fish into the form of a flying dragon!” (p. 93-94).

This ancient Chinese metaphor—used in modern China to recognize courage and perseverance demonstrated in accomplishing arduous life-goals—came to us as a traveling story (Olson &

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Craig (2009) brought by Cheryl after a Chinese educator commented that her career was like fish jumping the Dragon Gate. Discussing the Dragon Gate metaphor, career-pathway stories gradually emerged, revealing challenges that shaped our career decisions and teacher identities, and precipitating this self-study.

Our twenty-year knowledge community (Craig, 2007) began over school portfolio work—hence our becoming known as the Portfolio Group (Curtis, Reid, Kelley, Martindell & Craig, 2013). We represent varied content areas/levels of education from K-12 to university, each working with pre-/in-service teachers in different capacities. Our common context is the fourth largest, most diverse urban center in the United States, in a state characterized as the birthplace of the current testing milieu. In recent years, we each underwent shifting career pathways due to varied motivations. For personal reasons, Tim and Donna returned to school-based classrooms. Michaelann moved from classroom to district by choice, whereas Mike moved grade levels by school directive. Prompted by deteriorating work environments, Cheryl moved to a new university and Gayle from K-12 to higher education, creating new beginnings and different immersions in the teacher education enterprise. For each, career shifts reshaped teacher educator identity, eliciting reconsideration of our teacher stories, the stories that come back to us from others, our 'stories to live by,' and our 'best-loved selves.'

As teacher educators working with pre-/in-service teachers from K-12 to higher education, we recognized that facilitating/supporting career decisions of those with whom we work is both subtly and overtly woven into our practice. We wondered what we might learn by critically examining our career journeys through the metaphor that could improve the support we offer that may guide others to vault the Dragon Gate.

In this collaborative self-study, we employed the Dragon Gate metaphor to reframe (Munby & Russell, 1990) and examine experiential/contextual challenges that have shaped our educator career pathways and professional identities, eliciting both old stories reinterpreted/retold and new stories not previously told. As self-initiated/self-focused, our work was grounded in self-study research (LaBoskey, 2004), employing narrative methods of inquiry. In studying our individual selves, actions, ideas, “the ‘not self”’ (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998, p. 236), context, process, and relationships (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001) were central to our work. As critical friends, we determined that a collaborative self-study would create an interactive, multi-voice, generative inquiry space (Schuck & Russell, 2005).

Since the beginning, “the human species has thought with metaphors and learned through stories” (Bateson, 1994, p. 11). Story is a “portal to experience” (Xu & Connelly, 2010, p. 35), the main vehicle to capture and communicate experience in its rawest form. Many kinds of stories exist, for example, sacred stories (Crites, 1971) that are nearly bred in our bones. There are secret stories we live and tell ourselves (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) and voice in trusted spaces. Cover stories help to “maintain a sense of continuity with the dominant stories shaping [our] professional knowledge landscape[s]” (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 7). Counter stories are largely unspoken narratives advancing the moral self-definition of their teller and, according to Lindemann Nelson (2001), the only remedies for repairing damaged identities.

Identity (Palmer, 1997) is integral to this self-study. Dewey (1920/1967) discussed “the self [as] not [being] ready-made, but something in continuous formation, through choice and action” (p. 194). An educator’s ‘story to live by’—one’s identity-related narrative—is shaped by one’s personal practical knowledge forged in context (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), and affected by changing professional knowledge landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) and career moves. A ‘story to leave by’ (Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009)—identity-related narrative of leaving one’s place of employment—emerges when a ‘story to live by’ is less than an educator imagines his/her ‘best-loved self” (Schwab, 1954/1978; Craig, 2013) to be, and thereby largely foreshadows career changes. ‘Stories to begin again by’ (Craig, 2018) are intervening narratives that fill the transitional career space between stories of staying and stories of leaving, more fully expressing and sustaining the ‘best-loved self.”
According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (p. 5). Metaphors provide a way of defining reality, of creating a bridge between the familiar and the unknown. They also serve as tools in understanding teachers’ experience, knowledge, and practice (Craig, You, & Oh, 2017), allowing us to gain new insights by reframing experiences holistically (Munby & Russell, 1990)—in this case, the Dragon Gate metaphor.

**Aims**

Reframing the shaping of our careers and teacher identities through the Dragon Gate metaphor was the provocation for this self-study (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). As “seasoned” educators with abundant professional and life experiences, we often encounter challenging career-pathway situations/contexts that shape our identities and even bump against our images of ‘best-loved self.’ We wondered how those we work with, who often hold fewer professional and life experiences (and whose roles/positions perhaps hold less power), cope with similar challenges. To improve our support of pre-/in-service teachers as their careers and identities grow/shift in new directions, we focused research on better understanding factors shaping our own career pathways and professional identities. We wondered: In what ways do experiences, relationships, contexts, and visions of self, influence shifts(changes in career pathways and re-shape our teacher identities?

**Methods**

Our self-study employed narrative methods to examine researchers’ career-pathway storied experiences as reframed through the Dragon Gate metaphor (Munby & Russell, 1990). Data sources included meetings notes, electronic communications, and individual reflective writings (Schön, 1983). In monthly meetings and online collaborative texts, we engaged in critical dialogue (Guilfoyle, Hamilton, Pinnegar, & Placier, 2004) around researcher reflections. Using narrative methods, data were analyzed to identify intersecting narratives and emergent themes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Addressing trustworthiness, our self-study drew on the authority of experience (Munby & Russell, 1994) and the mindful selection of professional exemplars that showed “how a practice works” (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002, p. 6) and expressed transparency.

**Outcomes**

Initial conversations around the Dragon Gate metaphor evoked several thought-provoking impressions. Like majestic waterfalls whose dynamic flowing water are constantly shaped by rain, snow, and drought, professional pathways are ever-changing in response to mercurial contexts, leadership shifts, and personal/family situations. Like images mirrored on water seen more clearly from a nearby vantage point, understanding one’s experiences is enhanced by a close-up examination. Whereas as fish are transformed by jumping the Dragon Gate at the pinnacle of a journey, we understood (perhaps influenced by our Western perspectives) that transformational experiences occur throughout careers. Considering this, we focused reflective writings on situations that transformed our career pathways and teacher identities. Analysis of reflections identified multiple themes, four of which we present here with a cross-section of exemplars mindfully selected to give voice to all researchers.

A prominent theme throughout reflective writings was the influence of changing professional landscapes on career-pathway decisions. Tim’s early-school-context story highlighted trusting environments.

*My first experience as an educator was teaching high school remedial reading in one of our poorest wards. The job was grueling to say the least, but because of a tight knit gay and lesbian community on the campus I chose to stay. In 1988 the AIDS epidemic hit this community hard and in addition to losing my partner, Rodney, I lost my mentor and best friend, Jim.*
Donna’s return-to-the-classroom story disclosed unexpected hurdles on the professional landscape.

The switch from public to private settings is very important. I truly considered going back to [our local district] when I decided to go back to teaching full time, but the district had just instituted a hiring freeze—more evidence of the district’s undervaluing of teachers. However, that forced me to consider other districts and independent schools.

Moving from classroom to district, Michaelann reflected,

I am struggling with letting go of my school, my students, and my colleagues. I guess I am going through the period in life where you send your students to college or into life and have a hard time converting their room. I am still struggling with this, so bear with me during this time. I am finding my position difficult, in that there are no real parameters to what you have to do or not do. The job is what you make it—but being in the arts is totally different than in core areas that are tested.

For Mike, a declining professional landscape became his ‘story to leave by.’

My change in schools was a consideration of safety and sanity. Administration changes brought repeated situations that caused teachers to lodge complaints with me, the campus teacher union steward. For me, an environment in which one is constantly on alert is not the most conducive for learning and teaching. Dealing with the issues of other teachers became a greater and greater part of my daily work life. I desired a place to teach where I felt safe and could focus on my practice.

Gayle recounted a parallel story.

Leaving K-12 schools was difficult. Changing landscapes shifted attention away from teacher practice and outside pressure groups (mostly non-educators) interfered with the goings-on of classrooms and schools. Increasingly, actions/decrees coming down the conduit ran counter to my belief that teachers must be involved in decisions about schools and what/how to teach. I loved working with students, teachers, and parents, but reached an impasse where my professional agency and ability to constructively contribute to the professional growth of others—and mine—was constantly negated.

Another recurrent theme was tensions between how career pathways are viewed by others and how they actually unfold. Donna reflected on the visibility of professional growth.

Something that strikes me about the story about the fish and the dragon is that on the outside, I have not transformed that much since I started working with the Portfolio Group in 1999. I am still teaching middle school English and history. I teach at a different school, I go home to an expanded family (2 kids), but the rhythm of my day is much the same as it was 20 years ago. I plan lessons, I instruct middle school students, I sponsor clubs, I grade papers. This fish is not a dragon! My transformations are invisible (or at least not obvious).

Similarly, Michaelann shared,

On the surface it may look as if very little has changed over the past 20 years in my professional life. I still work in the same district, still work in the visual arts, and still meet with critical friends; I have moved out of the classroom and into administration and now work with mentoring, guiding, and teaching teachers. I have moved out of the stream and onto the mountain of traditional ivory tower educational structures but am still looking for my own path to the Dragon Gate.
Perceptions of schools vs reality appeared in Mike's reflections.

*The school in which I currently teach is located in an economically upscale area. The new building is state of the art. It is assumed that teaching there is an easy gig—lots of funding, students of advantage, privilege, etc. The reality is that it is similar to many inner-city schools—a Title 1 campus with a very diverse population, a budget that is watched very carefully, and students in need of motivation.*

Cheryl considered a falsely-perceived smooth pathway.

*At first brush, I appear as someone who has successfully transcended multiple Dragon Gates to become a full professor-endowed chair with an arms-length list of publications and awards. But this is not true. Many Dragon Gates appeared on my pathway that I did not vault. Those lack-of-successes also brought me to my current position, indelibly shaping my identity and awakening me to teaching and teacher education struggles.*

A related theme was *tensions between the stories we tell ourselves and the stories others tell about us*. Opinions of others convinced Mike to accept a new role.

*While I thoroughly enjoy working with pre-service teachers, it was not something that I sought out. It came to me when others said, ‘You are good at what you do. You need to be teaching others.’*

In contrast, Tim's new roles went mostly unnoticed.

*I was elected to head two National Council of Teachers of English affiliates—one at the local level and one at the state level—which under my leadership showed significant growth in membership and areas of service, yet this was barely acknowledged by the school district. The district did not support or hinder my involvement in professional organizations.*

Of her move to private school, Donna wrote,

*When people hear that I teach at College Prep, they often think that I’ve “arrived” (maybe I’m a dragon after all). Although I appreciate the huge boost in pay, the safe working conditions, and the freedom, I miss the diversity of our city’s public-school classroom. In some ways, the gates of daily challenges have been stripped away.*

Gayle mulled over the “degree to which others’ perceptions influence and potentially shape [our] teacher identity.”

*It brought back the mixed comments from others regarding my move from K-12 to higher education—admonishments for leaving K-12, hints of assumed failure, praise for pursuing teacher education, and even approvals for ‘seeing the light’ and leaving K-12. It’s difficult not to let others’ perceptions influence how I see myself.*

Also rippling through our reflections was the intersection of job positions with age/gender in both seen and unseen ways. Cheryl shared an early-career story.

*In my second year of teaching I was part of an experimental program aiming to bridge the theory-practice chasm for pre-service candidates. Ironically, I was helping beginning teachers to navigate the theory-practice divide between institutions, but no one was assisting me with the same phenomenon. Deemed “too young” and “too practical” at university, I began to question how a person could never age and be too theoretical and too practical at the same time.*
Age appeared in Gayle’s late-career story.

At my previous institution, age and experience seemed to become a detriment. The long-term practice of hiring more-experienced post-doctorate (older, higher-paid) clinical instructors for undergraduate courses changed abruptly to hiring less-experienced, doctoral students (usually younger, lower-paid). Complications soon arose: limited or lack of teaching experience held by the doctoral students; reluctance on their part to offer suggestions during planning meetings; dependence on the lead instructor regarding what needed to happen in classrooms—ultimately creating a revolving door of instructors.

For Tim, age became an unspoken factor.

I saw that I was at a dead end in my career with the school district because of my age; yet because I was able to retire, I was able to return to teaching at a competitive, lower salary level. The private school values my experience—both as a teacher and as a curriculum leader—and trusts my expertise in my classroom.

In Michaelann’s case, the age issue was more apparent.

While I understand districts need to plan ahead, it’s unnerving when I’m asked, ‘So how much longer do you plan to work?’ I’m not even close to retiring!

Age-related issues also played into Cheryl’s recent move.

The age-on-the-page criteria seemingly was applied to me but not to the males around me. I again took an unknown leap in favor of my ‘best-loved self.’ This leap birthed a ‘story to begin again by,’ which restored my faith in local education, my pride of place, and my wounded professional identity. It also has enabled me to speak with “candor [and] proper introspection” (Nash, 2004, p. 31) about my career’s underbelly and caused me not to narratively smooth (Spence, 1984) bumps in career—which contributed to my jumping the Dragon Gate with stories instructive to me and novice, experienced teachers, and teacher educators.

Discussion

Reframing our experiences through the Dragon Gate metaphor brought forth new and previously unshared stories—some new to ourselves as well! Our research showed how stories told publicly—especially those not previously revealed publicly—give insights into contextualized lived experiences that shape educator career decisions and professional identities (Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009). Uncovered were the ways in which the self, having been stifled and stymied for a significant period, and having exhausted other options, is keenly aware of what is both gained and lost in life-/career-sustaining decisions (Gayle leaving K-12). As teachers/teacher educators, we constantly negotiate situations and work environment that can kill us, cause us to take flight, or inspire and enrich us—sometimes bringing about difficult career decisions in our pursuit of continued professional growth.

Also brought forward were stories of how internal/external expectations and perceptions of position/place create tensions in one’s self-image as teacher/teacher educator, often challenging one’s teacher identity (Clandinin et al., 2006). Researcher reflections of, “On the surface it may look as if very little has changed in my professional life” (Michaelann) and “My transformations are invisible” (Donna), speak to the flat trajectory of teaching in which teacher growth may be present in practice but not apparent to others. Shared stories also presented diverse, and perhaps counter, images of teacher educators from school-based individuals to those in the academy (Mike’s in-school work with pre-service teachers).
Stories of experience told in this self-study revealed our narrative truths, which also held historical truths (positions, job descriptions, dates) sprinkled throughout them (Spence, 1984). We acknowledged the inclination to tell “Hollywood stories” when looking back on career and recognized the tendency to leave out uncomfortable details (Tim spoke to homosexuality; Cheryl spoke about age/gender). Stories uncovered how appearing youthful is a disadvantage, however, the age-on-the-page eventually catches one up, particularly for females who tend to have less power and may be more affected by being called old, suggesting teaching is a seasoned career.

Working collaboratively emphasized the importance of trusting knowledge communities and made more profound the new insights gained that will inform/transform our work. We became more mindful that pre-/in-service teachers may be experiencing the same tensions, and in some cases, may not have yet defined their teacher ‘best-loved self.’ We came to see that career pathways are not straight-arrow ascendencies but unpredictable crooked journeys, that career changes are amalgamous experiences that unfold through a series of situations and interactions with others, and that ‘stories to leave by’ can become regenerative ‘stories to begin again by.’

We acknowledge that we (all pre-/in-service teachers) are constantly changing and being changed by environments, relationships, professional growth, and changes in position and context. We recognize that the feedback that we give our colleagues and students change them—but we, in turn, are changed by feedback they give. This is the value of group self-study because we make ourselves and our learning visible to our knowledge community members and others in the broader landscape.

References


Enacting ethical frameworks in self-study: Dancing on the line between student agency and institutional demands

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Sound ethical standards are important in all research, though ethical issues and challenges differ among disciplines and fields of study. Self-study researchers engage in their research in the context of their everyday work as educators. This dual position can generate opportunities for them to draw on their fields of research while trying out their understanding by acting upon and experimenting with responsive educational practices within their contexts (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2007). The dynamic existing between self-study research and professional practice is such that ethicality is always embedded in the processes of both self-study and professional practice (Brandenburg & Gervasoni, 2012; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2007; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2010; LaBoskey, 2004). Teaching is a profession that could or should be considered a moral practice, not just a collection of skills and techniques (Carr, 2000; Palmer, 1997). Researchers must engage critically and ethically with their research and educational practices, lest they develop educational practices that are unfair and undemocratic (Biesta, 2007, 2010; Carr, 2000). In this sense ethical dimensions are always a fundamental part of the self-study process.

In self-study ethical considerations become more than a set of procedural conditions to follow. Ethical self-study is about adopting an ethical orientation, a stance toward educational and research practices that provide opportunities to improve the development of democratic and transformational education (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2007; Mockler, 2013). In developing an inquiry stance, practitioners adopt the belief that part of their work is to participate in educational and social change. This involves a continual process of questioning the ways in which knowledge and practice are constructed, evaluated and used (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Adopting a stance of inquiry that foregrounds ethicality requires self-study researchers to develop enough awareness to recognize and deal with ethical tensions and dilemmas experienced within their contexts (Brandenburg & Gervasoni, 2010, 2012). This process of exploring ethical tensions calls for participants to be both honest and willing to face their own strengths and weaknesses. If we are to improve our practice, these tensions need to be explicitly articulated and...
addressed—meaning that we as researchers can sometimes find ourselves in a vulnerable position (Brandenburg & Gervasoni, 2012).

In this paper we observe that research ethics and pedagogical ethics infuse each other and influence the development of our learning community of master’s students conducting their final thesis. Our identification of ethical dilemmas is guided by our mission as teacher educators to empower students as agents of change. We develop a stance of inquiry to create a safe space for students where they can explore the underlying reasons for their educational practices and beliefs. This allows them, as professionals, not only to figure out “how to get things done,” but to carefully consider and be able to justify what is getting done, why they are getting it done, and whose interests are being served (Carr, 2000; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Palmer, 1997). In creating such a space for students, we need to be alert to subtle feelings of tension in our supervision and explore their underlying causes.

In order for educators to make changes in their behavior, they need to explore its underlying sources, including how their mission as educators influences their professional identities, and what behavior and competences they develop to carry out their work within different environments (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2010). In using core reflection to analyze and find solutions to the ethical dilemmas we encountered, we created opportunities to reflect on different layers and understandings of selected moments.

We, the authors, have been inquiring into our collaborative teaching for more than five years. We have gathered data from 2012-2017 on our collaborative supervision of a group of master’s students. In our work, we have aimed to empower our students as professionals in education within the frames of our institution and according to our professional working theories (Guðjónsdóttir, Jónsdóttir, & Gísladóttir, 2017; Jónsdóttir, Gísladóttir, & Guðjónsdóttir, 2015). Working on the issue of ethics, we tackle questions such as: Whose needs are we serving—our students’, our own, our institution’s, our society’s—and how are we serving them? And how do we balance being critical and at the same time respectful and constructive? In this paper, we will focus on one illustrative case we encountered, as it exemplifies a recurring theme in our supervision.

Why and how

The purpose of this paper is to uncover and display the ethical frame we adhere to as we perform a self-study of our educational practice. The aim of the research is to gain a clearer understanding of the ethical challenges we have encountered in our self-study educational practices. We seek an answer to the question: What kind of ethical challenges have we encountered in our self-study on collaborative supervision of master’s students in teacher education, and how have we responded to them?

The data come from collaborative research we have conducted over the last five years. They consist of: recordings of our planning and analytical meetings, notes from supervisors’ meetings, e-mail communication among us supervisors, and e-mails to and from students, TOCs (ticket out of class), communication in a Facebook group for our master’s students, and finally our journal entries containing our reflections and thoughts about our teaching and collaboration. One type of e-mail communication we have gathered is the Monday letter, a weekly e-mail, students send us supervisors to tell us what they did during the week, what they plan on doing in the coming week, describe challenges or victories, or ask us questions if they need our help. In order to ensure anonymity of our student in the case we use, we do not use dates in citing our data.

Analysis has been ongoing, as we have used our findings along the way to adjust our teaching and ways of working. Over the years we have analysed and presented findings from our self-study of our collaboration (Guðjónsdóttir, Jónsdóttir, & Gísladóttir, 2017; Jónsdóttir, Gísladóttir, & Guðjónsdóttir, 2015). We have identified recurring issues and themes that we have responded to. For this paper, we scanned through the bulk of our data, revisited recurring themes and selected incidents and cases where we have faced ethical dilemmas or reflections, and used them to analyze and choose from, one case to present in this paper. We selected a single case from the initial pool of incidents to analyze further in this article as it was an example of a theme that
has emerged year after year. We used the case to extract the ethical component and to see how self-study methodology both influenced our understanding and reactions to it, while at the same time raising new ethical considerations. We discussed the incidents and the case we chose and the incidents related to it, in analytical meetings in person and on-line. Core reflection helped us to collaboratively dig to the center of our personal and professional identities to identify our ethical guidance in practice (Guðjónsdóttir, Jónsdóttir & Gísladóttir, 2017). The process required us to look closely and honestly at the incidents. To analyze the case we present here, we used the Praxis Inquiry Protocol (Guðjónsdóttir et al., 2007). Thus we describe the case from our praxis, explain what happened, and analyze and theorize to see how the ethics that guide us influenced our responses (practice changed) and helped us resolve tensions.

Identifying the interplay of ethics in supervision and self-study

We have encountered various ethical issues in our collaborative work. One of the reoccurring issues in our work is finding ways to support students in terms of making decisions of their content, working processes and the form of their final products. The case we choose to focus on highlights the challenges of supporting the master's students in their experience of the empowerment of academic knowledge, and how responding to them allows us to create spaces for their professional development. Students often find the theoretical demands of writing a master's thesis to be an overwhelming task, something they have to endure and come to terms with. Most students want to gain practical knowledge and learn methods and tricks to teaching rather than battling the distant theories we supervisors feed them. We continuously speculate what makes our mission (theoretical) more important than theirs (practical). Our experience as teachers taught us that if we take the time to grapple with these grand theories to understand our practice we are not only able to response to challenges as they arise but to work towards changing their underlying causes. Thus, we find it important to integrate these views in our supervision. Starting by creating space for students to tackle their ideas in a dialogue with us. In that process we negotiate how they can approach their ideas and discover how theory provides different perspectives on understanding their issue and educational practice.

One of the students we supervised, Anna, was an enthusiastic and resourceful teacher. In her master's project she created a set of wonderful teaching materials with several ideas and instructions for use in practice. However, making connections to theories and describing how they made a strong case for her teaching materials was a challenge for her. Svanborg began as her supervisor and Hafdís as the specialist. Initially, Anna had intended to only write the teaching material as her master's project without attending to any theoretical foundation. However, masters' thesis requires students to demonstrate a theoretical understanding of their projects. We discussed Anna's challenges at a meeting and came to decisions that seemed constructive for this student and for us as supervisors:

- If Anna is to meet the demands of a master's thesis she has to do the theoretical chapter.
- We discussed and agreed to be two supervisors in her case instead of one supervisor and one specialist as we can have more supportive conversations with each other that help us give Anna the support she needs.
- We discussed that in order for her to get a useful understanding of the gains the theoretical funds had to offer we would have to take a step-by-step approach advising her as she wrote the theoretical chapter.

(Notes from supervisors' meeting)

In our work we have been developing collaborative supervision. By making the decision to become two supervisors instead of one supervisor and a specialist in students' projects, we believed we would manage to develop a deeper insight into students’ thinking processes. In return, we would be better prepared to foster authentic dialogue with students regarding their experiences, needs and preferences of conducting their master’s thesis. Following the meeting we
asked Anna to send us each theoretical sub-chapter as she wrote them. We responded carefully, instructing and correcting but always trying to get her to respond rather than giving her the answers, though sometimes we did. From our experience students welcome when we give them concrete suggestions. We see that in the way they either directly include our comments without questioning them or thank us for the feedback. They are more challenged when they receive open ended responses they need to work through. That can be seen in the way they respond either by saying that they do not understand our suggestions or they postpone working through the feedback. This creates an ethical tension for us, as the core of our mission is to empower students through dealing with and discovering the power of theories. This can be seen in our reflection as we discussed our feedback to Anna:

As we have discussed before I am struggling with not making direct instructions or too detailed comments. But I find it difficult to overlook obvious faults I notice and not correct them. However, I try to make the comments I do, in a positive tone, as questions and suggestions rather than directives. But I have to admit that sometimes I just make direct instructions. I do want her to feel empowered through this process. I feel like I am dancing on the line between giving her agency and taking over the power in the name of our institutional requirements and demands. (E-mail communication from Svanborg to Hafdís and Karen)

The next time we responded to Anna, Hafdís wondered whether we allowed enough agency for her to respond on her own terms.

I am wondering if we are beginning to do too much for the student. Instead of telling her what to do or rewrite the sentences, can we ask her questions? Ask her about the focus of the paragraph? What she is trying to tell the reader? What is the main information she wants the readers to take with them? (Notes from supervisors’ meeting)

The communication above illuminates how we constantly needed to remind each other not to intervene into the student’s writing process with our words and understandings, but rather to give her the space to develop her understanding of what she was doing. Because we were both sharing the responsibility and supervising collaboratively we could articulate our challenges in this supervision which again supported us in dancing on the line of creating a framework supporting students’ progress but still encouraging their agency in carrying out the work. Throughout the process from writing the research proposal, gathering data and writing up the findings, Anna repeatedly expressed her own insecurity with writing the thesis. Late September (finishing thesis late December) she wrote to us in her weekly Monday letter:

I have been reading a lot about how to write academic texts, I’m very insecure in my writing. I have found someone to read over my theses when it is ready. It has always been my weakness in school to write essays, I’m told I write too much colloquial text but I think I’m getting better at it.

Anna managed to finish her thesis on time and when she presented her work in the required open seminar she was proud and convincing, showing the audience that she was a specialist in her work.

Reflecting on this process with Anna and our experiences with other students going through similar challenges over these five years, Hafdís pondered:

I feel like we are always trying to get ourselves used to ask questions rather than to tell students explicitly how to do their writing. And we do support each other in doing so. (Hafdís, journal 2017)

In our supervision we are always dancing on this line between student agency and institutional demands.
By supervising collaboratively and doing self-study we were systematically keeping record of our communication in relation to our work. This has helped us to devise ways to explore ways to support our students without going too far in giving them the answers or omitting the institutional standards. Thus the ethics of our own mission to empower students has come to terms with the ethics of our obligation to support students to fulfill the requirements of the masters' studies. They are however still terms we constantly have to negotiate and we do so through our collaboration and self-study.

Engaging with one ethical dimension always brings forth further issues that needs exploration. Ethically, telling the story of Anna could also be considered problematic, as we might be revealing the academic standing of a student and making ourselves as supervisors vulnerable as we honestly acknowledge our challenges. In responding to this dilemma, we take care to leave out any information that could identify this student. As self-study researchers, however, we have to take on the ethical responsibility of sharing our work in order to transform what we do for the benefit of students' learning. In telling these stories, our findings will have the opportunity to influence the master's program at our university, and other supervisors can learn from our work.

**Envisioning inquiry as ethical stance**

Conducting self-study on our practice raises new ethical dilemmas for us to negotiate. At the same time we find it important to draw on theory in our educational practices (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2007) we do not think that the role of teacher education should be about moving theory into practice or making sure that practice is research-based (Biesta, 2007; 2010). It is more problematic than that. It is more about the reciprocal relationship between theory and praxis, how these terms are constructed, by whom, and for what purpose. Lytle (2013) reminds us that the interplay between theory and praxis is about constructing and re-constructing knowledge and practice within local context and in relation to what we think we know and what actions we take. By articulating and working through the case with Anna, using self-study as a stance of inquiry helped us excavate the underlying causes of the ethical dilemma in the process of students' learning, while simultaneously finding ways to work through it. In so doing we generated opportunities to try out our understanding by responding deliberately according to the needs we analysed in our practice and within our context (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2007). This process has influenced both our pedagogy—what kinds of approaches become available for us to apply—and the learning community we were developing.

By looking at the whole of our data we identified the dilemma of dancing on the line between preserving students' agency while meeting the institutional demands as a common theme in our supervision, emerging in different degrees. The experience of looking at and analyzing one case helped us to understand how we were infusing research ethics in our everyday practice (Brandenburg & Gervasoni, 2012; Mockler, 2013) in designing pathways we could draw on to constructively respond to students individually and collectively without eclipsing their agency. In exploring our data we have also realized that our educational practice and self-study have merged and developed into our collective pedagogy of our supervision. The constructive dynamic between doing self-study research and practice requires the ethical lens (Brandenburg & Gervasoni, 2012; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2007; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2010; LaBoskey, 2004) to problematize and understand our practice and choose our responses. In approaching our work in this way we constantly challenge what we do, how we do it and why. In telling stories emerging from our data, we share that teaching is not just a technical matter; the practice of teaching is ethical and interwoven into the complexity of professional development. The ethicality of self-study demands that we face the ethical issues, analyze and respond to them. Although we acknowledge the importance of responding to or resolving tensions and challenges we also recognize the value in keeping the tensions alive and understand the drive they can provide to keep on developing towards our missions.

Using core reflection in our self-study allows us to identify ethical tensions we experience in our work and reflect on how they relate to the professionals we are or want to become.
Self-study forced us to critically examine how we engage with our students. Anna's case could have been addressed and forgotten as a technical operation in the process of supervising but by focusing on it we problematized it as an ethical issue, as teaching is a moral practice (Carr, 2000; Palmer, 1997). Core reflection helped us to systematically work through this process and develop opportunities for us to open our hearts and minds (Korthagen, 2013) towards students' challenges. This systematic work and openness to students, created a space for engaging in the dilemma in a meaningful way. Through our collaboration in our teaching and self-study, we have identified, analyzed, and grown as professionals by responding to ethical challenges such as the one we have described. In our research we have held up the mirror for each other and our collaboration in supervising masters' students in order to reflect on and understand how we work on finding a balance between being critical on one hand and on the other respectful and constructive. The balance is ever changing and shaky and we keep dancing on the line.

References


“I have to understand self-study first before I can engage in it”: Working through tensions in learning to do self-study

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Self-study is an important research methodology for exploring the challenges of teacher education by moving beyond the “particularities of practice” (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015, p. 509) to make individual dilemmas public. However, self-study is complicated and messy work (Berry, 2007b) because it is not a prescriptive methodology (LaBoskey, 2004; Loughran, 2005; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009) and it is often hard to describe and define (Berry 2007b; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004). To add to the complexity, attempts to explicitly teach self-study run the risk of making the research process too technical (Lunenberg & Samaras, 2001).

Not everyone is explicitly taught how to do self-study work (Ritter, 2017), and little is known about the experiences of those learning to do self-study (Butler, 2014; Butler et al., 2014; Ritter, 2017; for an exception see Gregory, Diacopoulos, Branyon, & Butler, 2017, and Peercy et al., 2018). Most self-studies that focus on the learning side of self-study tend to center on an empirical question of practice or identity and researcher learning tends to be on the periphery (Gregory et al., 2017). There is minimal research on how individuals come to understand self-study methodology as a result of engaging in self-study work.

To address this gap we investigated the learning side of self-study by collaboratively examining the learning experiences of the three authors on this study: Megan S., a doctoral student learning to do self-study research (first author); Megan P., an experienced teacher educator and advisor of Megan S. learning to engage others in self-study work (second author); and Shawn, an experienced teacher educator well-versed in both doing self-study research and engaging others in self-study work (third author). As part of a larger study, we sought to explore how a novice self-study researcher begins to make sense of self-study work and how more experienced scholars continue to learn what it means to engage in and mentor others in self-study work. While other research studies may “gloss over the specifics” of learning self-study or focus on the outcomes instead of the learning process (Ritter, 2017, p. 22), our aim in this study was to reveal the challenges and tensions inherent in learning self-study methodology. In this paper, we focused specifically on the

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learning of Megan S. and explored the following research questions: How does a doctoral student experience the process of learning to do self-study? How is that experience impacted by collaboration with more experienced self-study scholars?

**Background**

During the first semester of her doctoral program (fall 2016), Megan S. was introduced to self-study by Megan P. Though Megan S. had read a small number of articles on self-study, participated in class discussions about the methodology, and video-conferenced with Shawn (as part of a class experience to engage with other self-study scholars), she felt she was still grappling with understanding the true nature of self-study work. Intrigued by the idea of self-study and propelled by a desire to better understand how to critically examine her practice as a practitioner and scholar of teacher education, she sought the support of Megan P. and Shawn to engage in self-study work.

**Framework**

Berry’s notion of *tensions* (2007a) served as a helpful frame for our work of learning to do self-study. Berry described tensions as the “internal turmoil” that teacher educators face as they navigate the “competing pedagogical demands in their work” and the difficulty of managing such demands (2007a, p. 119). Though Berry’s conception of tensions arose from teacher educators teaching about teaching, it nevertheless provided a solid framework for understanding how one learns to engage in self-study work because it allowed us to “represent that complexity to others” (p. 31). We designed our study using Berry’s (2007b) tension of *Confidence and Uncertainty* as a primary tension in learning self-study work and examined what other types of tension arose that interacted with this primary tension. We chose *Confidence and Uncertainty* as a primary tension because Megan P. and Shawn felt confident in their ability to conduct self-study and Megan S. felt uncertain about her ability to conduct self-study. We believed that, due to the varying levels of expertise in our collaborative group, there would be points of tension and challenge as we worked to understand self-study from varying perspectives and levels of expertise.

**Methods**

Data collection occurred over a seven-month period. All three authors taught during the fall 2017 semester and journaled at least once per week about our practice as teacher educators and self-study researchers. Once each month we prepared one-page summaries of these journals. Shared and read in advance, these summaries served as the foundation for our monthly video-conferences about our practice as teacher educators and self-study researchers. To more deeply examine the levels of our learning, we decided to employ a layered critical friend approach. Megan S. met biweekly with Megan P. to discuss Megan S.’s questions and emerging understandings about her teaching and research, and once per month all three authors met to discuss our pedagogical and research practices. Megan P. and Shawn met once per month to discuss and analyze Megan P.’s support of Megan S. in learning to do self-study and to discuss learning how to support others in doing self-study. All meetings were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The data analyzed included the transcripts from audio-recorded meetings between the authors, the one-page summaries, Megan S.’s weekly journals, and email correspondence between the three authors. The constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) was used to iteratively code the data, beginning with open coding, and tension emerged as a common thread. A second round of coding was conducted to collapse codes into types of tension: focus/structure of the study, abstractness of self-study, and understanding self-study. A third round of coding was conducted using the refined codes to identify places where those tensions were expressed or addressed.
Findings

We found that part of learning to do self-study was learning to live with tension. We also discovered that working through tension does not necessarily mean it is resolved but may become more manageable over time. In this section we illustrate (1) a tension that became more manageable, (2) a tension that has remained unresolved, and (3) how the collaborative process helped Megan S. manage tensions in order to develop her understanding about self-study.

**Manageable tension: concreteness vs. abstractness of self-study**

Megan S.’s desire to try to concretize self-study caused tension. Her expectation of wanting self-study to be tangible created dissonance for her because she was looking for a specific structure:

*I think I’m trying to make it very ‘These are points and these are things you do. If you sit down and have a critical friends conversation these are the things you do and these are things you say and this is the format you follow to write a self-study.’ So that’s what I think I’m trying to figure out. I’m trying to give specific tasks and names to things but I don’t know if that’s actually needed or even what you do.* (9/14/17 meeting MS & MP)

Because Megan P. and Shawn could not always provide Megan S. with concrete answers about specific rules or structures, she continued to seek ways to support her learning by making self-study more accessible.

After a group meeting where the authors discussed how self-study is generally not included in graduate research textbooks, Megan S. emailed Megan P. and Shawn asking for a simpler “textbook” definition of self-study. In response, Megan P. recommended that each of the authors read four specific articles about self-study and write a paragraph defining self-study. Megan S. provided a definition and a tree metaphor to represent her understanding of self-study. In the following group meeting, Megan S. questioned her definition because she still felt tension around “getting” self-study, saying, “I don’t know if that’s a good representation or if it makes sense to the two of you” (12/14/17 meeting MS, MP, SB). Shawn responded,

*...there’s no accepted definition of self-study but there are accepted views about what it isn’t. And I think that’s what’s important about what you’ve done...I feel like it almost doesn't matter to a certain extent what either Megan P. or I think about your particular definition because I think that part of this is about defining it for yourself but in a defensible way.*

(12/14/17 meeting MS, MP, SB)

This response helped Megan S. to understand that self-study is by nature abstract, and while there is a general perception of what does and does not count as self-study, there is not a concrete definition or liner process that has to be adhered to.

Since Megan P. and Shawn already understood the abstract nature of self-study, they could not always offer concrete explanations to Megan S. when she described her struggles, and this created tension for her. Uncertain that she fully “got it,” Megan S. also felt vulnerable sharing her definition and tree metaphor, believing that Megan P. and Shawn would have better explanations than hers. When Megan S. tried to make self-study concrete by defining it, she began to see and accept the abstract nature of self-study and, thus, her tension began to lessen. We deemed the tension around the abstract nature of self-study to be “managed” because Megan S. was able to see the “deep ambiguity” (12/14/17 meeting MS, MP, SB) within self-study because each author had a different definition, and they were all defensible. Trying to work through the tension of making self-study concrete allowed Megan S. to reconceptualize what it means to be a self-study researcher.
Unresolved tension: focus of study

Although Megan S. managed her tension and began to accept the abstract nature of self-study over time, it was the intangible processes of the work that she continued to struggle with throughout the course of the project. Early on, Megan S. felt tension as she tried to make sense of the focus of the study: “I am trying to learn how to do self-study – so is my focus my practice or my understanding of self-study?” (MS Journal, 5/23/17). We aimed to use our teaching practice as the foundation to our journals and discussions, but Megan S. was often unsure whether a focus on practice was most conducive for her learning of self-study:

I think our last triad was more around our teaching practice and our one-pagers. But I think for me where I had that struggle in that first meeting…is that we talk about our practice but the whole time… I don’t really get self-study. (11/1/17 meeting MS, MP, SB)

Megan S.’s intention of wanting to learn self-study – not just improve her practice – created tension around her understanding of what was acceptable for journaling and discussion. She often felt conflicted about whether focusing on methodology or practice would provide her with the most understanding around learning to do self-study. Later on, she questioned whether her choices had been “right” throughout the study: “I sometimes kind of felt like ‘ugh, am I taking us away too much from the practice piece when I’m constantly having these conversations around self-study?’” (12/8/17 meeting MS & MP).

Unfamiliarity with this type of research made Megan S. feel less confident in her ability to take up self-study research. Her uncertainty created tension around her ability to understand whether the empirical research she was engaged in was a self-study or another type of qualitative research. About half-way through the study, Megan S. asked Megan P., “Is what you, me, and Shawn are doing a self-study or is it empirical research that will inform the self-study field?” (10/25/17 meeting MS & MP). Megan S. posed this question because she felt she was not currently engaging in a self-study due to the focus on her learning instead of her practice. As the study progressed, Megan S. still struggled with where her focus should be directed and whether or not she was engaging in self-study:

…maybe it’s just that we need more time, maybe as my understanding develops we can cover two topics at once. Because I kind of feel like when we’re talking about practice we’re not talking about the specifics of self-study, and when we’re talking about the specifics of self-study…we’re not talking about our practice. And so I guess maybe that does set up for me these kind of dichotomies and that’s why that’s not meshed for– like I’m just not seeing the link– I don’t know if I’m thinking that I have to understand self-study first before I can, [ sighs] I don’t know, engage in it? (11/1/17 meeting MS, MP, SB)

Megan S. struggled to understand that she was, in fact, engaged in a self-study, and tension developed between what she knew about self-study and her limited exposure to experiencing self-study. In a conversation with Megan P., Megan S. noted that she would require additional experience for her understanding to continue to develop:

MS: So I think for me that’s maybe just been a point of tension… what I was expecting versus the reality. But I think reality is that self-study can look different and that’s something, like I can say that and that makes sense to me, but I think I still just have to get further in this process to really maybe embody that? To really like understand that…I can say this and that make sense to me, but

MP: The experiential piece.

MS: Yeah, I think that still needs to happen. (12/8/17 meeting MS & MP)

We considered the tension around the focus of the study to be unresolved because of Megan S.’s awareness that she needed more time to engage with what it meant to do self-study, both theoretically and experientially.
Collaborative work and tensions

Just as “the self-study journey is not necessarily linear” (Samaras & Freese, 2006, p. 42), neither was the process of working through the murkiness of learning self-study. Because Megan S. had originally presented this study idea to Megan P. and Shawn, they generally let her guide the research study. However, Megan S. felt tension around this freedom because she was not sure if her choices were “right” or “acceptable” for self-study since she was not being told what to do. Though she desired more guidance from the other authors, it was ultimately the openness of guiding the conversations that eventually allowed her to “get it”:

**MS:** Because we get together like this and then a lot of times the conversation is just around self-study, it’s not on the practice and so

**MP:** I would say, though, that’s because you’ve turned it that way, right?

**MS:** Yeah, uh huh.

**MP:** And we’ve been willing to go that direction, so it depends on where we turn the focus and what it is you want to focus on, right?

**MS:** Yeah and I think for me I haven’t necessarily intentionally done that. I think I’ve just found I have so many questions and if we were only talking about practice I think I would still be maybe lost with the whole methodology piece because there’d be so much that we hadn’t talked about …I think that’s what I needed in order to “get” this, you know.

(12/8/17 meeting MS & MP)

This excerpt demonstrates that tension arose for Megan S. because Megan P. was not outright telling her specifically what to focus on for the study. Megan P. and Shawn allowed Megan S. to work through various topics, as needed. However, it was the process of Megan S. learning about self-study herself that enabled growth in her understanding and propositional knowledge. The tension was not completely resolved, but it became more manageable through the actions of the teacher educators in giving her the opportunity to “take the reins.” However, not all instances of “freedom” resulted in more managed tension. Megan S. also struggled with the openness of guiding the study as a whole:

**MS:** …I kind of get this was something that I brought to you, that I wanted to do, and you guys have been kind of letting me take the reins with things, but I’ve found that difficult...to kind of take the control because I don’t really know

**MP:** And I think that’s going to be part of the learning process too. As first author and the person in charge of this study I’m trying to give you some space to start to develop those skills. So yeah, part of it’s uncomfortable because you haven’t done it before but you don’t know how to do it until you’ve done it either...So I think that’s like trying to situate it so that you get to take ownership of it. (12/8/17 meeting MS & MP)

In this instance, Megan P. is giving Megan S. space to develop her experiential knowledge by learning through doing. Although it was a valuable technique, Megan S. experienced tension because, without having more instruction, she felt uncertain with her choices regarding the study.

Ultimately, Megan S. experienced tension around her learning of self-study. Although individual reflection was beneficial, it was the collaborative nature of the research study that helped her make sense of her tensions,

…I don’t think I ever would have come to this realization on my own…I did a lot of processing on my own but I don’t think that processing would have happened had we not done this structure or this study. (12/14/17 meeting MS, MP, SB)
The iterative and collaborative nature of the project allowed tensions to be highlighted for Megan S. and for her to begin to manage some of them. Though Megan S. may not have realized it at the time, the self-study process both created tensions and brought forth ways to begin to work through them. Megan S. noted in the last triad meeting, “And so I think where I’m at right now in kind of seeing where this tension is coming from and why it might exist, I think speaks very highly to maybe the methodology or the methods of self-study” (12/14/17 meeting MS, MP, SB).

**Discussion and implications**

Going into our study, Berry’s (2007b) *Confidence and Uncertainty* provided a general frame for possible tensions. During the study, additional types of tension emerged for Megan S. that were related to *Confidence and Uncertainty* but were tensions in and of themselves: the focus of the study, the abstract nature of self-study, and understanding that she was engaging in a self-study. Since the awareness of the continual interconnections among tensions helps produce new knowledge regarding one’s practice (Berry, 2007a), our examination of these other areas of tension that arose from, or interacted with, our tension around the *Confidence and Uncertainty* of doing this project helped provide a more holistic picture of the challenges one encounters when learning to do self-study.

Our findings indicate that the learning of self-study is just as messy as the doing of self-study. The abstract nature of self-study work can make it difficult to pinpoint exact strategies or procedures that will support a novice scholar’s learning to engage with self-study research. Therefore, learners of self-study need to be open to the natural progression of the research process and be willing to learn through doing. Additionally, one must also account for the experiential learning process and determine how much guidance or “telling” is needed for novice scholars. However, novices learning to do self-study may each have different tensions and struggles, which makes it difficult for teacher educators to pinpoint universal or generic supports to offer novice learners. Further research is needed in the areas of tension and struggle that novice scholars face regarding the methodology of self-study and how critical friends/mentors can help manage those tensions through appropriate challenge and support.

Our findings also suggest that more experienced self-study practitioners could help novices by not only discussing their practice, but providing them with opportunities to question and discuss the methodology itself. Megan S.’s understanding of self-study mostly came through the process of unpacking the methodology and not through the examination of her own practice. Therefore, though an important aspect of self-study is articulating what one has come to understand about one’s own practice (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998), we argue that learners of self-study should be able to articulate not just what they have learned about their practice, but also what they have learned about self-study methodology.

Due to self-study’s inherent ambiguity, the notion of tensions allows us to reframe our knowledge of learning to engage in self-study work as “tensions to be managed” instead of resolved. Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) claim the nature of self-study is to “provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm and settle” (p. 20). Therefore, managing our tensions while learning to do self-study aligns with the nature of self-study methodology in which researchers must “acknowledge, live within, and even embrace ambiguity in one’s work” (Berry, 2007b, p. 42). We do not claim that the tensions we experienced will be the tensions that others will encounter as they grapple with the learning of self-study. We encourage others to compare their learning experiences of self-study with ours and to revise and expand upon our types of tension and collaborative efforts to alleviate them.
References


Walking a fine line: Teaching others about self-study while developing myself as a self-study researcher

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At our university, doctoral students interested in formal classroom practice are often simultaneously engaged in experiences as both educational researchers and teacher educators. Yet, most of the time they keep these experiences in silos with little thought or opportunity for integrating the two. Considering this issue, I (Meredith) sought to find a way to intersect problems of practice with methods of research that could better prepare our future faculty, “concerned with both enhanced understanding of teacher education in general and the immediate improvement of our practice” (LaBoskey, 2004, p.818). Searching methodologies that target this goal, I came across Ritter’s (2009) self-study about transitioning from teacher to teacher educator. In this study, he explains how self-study informed his understanding about this transition. Intrigued with Ritter’s experience, I immersed myself in self-study literature and soon came across LaBoskey’s (2004) description of the theoretical underpinnings of self-study research. She explains that self-study researchers often approach their work from the mindset that they have a pedagogical responsibility to do so. This sense of responsibility includes developing future faculty who are not only preparing to be good researchers but also good researchers of teaching and good teachers of research. As an academic preparing future faculty, I certainly feel this responsibility, and as such believe in LaBoskey’s (2004) statement:

we need to “practice what we preach” or “walk our talk.”... Engaging in self-study is a primary vehicle for this modeling of practice, and thus provides a bridge between our pedagogy and our research (p. 839).

Therefore, to bring authenticity to my own teaching and research on teacher education I initiated this self-study. Although I write from the perspective of first-person, I have included others as co-authors because I view them as collaborators in my reflective journey. It is through their insights (i.e., their voices) that I am able to explain the evolution of my thinking about self-study as both a research methodology and a process for mentoring future teacher educators.

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Context

While beginning to explore scholarship on self-study, I was also teaching a seminar for first and second year math and science doctoral students that had a similar purpose to Butler's (2014) “pedagogy of teacher education seminar.” One difference is that I do not introduce self-study research until halfway through the semester. This is because another focus of the course is to teach our doctoral students about our programmatic approach to preparing preservice teachers to teach math and science, and the theoretical framework guiding this approach. My purpose for combining these two foci is to make our doctoral students aware of how reflective practice is emphasized in all aspects of our teacher education program. Therefore, once I introduce the goals and design of our undergraduate courses, I then introduce the methodology of self-study with the intention of encouraging doctoral students to practice what we preach through a critical lens of what means to be a good pedagogue (LaBoskey, 2004).

Although I have taught this course twice, the focus of this study extends from my first iteration of the class in fall 2014. With respect to the self-study portion of this class, we read and analyzed several self-studies examples, some that were associated with the doctoral students’ content areas and others that were more generic or foundational pieces (e.g., LaBoskey, 2004). Throughout our discussions of these articles, I asked the students how the authors were articulating problems of practice or assumptions in their thinking about teaching that possibly relate to what they were experiencing in their own teaching within our teacher education program. I chose this approach because I believe reading about others self-study experiences can help with constructing questions about problems of practice, as they see a bit of themselves in the studies they are reading. The final component of the graduate seminar was the development of a draft self-study proposal. I provided feedback on these drafts through one-on-one discussions, and from these conversations, three students (Jared, Rebecca, and Ranu) approached me wanting to pursue their proposed self-study under my guidance. It is from this situation, of teaching others about self-study while still considering myself a novice self-study researcher that serves as the objective of this study.

Methods

As both a novice researcher of self-study, and first-time facilitator of a self-study research group, I sought to understand self-study methodology while experiencing this dual role of researcher and teacher. To assist me in this endeavor I shared with Jared, Rebecca, and Ranu the notion of a ‘Community of Practice’ (Wenger, 1998) as a means of organizing our meetings. They agreed and from that point on, we referred to our group as a Community of Practice for Self-Study (COPSS). With respect to my own interests as a participant in COPSS, I initially developed two questions to guide my reflective journey: 1) how are my own understandings of self-study research developing from facilitating COPSS, and 2) how are my understandings about teaching others to conduct self-study research developing because of my participation in COPSS?

Participants

At the same time Jared, Rebecca, Ranu and I initiated COPSS, I was also talking with a mathematics education colleague about the limited professional development we feel our doctoral students receive in supporting their knowledge and skills for becoming teacher educators. Through these conversations, I shared how the three doctoral students and I were starting COPSS and I asked if he would like to join us. Due to the grassroots effort of COPSS, all co-authors of this paper serve as participants in my journey of understanding of what self-study is and how to mentor others. Our community informed my thinking about what it means to be a learner of self-study, while also supporting others to conduct self-study. Therefore, I believe it is critical to recognize all members’ intellectual contributions with authorship. In addition, Erik (Author 2) served as my collaborator and critical friend outside of COPSS meetings.

Due to personal reasons, unfortunately Rebecca was unable to complete her self-study during this first semester of COPSS. However, she said she wanted to continue with participating in
COPSS because she wanted to support her peers and learn about the process through their experience. Over the course of the spring 2015 semester, our COPSS group focused specifically on Jared’s and Ranu’s self-studies. Jared’s study examined his professional identity development as a novice teacher educator while instructing an early field experience for elementary majors (Allen, Park Rogers, & Borowski, 2016). Ranu’s study looked at how her facilitation of classroom discussions with her elementary preservice teachers resulted in identifying cultural tensions between her and her students (Roy & Park Rogers, 2016).

**Data sources and analysis**

Multiple data sources were gathered at different points in time for this study (LaBoskey, 2004). First, Erik and I listened to the four audio-recorded COPSS sessions. We each took notes on what we heard about how each member of COPSS was engaging in the discussion about Jared’s and Ranu’s self-studies. We then came together after reviewing each session and compared notes on common elements associated with my role to the discussion, but in light of others’ contributions as well. Our conversations about these notes served as a second data source.

Next, we conducted interviews with Jared, Rebecca, and Ranu to clarify the findings we had noted from our review of the COPSS sessions. These interviews focused on three core questions to help us get a better sense of how the COPSS experience was supporting (or not) their understandings of self-study research. These follow up interviews helped me to recognize how others perceived my role in their emerging understanding of self-study methodology.

**Table 1. Guidelines for developing a pedagogy for teaching self-study research (Lunenberg & Samaras, 2011).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guideline</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Starting Point - The ‘I’</td>
<td>Ensure that self-study participants initiate and study their own inquiry situated in their practice and utilize as self-study method aligned with that inquiry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Learning</td>
<td>Emphasize the learning side of self-study research with improved and continuous learning that extends beyond the self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Knowledge generation and presentation</td>
<td>Stress the necessity of sharing research by making it public through presentation and publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Critical collaborative inquiry</td>
<td>Create dialogic participant structures for supportive and productive engagement with participants’ contributions enriching each other’s as well as that of the learning community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Transparent and systematic research process</td>
<td>Provide and promote continuous opportunities for participants to present the documentation of their work openly to assess and validate the quality of their research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Teachers’ modeling</td>
<td>Authenticate self-study research by practicing it (A Double-Helix Design).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From this process, I noticed my two initial research questions were evolving, a natural process of most reflective qualitative research such as self-study methodology (Agee, 2009). I realized that my understandings of what self-study research involves was developing because of my collaborative experience with my other COPSS members. Thus, the research question that guided the remainder of my analysis, and the structure of my findings, became an amalgamation of my initial questions: Given my experience in COPSS, how have my understandings developed as to what comprises self-study research, as well as how to mentor self-study research?

Shortly after revising my research question, I came across Lunenberg’s and Samaras’ (2011) work on developing a pedagogy for teaching self-study. In their article, they outline six guidelines for facilitating work with others that exemplify the core aspects of self-study research. Using these guidelines (see Table 1), I analyzed how the six guidelines for teaching self-study were reflected in our COPSS experience, and thus supporting me in developing my understanding of what is self-study methodology.

Findings

To illustrate my view of how I have incorporated the six guidelines into this self-study experience, I merge both my interpretations of the guidelines, evidence of my practice, and supporting or representative comments of these practices from my co-authors. In some instances, guidelines merged because separately they were not an accurate portrayal of my developing understanding and approach to guiding others about conducting self-study research.

Guideline 1 – focusing on the I

At our institution, both the doctoral mathematics and science education programs require that students complete a paper for their comprehensive qualifying portfolio that examines changes in their thinking about teaching. Therefore, I designed the self-study requirement of my seminar to support the students in this pursuit. Perhaps not surprising then was Jared’s and Ranu’s confessions in the interview that they first entered into self-study because they saw it as an ends to a means; a product they needed to complete as part of their program requirements. However, both also explained that over time participating in COPSS taught them the importance of staying focused on “I” throughout the process because ultimately the impact is on their development as a teacher educator. Jared’s comment illustrates this shift in perspective:

"Looking back on it, I realize that while initially the focus was on the product of a publication and going through the process, now I see my participation in COPSS as helping me to understand the reason for the process of self-study and now realizing the affect that this process had on me as a teacher educator…. I think this is the more important part for my development"

As for my own understanding about guideline one, I have come to realize that helping others to keep the focus on “I” is difficult. Perhaps it is because, as teachers, we learn to reflect but often from the perspective of understanding our students thinking and not on what we gain in our own interpretations of our practice through our interactions with our students. While I understand the importance of self-study research being self-initiated, I believe that the design of self-study is by nature evolving, and so perhaps through making our doctoral students investigate their teaching from a self-study perspective can foster an appreciation for what self-study offers. Thus encouraging self-initiation of future self-study research.

Guideline 2 – extending the learning

I found my understandings about self-study research, as well as how to teach others about self-study research grew the most with respect to this guideline. Erik in particular provided valuable assistance to me with this aspect. During the COPSS sessions, as well as in our data discussion sessions I noticed he continuously asked broader impact questions regarding the implications
of our work for the field of teacher education. The following quote from Rebecca illustrates the different roles she saw Erik and me bringing to the group. Her comments are reflective of similar comments made by Jared and Ranu.

For me it felt like you (Meredith) were the self-study expert. Maybe this is all perception and maybe Erik has done self-study too but because I had taken that class with you and you had chosen things for us to read about self-study and we had talked about self-study with you it felt like you were very much experienced with self-study… or experiencing self-study with us. [But] I felt like you (Erik) brought in a lot of theoretical connections --- literature and frameworks --- that were helpful for us to make sense so I definitely feel like you (both) played critical roles. (Rebecca, final interview)

After listening to all the COPSS sessions, and the final interviews, I realized that if not for Erik’s contributions, the guideline for extending our learnings beyond ourselves would have been limited under my guidance alone. I tended to focus on the logistics of self-study, which may have been the result of first introducing this method of research in my seminar the semester before. Regardless, I am thankful that Erik decided to join COPSS because his presence offered a kind of outsider perspective, reminding us that for research to be useful we must always be considering how our ideas, perspectives, learnings, etc., should be pushing our thinking about the phenomenon we are studying, which in this case is our own teaching.

Guideline 3 – generating knowledge to share publicly

From the start, I knew that generating knowledge to share publicly was an important aspect of self-study. Therefore, I tried to model this process by sharing with the COPSS group my plans for communicating the results of my self-study with the S-STEP community and beyond. I also encouraged Jared and Ranu to share their studies with others, which they did in the form of a publication (see Allen & Park Rogers, 2016) and conference presentation (see Roy & Park Rogers, 2016).

Looking back on the COPSS experience, while demonstrating the necessity of sharing research publicly was important I believe an equally important but unexpected outcome was the modeling of how to generate knowledge collaboratively. A comment from Jared about how he prepared for each COPSS session illustrates this realization:

At the end of each meeting, you (Meredith)... isolated a part for me to think on [and] in doing that I thought – Ok, so she wants me to think about this, but in order to do this I need to think more broadly about how it relates to ___. So you gave me a finite point to think of reflect on, I saw through reflecting how it might affect the bigger picture…I left each session wanting to think, ponder about it in preparation for reporting out next time.

Considering this third guideline, I learned that it is important to not only encourage but also model how to process and prepare (i.e., generate) in order to share publicly. I also understand that many of the methods I naturally incorporate into my teaching of how to be an effective research (e.g., helping to give targeted tasks in order to move forward) applies to self-study methodology as well, which is welcomed by those who are generally novice researchers.

Guideline 4 and 5 – collaboration and transparency

I merged these two guidelines because the structure I apparently had establish early on with the group, to ensure productive discussion for each session, not only offered transparency into the reflective process we were going to go through, but the collaborative nature of the process. For example, Jared explained how there was a particular “known” structure for how things would work. Similar to Rebecca’s previous comment, he noted that each member of COPSS had particular roles that helped with the functioning of the community. This structure and function pushed him and encouraged him to prepare things outside that made him dig deeper in his thinking about his data
because he was anticipating the kinds of questions we (all COPSS members) would ask. Likewise, Rebecca mentioned the importance knowing the general structure of how a COPSS meeting with flow, but appreciated how the dialogue was free form, allowing us to address particular issues as in depth as needed. It was these opportunities that she explained, “sometimes lead us to discussing larger teacher education issues.” Lastly, Ranu noted that although she had established critical friends to assist her with analyzing video for her self-study, she actually considered her COPSS group as another set of critical friends that helped her to contextualize what she was thinking about her practice with respect to broader program issues. Ranu also noted participating in COPSS helped her to make connections between what she was attempting to do with her students and the theoretical framework of ‘deliberate practice’ (Ericsson, Krampe, Tesch-Romer, 1993).

Lastly, with respect to creating dialogical methods to support productive engagement, all three doctoral student members commented on how despite the structure provided it was not confining and there was never one person dominating, rather we all served particular roles in helping each other to inquire about teaching practice. As Jared stated, “it [COPSS] was not just a place to report out but it was a place to inquire with each other…everyone was flexible for each other and so everyone was learning from each other.”

Examining these two guidelines together helped me to realize that transparency and process do not have to stifle collaboration and inquiry. Both guidelines are critical for group reflection to be productive within the context of self-study work. It is knowing how to walk that fine line between co-inquirer and teacher of inquiry that can be difficult but not impossible.

**Guideline 6 – modeling**

I begin my reflection on this guideline with a quote from Jared that depicts how the doctoral students in COPSS saw me modeling the critical thinking and reflective process of self-study:

> I liked the fact that you modeled how to do a self-study [as] you helped us with our self-studies. You knew what types of questions to ask, and by asking us those deep questions you forced us to think about them and to create our own deep questions, so you showed us examples of how we should be asking deep questions ourselves about our studies. Learning to ask questions in a self-study context is very different from any other research out there and it is harder, in my opinion, because you are asking them about yourself. I don’t think most people want to ask those because they don’t like self-inspecting. So by you “drilling down on us” (air quotes) with the questions you asked about our thought process, forced us to burst that bubble and reflect on ourselves and our practice...You guided us in doing self-study by modeling for us how to do a self-study through asking those questions.

Prior to analyzing my data this was the one guideline I was least sure I was following. Considering the comment above and Rebecca’s comment that “it was evident you were experiencing self-study with us”, I now understand modeling with respect to self-study can take on many different forms. Whether it is supporting how to frame questions, or offering connections to link theory to outcomes, modeling does not necessarily mean taking someone step-by-step through my own self-study process, rather it could be modeling how to inquire through ‘dialogical practices’ (LaBoskey, 2004), as we did in COPSS.

**Conclusion**

Self-study research, a form of practitioner inquiry, is a unique form of methodology as it places the “emphasis on the researcher studying his/her role within, and not outside, the practice” (Lunenberg & Samaras, 2011). The aim of this study was to incorporate this process for myself by studying how my understandings of self-study research develops as I engage in the process of mentoring others in conducting self-study research. Analyzing my approach through the lens of Lunenberg and Samaras (2011) ‘guidelines towards a pedagogy for teaching self-study’, I have now...
come to an understanding about the nature of self-study research and the need for considering the broader impact of one's personal reflection, but also the importance of being a member of a collaborative group like COPSS throughout the process. Over time, the structure of COPSS evolved to meet the needs of the group, and as such, each of us served the group with offering critical moments of support in the research process.

From this experience I have a better understanding of what it means to move beyond the self (Loughran, 2007) through co-inquiry. Throughout the COPSS discussions, I hear myself questioning Jared and Ranu about their process, and I hear Erik questioning them about what others can learn from their self-studies. We collectively encourage them to think about how to take what they are learning in their context and consider implications for the broader field of pedagogy for teacher education. In other words, there needs to be a theoretical foothold from which to explain or rationalize the nuances, challenges, or uncertainties identified within ones' thinking and practice of teaching. Conceptualizing this notion of a ‘foothold’ reminds me that self-study requires connecting insights from various resources to extend the learning beyond one's self. The guidelines for teaching self-study (Lunenberg & Samaras, 2011) provided me with a theoretical foothold to make sense of what constitutes self-study methodology while simultaneously mentoring others in the process of self-study.

In conclusion, I am beginning to realize self-study research requires a different analytical lens than other reflection-oriented methodologies and that I need to support others with understanding these differences through continuous modeling of self-study, but in various ways. At times, I felt I was walking a fine line between teacher of self-study and self-study researcher; therefore, how I negotiate this balancing act is a problem of practice I will continue to explore in my future self-study research.

**References**


Unfolding the “mysterious truth” of emotional entanglements in supervising self-study research: A collective arts-informed self-study

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We belong to a transdisciplinary, trans-institutional South African research learning community that has supported university educators’ self-study research since 2011. While this research is self-focused and self-initiated (LaBoskey, 2004), the work of the community as a whole is aimed at contributing to a socially just re-knowing of pedagogy in South African higher education, which still bears wounds from the damages and divides of the apartheid past (Sedgwick, 2004).

Participation in our community is voluntary and open to any university educator who wishes to learn about or contribute to learning in self-study. University educators in our learning community serve as critical friends, offering alternative perspectives and feedback on each other’s research (Schuck & Russell, 2005). Overall, each year we have approximately 40 active community members who are diverse in terms of academic disciplines, age, gender, language, and race, and in years of experience in research. We, the six co-authors of this paper, are similarly diverse and represent a variety of academic disciplines: curriculum studies; educational leadership and management; gender studies; mathematics education; and teacher development studies.

In this paper, we concentrate on our learning conversations as research supervisors¹ of graduate students in our self-study community. Over the years, our evolving supervisory conversations have included up to 10 supervisors at a time (see Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2015). We regularly meet to discuss our supervisory practices and experiences, with the intention of enriching our support for the students’ individual self-study projects. In so doing, we have recognised a shared commitment to “walking [our] talk” (Lunenberg & Samaras, 2011, p. 849) by collectively studying our practice as self-study research supervisors in a South African higher education context. We seek to learn and develop together, as well as to contribute to the growing, international body of

¹ In South African universities, graduate research advisors are termed research supervisors. Each graduate student usually has only one research supervisor.

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work by self-study scholars who facilitate others’ self-study research (for example, Berry, Geursen, & Lunenberg, 2015; Lunenberg & Samaras, 2011; Ritter, 2017). To this end, we have found arts-informed self-study research practices to be of particular value in enabling collective reflexivity or “co-flexivity,” which we have expressed as “being reflexive together through thinking deeply about and questioning our professional [supervisory] practice and selves in dialogue with significant others” (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2015, p. 148). Mutual trust and respectful working relationships have deepened over time and given us space and confidence to develop methodologically inventive, arts-informed research methods. To illustrate, in co-authored publications, we have jointly explored our experiences and learning as self-study supervisors using the visual arts-informed research practice of metaphor drawings (Van Laren et al., 2014) and the literary arts-informed research practices of poetry and dialogue (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2015).

**Objectives**

As Pithouse-Morgan, Coia, Taylor, and Samaras (2016) pointed out, “self-study research requires both self-confidence and vulnerability as it confronts scholars on a personal level and triggers a heightened awareness of ‘the messiness, uncertainties, complexities, and elisions’ (Samaras et al., 2014, p. 3) of professional practice” (p. 444). The entanglement between personal and professional in re-encountering the self in self-study research can be emotionally complex. In our experience, this complexity is heightened in South Africa where high levels of traumatic stress (Williams et al., 2007) and “insidious trauma” (Root, 1992, p. 240) are part of the “emotional landscape” (Zembylas, 2012, p. 1). As a historical consequence of the traumatising apartheid regime, South Africa is burdened with a bitter emotional legacy comprising a volatile combination of intense feelings such as anger, fear, hurt, loss, shame, or resentment (Jansen, 2009; Zembylas, 2012). Moreover, in the post-apartheid era, daily accounts of “high rates of violent crime, sexual and domestic violence and road accident injury” have led to South Africa being referred to as “a ‘natural laboratory’ in which to study the impact of traumatic events and their consequences” (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010, p. 4).

A serendipitous realisation from our work together has been that, in supervising self-study research, we learn much about our students’ experiences within the emotional landscape of South Africa (Collins, 2013; Zembylas, 2012). Our students frequently undertake personal history narrative and memory-work writing (Mitchell & Pithouse-Morgan, 2014; Samaras, Hicks, & Berger, 2004), which can expose emotionally complex happenings and remembrances of a traumatised past. As Relebohile Moletsane (one of our fellow South African self-study supervisors) pointed out, “Most of our students have to deal with emotions in their self-study research” (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2015, p. 164).

While on the one hand, students’ stories have been infused with, among others, past and recent experiences of illness and bereavement, violence and abuse, poverty, and discrimination, oppression, and alienation linked to race, gender, ethnicity, religion, ability/disability and so on, on the other hand, there are also joyful and inspiring stories that have given us hope and energy. Although we are not positioning ourselves as therapists, we have become increasingly mindful of how, as supervisors of self-study research, we are confronted with the ethical intricacy of receiving and responding to others’ emotionally complex stories, some of which are so private that they are omitted from students’ public writing. We are also confronted by our own profound feelings triggered by such stories and have become aware that emotional entanglements in self-study supervision present unlearning and re-learning opportunities for us (Collins, 2013).

Limited literature on graduate research supervision practice focuses on emotionality, with even less attention paid to the emotional work of supervisors (Wisker & Robinson, 2016). Research in this area has acknowledged supervision as “a highly emotional process,” which makes complex emotional demands on supervisors (Strandler, Johansson, Wisker, & Claesson, 2014, p. 70). These emotional strains have been linked to “student lack of progress, or poor communication, or … to work overload in the current context of increased demands in higher education, or any combination of these” (Wisker & Robinson, 2016, p. 1). Certainly, we have experienced such stressors; however, our concern is particularly with the emotional effort required to understand
and respond in supportive and resourceful ways to difficult emotional knowledge against a backdrop of pervasive traumatic stress and a history of oppression and conflict (Collins, 2013; Zembylas, 2012). Hence, we asked, “How can we work collaboratively and creatively to learn to navigate emotional entanglements in supervising self-study research?”

**Methods**

In this paper, we reflect on our collective arts-informed self-study (Samaras et al., 2008) that took place over a period of three years during five one-day workshops and via continuing e-mail correspondences. These workshops were arranged by Kathleen in her capacity as overall leader of our self-study learning community. However, the focus and inquiry methods of each workshop evolved through our ongoing interaction and co-flexive engagements. Each workshop built on and extended in a spontaneous way what had previously transpired. Not all of us were present at all five workshops and so our e-mail correspondences, along with audio recordings of our workshop conversations that we shared online via Dropbox (https://www.dropbox.com), and the writing that we composed in each workshop, enabled those who were not physically present to “relive” the collective workshop experience.

At the suggestion of Daisy, who has a background in studying and teaching visual arts, the first workshop began with visual exegesis (critical explanation or interpretation) of a painting (Hamilton, 2005). We chose to work with an expressionist painting because such art deliberately offers subjective perspectives and creates emotional effects (Gordon, 1966). To launch the process, we made an online Google search for “expressionist paintings images.” From the images that appeared, each of us individually chose the three images that caught her or his attention first. Next, we shared and discussed our intuitive choices. We then agreed on one out of this array of paintings as a stimulus for our exploration. This was a consensual, intuitive choice of a painting that resonated emotionally. We selected the painting based on the visual image alone and then explored the background information of the painting and the artist.

The painting we chose was “Mysterious Truth” by Maxim Grunin (2011), a Russian artist based in Canada. Grunin's semi-abstract painting generated extended, intense conversation, which we audio-recorded for transcription. Our conversation highlighted intriguing aspects of the painting: the inviting posture of a female figure; the hands of this female figure hovering over a piece of paper; a close up of a face, with one eye exposed and the other veiled; a mug with coffee splashing upwards or pouring downward in a face-like shape.

We composed an overall response to the painting in relation to emotional complexities of supervising self-study research (Figure 1).

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*The supervision process happens in the meeting space where there is physical and emotional connectedness. It also has life and growth within the student and the supervisor. That growth changes the student and supervisor. There is learning in both student and supervisor. The work takes on a life of its own – the unmaking and re-making of the self. The supervisory relationship could be the coffee mug as a container. Is the coffee pouring in or splashing out? It depends on who is looking at the painting. Coffee can offer comfort, warmth and sustenance. It could also burn you or give you ulcers. Are we ready for this kind of space, involvement? Acknowledging it? Can we make it visible? Can we provide supportive spaces to help with negotiating this?*

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**Figure 1. A summary of our collective response to the painting**

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At the second workshop, we devised a collective tweet poem activity (Pithouse-Morgan, Naicker, Pillay, Masinga, & Hlao, 2016). The basic premise is that each participant writes a tweet (a short message of not more than 140 characters) in response to a prompt. Then the participants compose a found poem (Butler-Kisber, 2005) comprising words and phrases extracted from the tweets and rearranged into poetic form. In this instance, we tried something new in the form of a found poem that we can describe as an unfolding poem.

To begin with, each of us wrote a tweet (Figure 2) triggered by our collective response (Figure 1) to the painting, “Mysterious Truth.”

![Figure 2. Two examples of individual tweets](image)

Thereafter, we each chose one line from our own tweet to write on a folded piece of paper. The written choice of each supervisor was hidden from that of each other supervisor by paper folds. When we unfolded the paper, we were able to see how our individual lines came together as a found poem (Figure 3).

![Figure 3. Our unfolding poem as work-in-progress](image)
As we read the unfolding poem together, we made minor adjustments to enhance flow and coherence (see Figure 3) to create the poem: “Emotional Questioning” (Figure 4).

![Table of contents](image)

**Figure 4. Our final unfolding poem**

```
Emotional Questioning
Am I connecting emotionally?
A journey of contradictions and contrasts
Without questioning, could I be less human?
New knowledge in an emotionally charged environment
Emotionally draining, yet rewarding
How do I provide support and embrace creativity?
```

Our emphasis was not on composing a poem that demonstrated artistic or literary merit; rather, the “Emotional Questioning” poem served as a research poem (Langer & Furman, 2004) to condense research data (tweets) and offer a collective representation of our subjective responses to the visual exegesis of the painting. “Emotional Questioning” signalled our growing awareness of the emotional intricacies of self-study supervision. It also served as a creative resource for a series of co-flexive conversations at three subsequent workshops. In each of these workshops, we revisited the “Mysterious Truth” painting, our collective response to the painting, and the “Emotional Questioning” poem. We shared and responded to emotionally complex supervisory experiences and also stepped back to reflect on our evolving learning through collective arts-informed self-study.

Kathleen began the process of developing this paper by re-listening to the audio recordings of our series of conversations and transcribing sections that offered key insights into our learning. She clustered excerpts into an initial outline for the paper. Kathleen then circulated several drafts via e-mail to the group and asked each person in turn to add, delete, revise, and rearrange. Additionally, the paper was further developed during several face-to-face meetings. Together, we worked over 18 months to craft a paper that could best represent our re-learning and re-knowing of self-study supervision.

**Outcomes**

Although we do not intend to offer prescriptions for engaging with the emotionality of self-study research supervision, our inquiry shows how, over time, arts-informed collective self-study with trusted colleagues facilitated unfolding of emotional complexities in a contained and responsive manner. The concept of emotional containment involves creating conditions under which emotions are purposefully exposed and aired in a secure environment with the aim of enhancing capacity for action and change (Collins, 2013; James, 2011). Through our inquiry, we have become more conscious of certain characteristics of emotional containment within our group. We offer four characteristics for our own further reflection and for consideration by other self-study researchers.

**Collective creativity**

Working together with visual exegesis as a creative entry point and collective poetry as subjective response became a shared adventure that enabled us to reveal and express emotional complexities in self-study research supervision. Our creations facilitated and represented our emerging learning in connotative and evocative rather than denotative ways (Riggins, 1994), offering multifaceted, invitational access to our emotional consciousness and dilemmas as...
supervisors. As Weber (2014) emphasised, drawing on the arts can allow self-study researchers to use artistic modes of expression, representation, and interpretation to expand perceptions and forms of addressing critical self-study questions. We found that exploring and writing about co-creative activities together played a vital part in building a sense of group identity, as well as enhancing our individual growth as methodologically inventive self-study researchers and supervisors. Because of the extemporary nature of our collective inquiry, we looked forward to our time together when we combined our energies and aptitudes, and allowed processes or outcomes to evolve organically. We were energised by curiosity, fun, and optimism in a “creativity enabling space” (Sprague & Parsons, 2012, p. 400).

**Contained vulnerability**

By allowing ourselves to be vulnerable in a safe space, trusting in the knowledge that vulnerability is necessary for empathetic connection with self and others, our conversations as supervisors have become richer, more humanising, and more energising. We experienced “mutual vulnerability [that] is grounded in the idea that there is interdependence between human beings and that the recognition of all people as ‘vulnerable’ has important pedagogical consequences concerning the possibility of assuming critical responsibility toward one’s own life and the lives of others in a community” (Zembylas, 2012, p. 9). As Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2016) highlighted, our “reciprocal vulnerability” was facilitated by our openness to less “conventional research methods” (p. 453). When we go back into our supervision responsibilities, after connecting with each other in creative and supportive ways, we feel less anxious and more accepting of our own limitations and of what is beyond our control or capability as supervisors. Additionally, we have become more comfortable with negotiating boundaries in self-study supervisory relationships; we have received reassurance from each other that sometimes it is necessary to place emphasis on professional commitments, even when we are acutely aware of a student’s personal challenges.

**Careful listening, responding, and questioning**

Working together to learn to navigate emotional entanglements “demands emotional effort, careful listening … and explicit discussion” (Zembylas, 2012, p. 9). In our case, the emotionality of self-study supervision was exposed with and within an inviting, considerate, and reflective community. Each contribution was valued and no one was made to feel deficient (Samaras et al., 2008). Deep listening and considered responses from multiple perspectives allowed for moments of stepping back, opening up space for clarity and new insights that deepened our understanding of emotional complexities in more nuanced ways. Together, we found ways to navigate difficulties that often seemed overwhelming on an individual level. Further questioning developed, thus strengthening us as a community with a sense of new possibilities and creative awareness.

**Continuing mutual inquiry**

The collective nature of our inquiry was crucial. Although Kathleen played a facilitating role in arranging meetings and taking the lead, from the beginning there was a sense of mutuality and a lack of traditional academic hierarchies. Each of us came into the group wanting to learn, and each of us served as a learning resource for others. We are mindful that none of us working on our own could have accessed the “collective wisdom” that emerged from this communal process (Davey & Ham, 2009, p. 187). Deepening our understanding of the emotionality of our self-study supervision over time assisted us in responding with confidence that we can make a difference through our actions in compassionate, courageous, and varied ways. This is something to be cultivated and sustained through our community in a spiral, interconnected process of experience, inquiry, and practice that feeds back into itself. Our desire to walk our talk as self-study supervisors means that our mutual learning adventures will continue.
Implications

While our study has responded particularly to self-study research supervision in the emotional landscape of South Africa, research supervision in general can be emotionally complex and self-study supervision particularly so because of the openness and vulnerability it demands of the student and supervisor and the impact thereof on the supervisory relationship. To return to our research question, we noted that our learning during collaborative workshops that used creative entry points and elicited subjective responses in a secure environment facilitated a deepened understanding of the “mysterious truth” of emotional perplexities in supervising self-study research. We see this as central to a personally and socially just re-knowing of self-study supervision pedagogy.

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Chapter 9: Unfolding the "mysterious truth" of emotional entanglements in supervising self-study research


What drives a teacher educator to self-study? An exploration of personal, professional and programmatic influences

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What drives a teacher educator to self-study? This is a question with what might be perceived as an easy answer. Perhaps there was an influential professor or colleague who conducted self-study. Or, an ingrained desire to engage in critical reflection. Maybe there was an experience that needed exploration. These are all valid reasons for why someone might choose to engage in self-study. In this work, our purpose was to look strictly to the past and investigate the experiences that we felt led a teacher educator to engage in self-study. Melva is a woman of color and recently tenured faculty member, who was made to feel uncertainty and inadequacy related to her teaching due primarily to perceptions held by others. There were several critical incidents that pushed Melva toward self-study, most salient were incidents that compromised her professional identity. Melva, new to the department, was aware of Brandon’s self-study scholarship and sought collaborative engagement for learning self-study research. Brandon, also newly tenured, has extensive self-study experience, including self-study presentations (AERA, Castle), publications in Studying Teacher Education, and service to the S-STEP SIG. This collaborative learning opportunity led us to examine how teacher educators come to self-study through the lens of novice and experienced self-study researchers. Our examination in this study encompasses professional, programmatic, and personal influences to answer the question of, “What personal, professional and programmatic influences draw a teacher educator to self-study?”

Review of literature

The field of self-study has existed for a quarter-century with long-standing attention on methodology (e.g., Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Feldman, 2003; LaBoskey, 2007). However, teacher educators’ research about teaching and learning self-study is more contemporary, about a decade old (e.g., Butler et al., 2014, Gregory, Diacopoulos, Branyon, & Butler, 2017; Lunenberg & Samaras, 2011; Ritter, 2017; Ritter, Lunenberg, Pithouse-Morgan, Samaras, & Vanassche, 2018). Lunenberg...
and Samaras (2011) provided a framework for teaching self-study pedagogy comprised of six guidelines: (1) investigating self through self-study methods; (2) self-study findings go beyond self; (3) making outcomes public; (4) affording opportunities for collaboration; (5) sharing artifacts teaches and strengthens research validity; and (6) modeling self-study processes supports learning.

These guidelines have served as reference points for later scholarship on teaching self-study research (Butler, 2014; Butler et al., 2014, Gregory et al., 2017; Ritter, 2017). Butler (2014) explored his teaching of a doctoral seminar devoted largely to self-study research, highlighting the challenges of learning to teach self-study through “uncertainty, unexpected and problematic moments, and sudden alterations to pedagogy and expectations” (p. 43). In a self-study of his facilitation of a faculty self-study learning group, Ritter (2017) noted a number of instructional, relational, and methodological challenges. Pertinent to our work were Ritter’s challenges building meaningful relationships with new peers and how to teach self-study while balancing the active and passive roles as “teacher” and collaborator.

Shifting to the learning of self-study research, Samaras et al. (2007) provides an early example of how teacher educators learn S-STEP. They noted that learning and applying self-study during a doctoral seminar helped doctoral students learn how to co-construct knowledge, provided peer support, taught class and assignment design, and allowed for reflection of personal and professional applications of course learning. These findings are similar to later work by Butler and two groups of doctoral students (Butler et al., 2014; Gregory et al., 2017) who wrote about their experiences learning teacher education and self-study in a doctoral seminar. Butler et al. (2014) shared the challenges and benefits of learning self-study to develop specific practices as teacher educators, namely membership within a learning community, a teacher educator identity, and critical self-awareness. Gregory et al. (2017) focused more intently on the learning of self-study, finding that their experiences in the seminar helped them recognize obstacles in self-study, develop an understanding of self-study, and to see potential in self-study. Foot, Crowe, Tollafield, and Allan (2014) investigated their learning of and application of self-study in a doctoral seminar, finding that their development of doctoral student identity included the maintenance of multiple identities as educator, student and scholar, opportunities to connect with others, engage in self-reflection, and the mitigation of self-inefficacy.

What drove these teacher educators and doctoral students to learn, engage in, and teach self-study in the first place? That is the focus of our work. Given that a primary purpose of self-study is multifaceted renewal (Samaras & Freese, 2009), we draw on some stated purposes for engaging in self-study research to orient our study, specifically self-study for personal, professional and program renewal (Kosnik, Beck, Freese, & Samaras, 2006). These orientations shape our critical engagement with Melva’s personal and professional biography to identify moments that drew her to self-study.

**Method**

**Context**

Melva and Brandon are tenured faculty at a research-intensive university in the United States. Melva is a Black woman in her eighth year at the university, and Brandon is a White man in his seventh year. Melva sought self-study for healing her professional identity compromised by years of professional and sociocultural changes coupled with harms inflicted by sustained epistemic injustice (Grant, in press). Fricker (1998) defined epistemic injustice occurs when others diminish one’s credibility. One without a priori social or cultural standing typically experiences epistemic injustice. Melva’s epistemic oppression led to professional identity-related harm, underdeveloped epistemic courage and intellectual confidence, which served as the impetus for investigating her teaching practice.

Prior to the collaboration from which this study emerges, Brandon offered Melva the opportunity to teach an online graduate-level course he developed for students to critically investigate themselves and their practices. The course evidenced Brandon’s self-study foundation
through required assignments like autobiographical writing, journaling, and online dialogic communities. This course set the stage for Melva's tentative exploration of autobiographical writing and memory work as an initial approach for professional identity renewal. Brandon offered Melva readings used for teaching self-study in doctoral seminars and suggested the two engage in collaborative journaling about her reflections on readings and autobiographical writing. Initially, Melva found their collaboration problematic, the most salient concerns were the sharing seemed one-sided and she was vulnerable sharing intimate feelings, thoughts, and experiences with a new departmental peer who she did not know well and was so unlike her. We discussed these feelings in face-to-face meetings and in our collaborative journal. Brandon vowed to share more intimately, he reassured her of his commitment of keeping her confidence, and we explored traditions between critical friends within self-study (Logan & Butler, 2013; Shuck & Russell, 2005).

Data collection and analysis

Samaras (2009) described self-study as the “…critical examination of one's actions and the context of those actions in order to achieve a more conscious mode of professional activity, in contrast to action based on habit, tradition, and impulse” (p. 1). This definition is reflected in our critical exploration of Melva's biography to uncover what drew her to self-study of teacher education practices. Brandon served as Melva's critical friend during the study, through which he would "ask provocative questions, provide data to be examined through another lens, and offer critique ... as a friend" (Costa & Kallick, 1993, p. 50).

Data for this study focused on reflective writing and periodic meetings between Melva and Brandon. Meetings were generally held on a weekly basis, during which we discussed Melva's recent readings and experiences with self-study along with biographical and professional experiences that reflected her interest in learning self-study research. These meetings were audio-recorded and analyzed using NVivo qualitative software. Additionally, we both contributed written autobiographies of education-related experiences that served as entry points for many of these conversations. Finally, we both contributed written narratives with Melva providing the most narratives given the focus of this study on her learning of self-study. Melva's writing focused extensively on critical incidents from personal and professional perspectives that she felt influenced her interest in self-study (Brandenburg & McDonough, 2017). From these data, we used constant comparative analysis to identify themes related to personal, professional and programmatic influences in learning self-study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Initial codes were identified (Saldana, 2009), and followed by focused coding in subsequent analyses (Charmaz, 2014).

Findings

Melva's story serves as the focus of this paper on what influences a teacher educator to engage in self-study research. However, our analysis of Brandon's story revealed that although Brandon and Melva have different cultural and educational backgrounds, their critical incidences of personal, professional and programmatic influences intersected and suggests shared reasons for why someone comes to self-study research. The common elements led us to share aspects of Brandon's story in the discussion section.

Personal influences: Struggles with outsidership and expectations

In her writings, Melva spoke extensively about her personal experiences as a minoritized woman and how this positioning led her to engage in self-study research. Specifically, she shared three forms of experiences that reflected her struggles with outsidership and expectations influenced by others' perceptions of her (Skerrett, 2006). Melva wrote in her autobiography, “I recognized early in life that, 'I do not belong.'” She continued, “I am a person who is regularly, not due to malice or bad intent necessarily, but through cultural and social norms made to feel like an 'other' describes the predicament I have repeatedly found myself.” A recent experience exemplifies this feeling.
Melva observed negative cultural changes during President Barack Obama’s eight years in office, and more profound shifts since Donald Trump’s run for and election to the presidency of the United States. A couple of months before the election of Trump, Melva was walking along a local beach with her husband when they “were loudly exhorted, ‘N****s go home!!!‘ by White boys in a pick-up truck.” She added, “These young, ignorant boys were unaware that we were home.” Such experiences were not new for Melva, but had not been encountered in decades. This type of overt racism reinforced feelings of outsidership in the broader culture, which permeates through academic settings.

Melva wrote in her autobiography, “High expectations were taught to me explicitly early in life by my mother. She drilled into me that I would be required to give twice as much to receive half as much as others.” She continued, “Many people who are characterized as ‘other’ or assigned ‘minority’ status have been taught similar lessons for survival.” Within our shared journal, Melva wondered how this personal stance influenced her teaching of “majority”-status students who may not have been taught the same lesson, which led to her wondering about personal bias she may have toward such students.

These personal experiences influenced Melva toward self-study research as she was continually forced to question her place in society, at work, and in life. Melva pondered whether her status as a minoritized person created biased perceptions toward majority-status individuals and vice versa, that perhaps minimized her standing within academia (McNeil, 2011). She questioned why she would be hired for her expertise but be denied access to the programs that reflected that expertise. Such questions are ripe for self-interrogation as they aim to improve an understanding of self – a tenet of self-study research (LaBoskey, 2004).

Professional influences: Teaching from an “othered” perspective

Melva had been hired for her extensive experience related to a specific specialty program. However, over the course of two years, college administrators demoted her program status without explanation. Toward the end of her teaching in the program, a large group of students filed complaints related to their assigned course grades as they felt their grades were unjustified (Placier, 1995). This particular cohort was comprised of all women of the US majority racial group, except for one woman who shared Melva’s racial identity. This student told Melva that she did not participate in the student insurgency and admonished those who approached her about it. The students’ grades were based on accepted teaching practice informed by formative assessments and following the weighted averaging calculation strategy published in the course syllabus. In response to grade appeals, the administrators suggested changing grades, but the policy required justifying grades.

The cohort, excluding two students, petitioned the administration in writing to not allow Melva to teach this type of course, for which she holds specific and required credentials for teaching, but she has not been assigned to teach another of these courses since. This experience felt like epistemic injustice to Melva because students and administrators diminished her credibility as a knowledgeable teacher educator capable of assigning grades that evidenced disciplinary learning. Fricker (2007) defined epistemic injustice as one’s expertise being diminished by others, and epistemic oppression (sustained epistemic injustice) leads to under developed epistemic confidence and intellectual courage. Students initially diminished Melva’s expertise, and then university administrators chose not to oppose the students’ positioning; thereby, reifying the epistemic injustice.

The continuance of administration’s refusal to acknowledge Melva’s credibility as well as removing her from the program for which she was hired continues. Melva reflected upon the experience within a journal entry, “I can control improving my practice, but cannot affect student population or epistemic injustices.” She also reflected on how the experience impacted her credibility, writing, “Given social and cultural contexts of the United States, there are instances when my credibility or expertise appears to require validation by someone other than me, and validation is often withheld or not freely given by recognized authorities.” She sees pursuing self-
study as a means for building teacher educator credibility, but outside of the specialized field of expertise and for overcoming the epistemic oppression; an act of social justice.

**Programmatic influences: Weathering shifts and re-prioritizing**

In her first career, Melva was a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) professional, noting, “I valued my status and recognized the privilege that came with it.” After completing her doctorate in mathematics education, Melva accepted a faculty position at our institution in a newly-constituted STEM education department. This structure emphasized STEM as a specialized field of study and Melva found some successes and leadership opportunities within the aforementioned specialty program early in her career.

However, with little notice and limited faculty input, the college administration made the determination to shift faculty between two departments. Several faculty not associated with teacher preparation were moved from Brandon’s Department of Teaching and Learning while science and mathematics education faculty members were shifted to Teaching and Learning, leaving the STEM education department with precious few STEM educators. After the change, Melva noted, “I neither recognized nor appreciated the benefits as STEM-connected faculty until after the transition. My scholarship was no longer aligned with the new departmental values.” She added, “My ideas were no longer supported by years of historical precedent and heard by ears familiar with and receptive to my perspectives. I felt, ‘I do not belong here.’”

Hierarchy in the academy is not new and some decisions are simply out of one’s control. However, in institutions where faculty morale is valued, administrators make decisions with transparency. For instance, if a decision has been made, the decision is shared, there is clarity, and input is solicited from all stakeholders. Melva experienced the programmatic shift in a two-phased approach. Initially it was presented as a hypothetical consideration, something to be mulled over. However, the second phase hit like a ton of bricks dropped from a very high place. Within weeks the move was announced and a timeline set. Time for consideration or discussion had passed without either, and Melva’s voice was not heard or valued.

From a programmatic perspective, Melva had lost her compass. She had created an identity within the defined space of STEM and suddenly that identity was nullified without her input. As a result, Melva was left to re-prioritize her scholarship and practice, because she believed there was no synergy. She took on new classes she was unprepared to teach, and she felt like junior faculty instead of tenured. Brandon’s presence within the new department and her awareness of his self-study research scholarship provided the deciding impetus for Melva to select self-study research as the vehicle for investigating and improving her practice for the purpose of self-healing and social justice she sought.

No other faculty member used improvement aimed scholarship that could help Melva better understand and improve her practice. Given the influence of community upon teacher educator identity growth and connections to self-study research (Williams, Ritter, & Bullock, 2012), it is highly likely that without the presence of a self-study scholar in the department Melva would have pursued other approaches with which she had greater facility, including participatory action research or autoethnography. Clearly, the personal and professional influences were underlying causes for her interest in learning self-study, but the programmatic influence positioned her in close proximity of a self-study scholar, which revealed two appealing opportunities that moderated the predicament of the aforementioned programmatic influences: (a) developing professional relationship; and (b) scholarly collaboration with Brandon made self-study the right choice within her new department.

**Discussion and conclusions**

As a methodology that is often still defined as “emerging,” it was of interest to us to understand what experiences drives someone to engage in self-study of teacher education practices. What we found suggests that teacher educators who are driven to engage in such work do so through
multifaceted considerations related to personal, professional, and programmatic influences. For Melva, these influences related to cultural and professional feelings of outsidership, investigating her practice to improve her teaching, and feelings of being undervalued professionally. It is likely that others within the self-study community share similar experiences that led them to self-study research. In the midst of our study, Melva wrote: “I self-identify as a reflective practitioner, and self-study affords a systematic approach [to investigate my practice].” She perceives her own self-study as an activist’s tool for making public effective teacher educator credibility because it ensures a record of evidence for empowerment. The data, analyses, and reports shared within the self-study community afford validation of teaching credibility, which can be positioned for fighting epistemic injustices. Already engaged, Melva finds solace in her initial self-study for improving her practice.

Although not the focus of this specific study due to limited space, we analyzed Brandon’s narratives and contributions in weekly meetings and found synergy among our rationales for pursuing self-study. At a personal level, Brandon regularly questioned his credibility as a teacher, doctoral student, and faculty member. Professionally, Brandon has regularly found himself as an “Other” in his teaching. He self-identified most predominately as a secondary educator, but has been assigned to teaching primarily elementary courses at our institution, despite his secondary expertise and experiences. This has resulted in feelings of being cast as an “Other” by his students. Perhaps, students diminish his credibility because he has not taught elementary grades. Is he experiencing epistemic injustice?

Finally, Brandon has weathered extensive programmatic limitations that have forced him to rely on self-study as a dominant methodology in his research. Although there is an increased emphasis on powerful teacher education, Brandon has observed few opportunities to engage in his particular scholarly interests, which are beyond the scope of this paper. This reality forced Brandon to generate new, unexpected scholarship using self-study research.

We have identified a number of influences within Melva’s story; however, to gain greater understanding of this emerging area of self-study scholarship, we encourage others to reflect upon and formally investigate the reasons that led them to self-study scholarship. Even an informal investigation might serve teacher educators well to more fully understand their experiences, the causes, and understand if and how their work has been self-healing, supportive of social justice, or promoting other positive changes. In the end, a better understanding of why you do self-study is informed by what brought you to self-study originally.

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Crossing borders and pushing boundaries: Positioning, emotions, and liminality in teacher education

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Borders indicate boundaries, or limitations. Often times, teacher educators feel bound to be and act in specific ways, as determined by outside voices. We are positioned within normative frames, or larger storylines about education and teachers, that affect the “repertoire of acts” we have access to (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003, p. 5). Therefore, positioning theory is relational, and positions are socially-situated, which deeply impact and connect to matters of the self. As teacher educators, societal beliefs about teaching and teacher education influence how we are positioned and how we position ourselves, thus impacting the stories we tell about ourselves (Johnston, 2004). As self-study researchers, we sought to explore how positioning reveals the explicit and implicit patterns of reasoning evident in the ways we act as teacher educators towards both our students (teachers) and those in the public arena.

Positioning also reveals the way emotional labor impacts our acceptance and/or resistance of these positions. Emotional labor is conceptualized as the “management of feeling” through either surface acting, changing one’s appearance in order not to show a feeling, or deep acting, suppressing an unsuitable emotion or working to induce a suitable emotion (Hochschild, 2012, p. 35). With that, emotions we experience, and the unconscious appraisal process of evaluating these emotions, cannot be “separated from the relational, social, cultural and political contexts in which they occur” (Forgasz, Berry, & McDonough, 2014, p. 82).

To understand how both positionality and emotional labor impact our work as teacher educators, we also recognized liminality as an important concept that highlights the complexity of becoming a teacher educator. Liminality, derived from the Latin term limen, means threshold. Van Gennep (1909) describes thresholds as phases individuals go through in rites of passages, the act of becoming. As teacher educators, the preliminal stage involved a metaphorical “death”, leaving the K-12 classroom behind. The liminal stage, implied an actual passing through the threshold marking the boundary between being a classroom teacher and becoming a teacher educator. Lastly, during the postliminal stage, we began living with the new identity. To Turner (1969),

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liminal individuals, people in the transition phase, are “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (pp. 94–95). As teacher educators, navigating both societal positions and emotional labor, we understand liminality as “a dramatic cultural phase” (Pierce, 2007) impacting the stories we tell about ourselves as teacher educators.

The field of self-study offers a wealth of insight into the process of becoming a teacher educator (Garbett, 2012; Arizona Group 1995), the challenges based on cultural myths (Bullock, 2012), the limits and complexities of our roles (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2008), using teaching portfolios to support the transition from teacher to teacher educator (Hamilton, 2018), and identity construction in the academy (Bullock & Ritter, 2011). However, this particular field of study, as well as the field of self-study of teacher education practices generally, has limited transnational comparative perspectives (Mena & Russell, 2017). Additionally, self-study research on the transition from teacher to teacher educator often focuses on challenges in the academic context, for instance concerning a specific department (Hamilton, 2018; Bullock & Ritter, 2011), but rarely brings in a societal level that reaches outside the academy. Therefore, we seek to fill a gap in the literature by offering a context in which we, three teacher educators from different parts of the world, made sense of the ways positioning, emotions, and liminality impact our work in teacher education from both a personal and societal standpoint, with hopes that the comparative perspective not only grows our own understandings of being and becoming teacher educators, but also contributes to the field.

Therefore, we explored the following research questions: How does our emotional labor as teacher educators impact our possibility to resist particular positions, specifically when considering the outside voices influencing and attempting to influence these positions? How might teacher educators use theories of positioning and emotional labor to take a line to and resist boundaries that limit us within the profession?

Methods

Participants

Elizabeth, an associate professor in the United States, met Martin and Katarina, doctoral students, while conducting research in Sweden. Martin has since graduated and now serves as an assistant professor in Sweden. Katarina is currently completing the final semesters of her doctoral program.

Data collection and analysis

To answer our research questions, we used autoethnography self-study methods (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). First, we engaged in an academic written discussion about teacher education and identity formation, resulting in seven lengthy written responses shared in a google document over a 3-month period of time. Then, we each wrote three personal narratives as a way of “bending back on the self to look more deeply at self-other interactions” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 740), thus embracing Skerrett’s (2008) notions that personal biographies shape teacher educators’ identities and influence the lived experiences of teaching and researching. Topics included: becoming teacher educators, emotional work in teacher education, and influences of cultural models.

We followed up with face-to-face/online conversations, enacting Coia and Taylor’s (2009) argument that “real-time dialogue” is critical “to process and discuss meaning” (p. 177). Through the analysis of our narratives, we uncovered the normative constraints in our unfolding storylines, which at times were similar, and at other times, were distinct and unique. From here, we incorporated Richardson’s (2000) method of writing as a form of inquiry, exploring and engaging with the data through writing. Combining these various methods became a way to systematically analyze our data (Samaras & Freese, 2009). Within the analysis, we each individually read and reread the written documents to uncover recurring themes. Then, through dialogue, we determined three themes: vulnerability, need, and loss. In each, we noted tensions, which led
us to further unpack the relationship between the three concepts of positioning, emotions, and liminality embedded in these themes. The transnational perspective sharpened our view of our own practice, while also making us sensitive to our own preconceived ideas about the different national education systems. Thus, we each wrote about one of the themes, but when we shared our writings with each other, we uncovered extreme overlaps as we used similar data points to illustrate each assigned theme. For example, much of what highlighted vulnerability also highlighted need and loss. With that, we noted these themes incorporated two distinct perspectives—personal and societal. Thus, we present our data points in the outcomes with these two perspectives and then share our analysis of the themes framed by our theoretical lens.

Outcomes

Personal perspective

Our narratives covered the transition from being a teacher to being a teacher educator. We noted initial uncertainties leading to emotional labor in the form of surface acting, i.e. changing our appearance to hide our feelings (Hochschild 2012, p. 35), but also ways we gave up this surface acting to position ourselves through vulnerability within the classroom. Elizabeth outlined her worries about whether learning was meaningful to her students and asked them how they felt about the learning experiences. Martin did not hide from his students the fact that he was a new teacher educator, and Katarina shared mistakes she made as a teacher with her students. All three authors received positive responses from the students, in many cases explicitly mentioning their appreciation for our transparency and the sharing of mistakes.

We also noted how this wish to be transparent was a way of acknowledging the fact that we were in a liminal phase between teacher and teacher educator. We often experienced feelings of loss of identity on a personal level that were linked with this transition.

Elizabeth. Elizabeth reflected on her own feelings during the beginning phases of her career, “I often felt like a fraud . . . I didn't know it all, yet I was positioned as an expert.” However, she reflected later,

*Starting my 11th year at the university, I no longer harbor insecurities. If I let the ‘demons’ talk in my head, I might hear doubts about my knowledge or experience level, but, I feel confident in what I can share with my teaching candidates. I continue spending time in classrooms, connected to what is happening in schools. I do not feel like a relic in the university, but rather an integral part of the education system.*

Martin. Martin recounted an incident early in his career as a teacher educator illustrating how “insecurity might make people put on a mask”.

*Once we had a session before lunch and another after lunch. A few students left after the first part, without telling me. I remember how disappointed I felt. It was impossible for me not to think they left because they thought the first part was not as good as they expected. I slept badly, reflecting upon the event. I could not let it go, so I decided to ask them why they left and explain how it made me feel. I told them that they would probably experience the same emotions when they became teachers.*

Katarina. Katarina described the first few years as a teacher educator as a period of joy. She felt close to the students and connected in their choice of occupation. Gradually, though, that feeling was replaced by something else, feeling separated from her former teacher identity. In the liminal phase, she questioned what her identity had become:

*Had I distanced myself so far from being a teacher into being a teacher-educator? And was that not being a teacher in my mind? Is there a way back to the joyful community of we-the-
teachers? Am I an academic now that traditionally regards teaching as something inferior to researching? How did this happen?

Societal perspective

On a societal level, presuppositions and taken for granted ideas about what teacher education is and should be created feelings of loss of pride and self-confidence, while also imposing feelings of being devalued. To manage our emotions, we engaged in surface acting due to vulnerability in relation to societal discourse, presuppositions, and policy around teacher education. Additionally, accountability culture caused loss of authenticity and joy in teaching. Examples of this emerged from the narratives.

Elizabeth. Elizabeth revealed her trepidation with the ever-shifting U.S. legislation in education, identifying two themes—failure and accountability. She believed these regulations were limited in logic and no longer positioned teachers as professionals, writing: “I fear the presuppositions society holds about teachers and that these presuppositions will ‘win’ out, thus crippling and tumbling our teacher preparation programs. That is, people believe anyone can teach.”

Martin. Martin shared his understandings that in Sweden, research in pedagogy and educational science has been criticized for not taking evidence and best practice into account; it is said to deal with issues that do not improve results in large-scale studies, such as PISA. This personally affected Martin when his dissertation was given as an example of such ‘needless’ research in a Swedish newspaper. This article positioned him as not only “not needed, but as a detriment to teacher preparation”. Martin was saddened and angered by society’s disregard to what he considered important research as he wrote, “But the problem is that the presuppositions vented in the article shape public opinion about educational science and, in the long run, about teacher education”.

Katarina. Katarina shared an instance where she was about to teach a course where one of the students had just published an Op-Ed article criticizing Swedish teacher education programs. Curious, Katarina searched out the student and found her on Twitter actively debating teacher education with teachers, students, head teachers, union representatives, researchers, and teacher educators, building the discourse. To Katarina, this student’s positioning of her as a teacher educator was a negative voice, which overshadowed other voices in the class and moved her to behave/act in ways that felt ‘far from me’. That is, the discourse was so strong in society that it most definitely affected students. Knowing this, Katarina lost self-confidence and inadvertently changed her teaching. She wrote, “Was I influenced by a discourse I did not agree with, turned into a kind of teacher educator I did not want to be, with low expectations for students, throwing suspicion on them?”

Discussion

Through the data, we came to recognize the ways we intentionally both used surface acting and gave up surface acting to position ourselves within our liminal phases in relation to the three themes of vulnerability, need, and loss within our personal classrooms and the larger societal dialogue.

The meta perspective of teaching about teaching implies that there is vulnerability in the balancing act of how transparent to the inner workings of a teacher’s thoughts and decisions one can be. In the preliminal and liminal phases, all three authors struggled with the new identity of teacher educator, negotiating the line between how he/she was being positioned and how he/she hoped to position him/herself. Elizabeth worried about not being qualified enough to be a teacher educator—being perceived as a “fraud”. Martin described an initial worry that his knowledge was not enough, or that he wouldn’t be good enough as an instructor to keep his students engaged in the learning. For Katarina, she acted out a confidence that was not there by putting on a smile, or keeping her head high. In these cases, vulnerability was covered up.
However, over time, surface acting was no longer needed due to a greater confidence, and vulnerability became an important pedagogical asset. All three authors described difficult situations as teacher educators where they, sometimes as a last resource, opened up and showed their inner workings as teachers to their students. These were threshold moments, in some ways a path out of the liminality (Turner, 1969) of not-yet being a teacher educator, where the authors received positive feedback from students following this transparency just because they were open about their worries or mistakes. In this way, vulnerability became a new behavior in the “repertoire of acts” we had access to (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003, p. 5) while navigating our own positioning as teacher educators.

While vulnerability in relation to teaching became an asset, there was a new vulnerability induced by outside voices in relation to societal discourse, presuppositions, and policy around teacher education. Our narratives uncovered a desire, as teacher educators, to feel needed. However, our different national contexts made us sense this in distinct ways. With that, we identified specific ways our emotional labor was a direct result of the ways we felt positioned by the outside voices. The perceived discourse, in both the U.S. and Sweden, positions teacher education as a scapegoat for the supposed failure of the school, or even the nation. In addition, teacher educators are deprofessionalized through the accountability culture. However, a subtle difference emerged in our narratives between the U.S. and Sweden in regards to need. In Sweden, Martin and Katarina shared how teacher education is seen as important, yet requires great improvements. On the other hand, Elizabeth shared the societal discourse that says ‘anyone can teach’, and consequently there is no need for teacher education.

Each author explored how he/she performed emotional labor to hide his/her fear and sadness regarding this view of teacher education on the societal level. Thus, how we were positioned by others impacted the acting we performed. Within the classroom, each author felt empowered when the students showed appreciation for the instruction. But, we also experienced angst when the societal presuppositions crept into the classroom, feeling somewhat restricted in our abilities to combat these presuppositions. However, Martin had the unique opportunity to resist the societal positioning as he responded in writing to the article critiquing his research, thus defending his beliefs on a national level.

Loss of teacher identity was part of the personal level, a difficult border to cross for beginning teacher educators, it seemed. As Turner (1969) pointed out, liminality is “the realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise” (p. 97). These feelings can be traced in the narratives by both Martin and Katarina as they each described the transition from being a classroom teacher to being a teacher educator. Both identified a sense of self was lost in the process of becoming teacher educators, which could be explained by feelings of being neither here nor there—not a classroom teacher anymore, but not yet fully an incorporated identity of teacher educator. Elizabeth, as more experienced, already crossed the border. Still, all three authors had lingering tensions due to an unwillingness to identify with how public opinion regarded teacher education in general.

Specifically, feelings of loss were often connected to a societal discourse that embraced a non-disputable truth, both in the U.S. and Sweden, that teacher education, in general, fails to produce good teachers. Because language is constitutive of the social world (Fairclough, 1992), this discourse is almost impossible to oppose, despite the absence of evidence. In the U.S., policymakers believe they know what it means to teach because their own experiences mean more than research (Saphier, 1994). This is what Lortie (1975) referred to as “apprenticeship of observation”. According to Elizabeth, “the idea creeps in that we don’t need teacher preparation programs, especially out of the university, because anyone can teach based on personal experiences as a student in the school systems”. This discourse leads to loss of self-confidence and dignity. In Sweden, the media let academics in various fields vent unfounded, sweeping opinions about the ills of teacher education. Additionally, bolognization of higher education has been going on for the last decade or so, to the effect that higher education is becoming standardized, bringing the accountability culture in its trail. The constant evaluations, where students anonymously judge the courses, and, in effect, teacher education, may make the teachers less willing to experiment
and improvise. Thus, the joy and pleasure of teaching vanishes to some extent, interlinking the societal and the personal.

Implications

From the data and analysis, how the students position themselves/are positioned by us seemed to be crucial to the “repertoire of acts” we can access (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003, p. 5) in relation to both the students and society as a whole. Therefore, we propose two ways by which to discuss the complexities of these relationships as they relate to the field of teacher education. Although both can be applied transnationally, we recognize the importance of understanding the national/local context when determining the stance.

First, teacher educators can position themselves together with students, future teachers. In this, they retain their identities as teachers, giving up the surface acting to position themselves as co-learners, outside the negative societal discourse. For example, when we showed our vulnerability, we aligned ourselves with our students. This act of not surface acting could be considered a form of resistance.

Alternately, teacher educators can position themselves as separate from students, future teachers, as they align the students with the negative societal discourse. This positioning demonstrates more insecurity and emotion management because surface acting is based on the division created by society’s presuppositions between teacher educators and students. Thus, emotional labor limits the ability to push the boundaries toward full connectivity with students, and could be seen as a defense mechanism. As teacher educators, when under attack, we may want to take the easy way out and surface act not to lose face.

However, resistance could come in the form of addressing the presuppositions through discussion, making the students aware of public opinion about school and teacher education, how it is discursively constructed and how and by whom students, teachers and teacher educators are positioned. Thus, positioning theory may help teacher educators, together with students, take a line to and resist boundaries that limit within the profession.

Engaging in these forms of activities are signs that we have not lost hope in our ability to produce change through our actions within teacher education and ultimately in society. Therefore, this inquiry inspires us to collaborate with other teacher educators to continue considering the complexities of crossing borders and pushing boundaries as acts of resistance to societal presuppositions.

References


Understanding our identities as teacher educators in an era of deprofessionalization

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Our self-study bubbled to the surface as we were sitting next to each other in a 3-day training for which the leadership in our college had mandated attendance under the auspices that it was required by the state, which it was not. We were frustrated because the training and corresponding certification was designed by the state public education department for school principals, and as university faculty/teacher educators we couldn't understand why we were required to attend. The prickly tensions that engulfed this mandate were well beyond our typical professional development seminars, meetings, and normal professional duties. Since we carpoole to and from the training, we had time to explore the notion that this mandated training was part of a bigger issue, deprofessionalization.

For us, deprofessionalization lies within the corporatization of universities and of K-12 education in the United States, decreased public funding for public education, and diminishing professional autonomy and diminishing credence given to our professional judgment (Ball, 2003; Hargreaves, 2000; Ryan & Bourke, 2013). This “managerial discourse” (Ryan & Bourke, 2013) is most often couched in reform initiatives that “reflect an international convergence toward uniformity, conformity, and compliance” (Delandshere & Petrosky, 2004, p. 2). Additionally, this corporatization has led to increased numbers of part-time instructors in lieu of tenure track faculty members.

We are two white, female, tenured faculty members in a college of education at a research university in the southwestern United States. Throughout our careers, first as classroom teachers and eventually as university professors, we have valued collaboration, equity, and working with PK-12 educators. We were both hired into our current positions as assistant professors 11 years ago. Cheryl is in the Elementary Education Program, while Laura is in the Secondary Education Program.

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Aims

Increasingly across the United States, changes in PK-12 education have resulted in increased feelings of frustration and disquietude among educators (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Snow-Gerono & Franklin, 2006). Over the past decade, a deprofessionalization of classroom educators has occurred as a result of value-added modeling to evaluate educator effectiveness, increased mandated standardized testing, and teacher attrition. This has also resulted in fewer teachers entering the profession (Milner, 2013; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Because “self-study methodology positions the researcher to examine the self as an integral part of the context for learning, whereby the framing and reframing of lived experiences results in a cumulative and altered understanding of practice,” (Tidwell, et al., 2012, p.15) we must make transparent how the historical and political realities of public education in America are part of our “context for learning.” Thusly, as we began to explore the increased mandates placed upon us as teacher educators, we noticed that we, too, were seeing similarities between the changes in the work lives of classroom educators in the United States and in our work lives as university-based teacher educators. Hence, in this self-study we sought to explore these changes in our professional lives more deeply.

Methods

In this collaborative self-study, we strove to adhere to the guidelines set forth by Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) to ensure the quality of our self-study. Berry and Crow (2009) indicate self-study presents “a framework for inquiry into one’s beliefs and practices as an educator with a focus on better understanding the interaction between beliefs and practices for the improvement of teaching and learning” (p.85). In this regard, we utilized a personal history (Samaras, Hicks, & Garvey Berger, 2004), or education life history (Bullough, 1994) approach. Samaras (2011) explains the benefits of this approach, stating:

*The personal history self-study method allows you to begin to reflect on your own learning that may have connections to your research interests and question. It is particularly useful to examine who you are as a teacher, your teacher identity, the motivations behind your teacher goals, and the constraints and supports you have experienced in reaching those goals.* (p. 95)

We are using personal history to explore our professional identities as a means of better understanding how we define ourselves as teacher educators, how we understand what it means to be professionals, and how we are experiencing deprofessionalization.

To begin our personal history self-study, we met to share our perceptions of changes in our work and around a shared reading, *The Slow Professor* (Berg & Seeber, 2016). Through reflecting on the section of the book that we found most relevant to our current context, we developed a set of orienting questions to guide our work:

1. How do we define the work of teacher education?
2. What are our professional identities as teacher educators?
3. Given questions one and two, how are we experiencing deprofessionalization as teacher educators in our current context?

In order to begin to unpack questions one and two, we began by individually writing personal statements about our beliefs about teacher education and our roles as teacher educators. These statements were similar to the type expected during the tenure and promotion process and detailed our teaching philosophies. Next, we read each other’s reflections, looking for themes and places for further elaboration. The themes raised in this round of analysis represented key ideas and beliefs regarding the work of teacher education and our roles in it.

We then met again, sharing the themes we saw in one another’s writing and asking clarifying questions to ensure ideas were fully explored and explained. We each had an opportunity to hear, discuss, and elaborate on what our writing reflected to the other regarding our identities as teacher
educators and our beliefs about the role of teacher education. These discussions also began to dive into addressing our third orienting question about the impact of deprofessionalization on our work. During our discussions of our individual and joint beliefs about teacher education, we began to discuss ways our current context was impeding our abilities to fully live our teacher educator identities. We audio recorded this discussion and transcribed it for further analysis.

We coded the transcription for themes, this time paying careful attention to any disconfirming evidence, resulting in our iterative data collection, analysis, and interpretations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). At the end of this round of analysis, we had identified a set of common themes important to us as teacher educators and places where we felt constrained in some way in our work. We engaged in another full iteration of conversation, transcription, and subsequent analysis. This recursive dialogue process allowed us to tease out new insights and shed light on oversights (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). One of our new insights stemmed from one of our initial themes, agency vs. acquiescence. We discuss this further below.

Throughout our study, we strove for integrity and trustworthiness (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). We seek to clearly describe the experiences that have led to our understanding of self and of the new understandings that have been revealed as a result of this self-study. We have also asked outside members of our department to serve as critical friends and review our final manuscript and findings for their perspective. One of our critical friends offered a probing statement, “Perhaps believing in yourselves as professionals is what helps you face and stand up to deprofessionalization” (MK, 1/18). This aligned with a final wondering from Laura in which she related resiliency as part of true acquiescence.

Outcomes

Our orienting questions sought to explore our own beliefs about teacher education as a way to better unpack our teacher educator identities. We did this in order to situate our experiences with deprofessionalization in academia. As such, we identified four themes that represent both our hopes for our profession and the ways we are currently experiencing deprofessionalization. We describe them as continuums because we think that by framing them as such, we can begin to better understand both the ways we are being deprofessionalized, and how we might strive for circumstances in which we are more fully valued as professionals. The four continua are:

1. Collaboration and relationships vs. isolation
2. Mentoring as advocacy vs. false or absent mentoring
3. Professional learning vs. external mandates
4. Agency vs. acquiescence

Collaboration and relationships vs. isolation

One of the ways Cheryl views herself as a professional is through collaboration (Journal, 5/17). For her, collaboration is building relationships, which requires developing credibility and finding common ground. Across her career, she has focused her teaching and research on developing partnerships that provide strong educational experiences for teacher candidates. In reflecting on what she has learned about collaboration through 20 years of this work, Cheryl emphasized how much time it takes to collaborate effectively. In our current context, her time is being infringed upon in ways she frames as deprofessionalization (e.g., the three days spent in mandatory training after having attended this training previously). Increasingly, due to college-wide changes in course loads, she lacks the load time to collaborate with school-based partners. Potentially, this lack of time for collaboration and school-site based work could decrease her knowledge of current classroom realities. This is an element of her professional identity she is still negotiating. She stated, “I see it also as the research that I engage in, that whole flow has now been severed for me” (Dialogue, 9/17).
Laura also discussed collaboration as an important theme in her sense of professional identity. She described collaboration as a way to retain her identity as a teacher educator and to push back against the encroachment on her time and her work. In Laura’s initial journal, she recounted a discussion with a recently retired colleague who reflected that she had spent so much time battling administration at the expense of her own work. In her reflection, Laura wrote, “I’m trying very hard not to let that happen.” Cheryl asked, “How are you trying to do that currently?” Laura responded:

*Partially through this kind of work. I’m excited about our collaboration. I’m excited about self-study… I mean actually engaging in the work that’s making me better at my teaching…I love teaching, and I love thinking about teaching, and I love collaborating with others around issues with teaching.* (Dialogue, 9/17)

**Mentoring as advocacy vs. false or absent mentoring**

Each of us has articulated ways in which we have felt mentored. With regards to what is required for mentoring to be about advocacy, Laura wrote,

*The relationships have to be there and be developed and authentic. You can’t truly advocate for someone if you don’t know them and their context and their particular goals and philosophies. Because then it is simply advocating for what you think they want. Or what you think they need.* (Memo, 11/17)

Cheryl also noted that,

*As I reflect on the current context in which I work, I am thinking that a trusting relationship which is a piece of mentoring as advocacy has to begin with truth and genuineness; not just mentors assigned…but from a genuine place that is a strand through all of the work of the organization.* (Memo, 12/17)

As new faculty members at our current institution 11 years ago, we were both assigned mentors and reflected that “my mentor was not very helpful” (Laura, Memo, 11/17; Cheryl, Memo, 12/17). The meaningful mentors we have had throughout our careers were not assigned to us, but grew out of natural and organic interactions. Cheryl wrote, “I see that throughout my career as an educator, I’ve had mentors, people who advocated for me and gave me opportunities to grow, to become involved, and to develop my expertise” (Memo, 12/17). An emergent theme as a key component in mentoring as advocacy is a drawing out and encouragement of one's strengths and abilities; perhaps this is our working definition of advocacy.

In contrast, Laura wrote extensively about not being mentored and then overworked. She wondered, “Do I not know how to ask for help? Is that something that perhaps I need to learn? How to say no and/or ask for help?” (Memo, 11/17). Cheryl wondered, if false mentoring

*…might be a result of lack of time or a lack of expected outcomes? There is little meaningful work in which we, in our college, are collectively able to roll up our sleeves, create something that is lasting and impactful. Is this due to a lack of collective purpose?* (Memo, 12/17)

What we do see in our grappling with mentoring as advocacy, is that within our teaching we both build a sense of community, advocacy, and true mentoring. As instructors in our Master of Arts pathway that is focused on reflective practice (MARP), we both noted that we find joy and great satisfaction from our work with these classroom educators. Cheryl noted that “mentoring is supposed to make a difference in a positive way and to both parties” (Memo, 12/17). Within MARP we experience this sense of reciprocity.
Professional learning vs. external mandates

At the very outset of our study, each of us indicated that we consider ourselves reflective practitioners. Cheryl indicated,

“It wasn’t part of my teacher preparation…What I did do as a classroom teacher, which I continue to do as a teacher educator, I jotted down notes about things to do differently tomorrow to ensure success. I did that as a way to look at my kids and my teaching” (Memo, 8/17).

Laura wrote that in her work with teacher candidates,

I want them to crave alternative perspectives on issues they are struggling with in their classrooms. I often tell them that if there is a student they can’t seem to figure out in their classroom, a student who struggles in their class, they should ask other teachers who have this student. Perhaps there is another place, another class where they are successful. What does that look like? How would that teacher describe the student? (Memo, 8/17)

Throughout our recursive analyses, the theme of reflective practitioner was closely aligned with professional learning that is educator initiated. This may be supporting teacher candidates and classroom educators/graduate students in seeking out alternative perspectives and additional knowledge, or for us as teacher educators, engaging in professional learning that authentically enhances our work lives. Laura noted, “self-study has made me happy” She elaborated,

I mean actually engaging in the work is making me better at my teaching and better at how to be a member of a program. Learning so I can hopefully create the context for others that’s different from the context that I entered. (Dialogue, 9/17)

This professional learning that is rooted in our questions and our own quest to be better teacher educators is in contrast to the mandated professional development mentioned earlier.

Agency vs. acquiescence

In our first round of critical friend conversations, we each talked about agency as being trusted to use our professional judgment in decisions impacting our students and being able to guide our own professional learning. For example, Cheryl described how when she was a beginning elementary teacher, she and a group of her colleagues decided to work on how they taught mathematics. She stated:

We were all pretty good math teachers as a result of three summers in a row for a month of professional development. It was a time investment on our behalf, but we knew that we had 4th, 5th, and 6th grade kids who either didn’t understand a math concept or who were still struggling to move from the concrete to the abstract stages of understanding and knowing.

This experience is in contrast to the event that prompted this self-study—the mandatory training on the state’s teacher observation rubric. As teacher educators, we see ourselves as professionals who are deeply rooted in research about learning to teach and preparing teachers. While we understand the need for professional development and a shared understanding of what our teachers will experience when they are full time teachers, the process by which this training occurred made us feel as though we had no agency in our own learning.

Originally, we described the opposite end of the continuum from agency as acquiescence. In our initial conversation, we used this word to imply a sense of giving up, of being so beaten down by external pressures that one simply stops trying to be agentic. As Cheryl described it, “…there are things I’ve chosen, I will not engage in that again, in the current climate in this college because it is not worth my time and energy to do something that comes to naught” (Dialogue, 9/17). Additionally, Laura described a current context where she had felt true collaboration with colleagues across the college, but lurking behind the sense of collegiality is a concern that the work
will be wasted time like so many initiatives in the past. She recounted stating at this meeting,

*If this comes to nothing, I am done. For the rest of my time here, I will not engage in any work like this again because I have been burned previously, multiple times, where I, with my whole heart and my whole intellect engaged in something only to have it ignored.* (Dialogue, 12/17)

In our second recorded dialogue (12/17), we intentionally explored what the term acquiescence means. Merriam-Webster defines acquiesce as “to accept, comply, or submit tacitly or passively,” while the Latin root means “to become quiet.” What this led us to explore is that we had used this word negatively, while its definition and origins do not necessarily imply a negative state. Acquiescing can be a moment where one assesses one’s options, the existing constraints and possibilities, and then chooses to accept the current condition.

Through exploring this continuum, we learned that feeling as though our agency is being impeded by external mandates and poor leadership does not mean we give up. As Cheryl implied in her quote in the previous paragraph, acquiescing is a choice. Cheryl often uses the phrase, “area of concern and area of control” to distinguish between things she actually has control over and therefore, where she should expend her mental and physical energy. Learning to see the current context honestly and making informed choices as to how to adjust one’s response can open up new pathways of agency we had not previously considered.

**Discussion**

We consider ourselves teacher educators. This is more than a job, it is an identity (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Clandinin, 2003; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Gee, 1999). Moving within the four continua, we have begun to re-conceptualize our professional identities and to more strongly advocate for this newly articulated sense of self. A pivotal understanding that emerged for us during this self-study is the redefinition of acquiescence and the resiliency that dwells therein. The recursive process of self-study allowed us to move from feeling angry, marginalized and powerless to recognizing that even within deprofessionalization there is room for choice in our acquiescence, which has given us a new sense of agency. The notion of ‘belief in self as a professional,’ offered by one of our critical friends, resonated with us. Leaving dissatisfaction behind, which Cheryl identified as a space within which she had come to dwell, into agentic acquiescence has been empowering.

Berg and Seeber (2016) encourage tenured professors, which we are, to fulfill one of our obligations of trying to improve in our ways the working climate for all of us. They further state, as part of their Slow Professor Manifesto,

*In the corporate university, power is transferred from faculty to managers, economic justifications dominate, and the familiar “bottom line” eclipses pedagogical and intellectual concerns. Slow Professors advocate deliberation over acceleration. We need time to think, and so do our students. Time for reflection and open-ended inquiry is not a luxury, but it is crucial to what we do.* (pp. xviii)

As we returned to our initial shared reading, *The Slow Professor*, we see significance in our self-study. We, too, “shifted our thinking from ‘what is wrong with us?’ to ‘what is wrong with the academic system?’” (p.2). Our exploration of our professional identities has led to our increased understanding of our resiliency and acquiescence.

What implications does our personal history self study have for other teacher educators? As other studies have documented, life in the academy has been transformed through a “shift to managerialism” and corporatization (Berg & Seeber, 2016, p. 4). Additionally, universities have become fluent in a *discourse of crisis*, (Berg & Seeber, 2016) where every day a steady stream of concerns, questions, dilemmas, and crises both large and small must be solved immediately. When under such a deluge, it can be difficult to take time to slow down and evaluate our circumstances.
Learning from our joint exploration, we are recommitted to becoming *Slow Professors* who “act with purpose, taking the time for deliberation, reflection, and dialogue, cultivating emotional and intellectual resilience” (Berg & Seeber, 2016, p. 11). We encourage our teacher education colleagues to do the same.

**References**


Crossing from the personal to the professional and back: Using 5Rhythms dance meditation to explore our teacher education practices

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5Rhythms transcends dance. The movement is the medicine, the meditation and the metaphor. Together we peel back layers, lay masks down, and dance till we disappear. . . Only to rediscover ourselves through it all.

https://www.5rhythms.com/gabrielle-roths-5rhythms/

We are teacher educators in universities on different continents who are interested in using 5Rhythms dance meditation as a vehicle for better understanding our teacher education practices. We have been working collaboratively for several years now, examining how teaching and learning are cognitive, emotional, and embodied acts. In order to conduct research collaboratively on embodied teacher education practices, we realized that it would be important for each of us to learn in our bodies in our personal lives as a means of reflection and meditation. For how could we ask or expect our students to participate in embodied learning, if we as the educators, had not experienced this sort of learning ourselves? Having both had past theatre and dance experience, 5Rhythms seemed like a natural place to begin and we were encouraged when we found classes near our homes.

Over the past three years, we have each practiced 5Rhythms on a regular basis and then through journaling, emails, and skype conversation, have attempted to document and analyze our experiences and the ways in which the meditative practice, and in particular our dances of the rhythms of staccato and chaos, help us to see the challenges we face in our teaching through new lenses. For this self-study, we used the lens of 5Rhythms as a reflective mirror to explore the tensions that emerge in our teaching practices between the ways in which we enact caring authority and order and our ability to let go of control, negotiate power with our students, and open up instructional spaces for our preservice teachers to experience creative chaos.

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Our embodied self-study was twofold: we describe both the insights that we came to collaboratively through our use of 5Rhythms as a self-study reflective tool as well as the nuances of using an embodied method collaboratively to better understand our pedagogical beliefs and practices. Our focus was narrowed to the rhythms of staccato and chaos from a 5Rhythms wave as we believed these were the rhythms that emerged as most challenging either on the dance floor, in the classroom, or both.

**Theoretical framework**

I feel it all, I feel it all . . .
I know more than I knew before. (Feist, 2007)

We were drawn to 5Rhythms dance meditation practice because of our own interest in embodied teaching and learning and how it allows for “direct, experiential engagement as an alternative way to construct knowledge” (Freiler, 2008, p. 43). We understood that the body plays a significant role in knowledge construction (Nguyen & Larson, 2015) and we wanted to work within a space where “both the body and mind are being more holistically approached and valued” (Freiler, 2008, p. 45). We realized that in order to practice embodied teaching we needed to engage in embodied learning in a deliberate and reflectively methodical manner. This was especially important to us as we acknowledged that we work in institutional settings which privilege cognitive ways of knowing (Forgasz, 2015) and have explored the continuous challenge of walking our talk and living up to our commitments of embodied pedagogy (McDonough, Forgasz, Berry, Taylor, 2016). We wanted to experience embodied learning that “involves being attentive to the body and its experiences as a way of knowing” (Freiler, 2008, p. 40). We hoped that 5Rhythms would be a reflective mirror that used bodily sensations as a means of deepening self-knowledge and in turn our pedagogical knowledge as well. We believed that it would offer us “a different way of accessing, and expressing, self-understanding” (Forgasz, 2015, p. 128) rather than relying on cognitive and discursive forms of reflection.

Gabrielle Roth and the work of 5Rhythms dance meditation appealed to us because as we stated earlier, we both had some previous theatre and dance experience but also because we saw this practice as a realistic method of self-study. As Roth explains, the premise for 5Rhythms is that “your body is the ground metaphor of your life, the expression of your existence. . . Everything that happens to you is stored and reflected in your body” (Roth, 1998, p. 29). She contends that a wave of 5 rhythms exist in everything that we do—in our actions and emotions. These rhythms are: flowing, staccato, chaos, lyrical, and stillness. Each rhythm has a positive and negative or a light and shadow side and is associated with a feeling, a life cycle, a mode of knowing, and an aspect of ourselves.

Because our self-study focused on the rhythms of staccato and chaos, we describe those in detail here. Staccato movement is percussive, angular, disciplined, defined, and ordered but can also be rigid, inflexible, and impenetrable. It is associated with anger, childhood, loving, and is driven by the heart. In our classes, staccato could manifest as an order or authority which is in place in a caring manner to support student understanding. It could potentially mirror what feminists call reciprocal authority—a kind of authority that comes from caring and responds to the need for boundaries and structure (Applebaum, 2000). On the other hand, the shadow side of staccato could look like strict disciplinary actions which control student bodies (where they sit, how they sit) limit student talk (who speaks, how often students speak, how often teachers talk), and even dictate what is considered knowledge, truth, and understanding.

In the dance, in chaos, we let go of the head, spine, hips, and feet and move faster than we think. Chaos is associated with full release of the mind and represents sadness, adolescence, knowing, creativity, and the mind. In our classes, we allow for chaos when we let go of control and invite our students to co-construct knowledge with us. This could come in the form of inquiry learning or negotiating the curriculum (Boomer, Onore, Lester, & Cook, 1992; Freire, 2000). It is a generative process where instructors and students partner as problem posers and problem solvers through
listening, dialogue, and action (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 2000). Inviting chaos in the classroom can be messy and unpredictable, and often uncomfortable for the teacher, and yet there is great potential in what can emerge from the chaos in the classroom (Coia & Taylor, 2013; 2014).

Study aims

In this self-study, we explored how practicing 5Rhythms as a dance meditation assisted our understanding of the tension between caring authority and chaos in our teaching practice. We examined how 5Rhythms was used as a reflective mirror and how the insights that came up about our personhood crossed into our teacher education practices. Specifically, we asked:

1. How does 5Rhythms dance work as an embodied method of self-study of teacher education practices? How can it be used as a mirror to deepen our understanding of our teaching?
2. How does practicing 5Rhythms facilitate our examination of the tensions between the staccato or caring authority in our teaching and the chaos or ability to let go in our teacher education practices?

Methods

Our collaborative 5Rhythms study clearly demonstrated the criteria of a self-study. It was self-initiated and self-focused as we examine the ways in which practicing 5Rhythms helps us to understand authority and chaos in our teacher education practices (LaBoskey, 2004). Interestingly our study began with an inventive method, dancing, rather than a burning question. We had begun practicing 5Rhythms and we wondered what insights it would bring to our teaching. We believed that our dance meditation would serve as a creative engagement that could offer us an alternative way of knowing or a new way of making meaning (Pithouse-Morgan, Coia, Taylor, & Samaras, 2016). 5Rhythms became an arts based research method for us (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Pithouse-Morgan & Van Laren, 2012; Weber, 2014), providing us with a bodily language for what Evans, Ka'Opua, and Freese (2015) call “the hard-to-put-into-words” (p. 25) and giving us an alternative way to examine what we were feeling in our teaching. Our dancing became “a way to express ourselves when words are insufficient” (Absolon, 2017, para 10). Dancing 5Rhythms was also an iterative process for us, as many arts-based methodologies are (Weber, 2014). Through reflection and discussion our provocation for the self-study emerged. We discovered what Hamilton and Pinnegar (2009) describe as: “a living contradiction or a puzzle or a wondering about where we want to be, what we know, and how we know it” (p. 105). We identified aspects of our teaching that mirrored some of our struggles on the dance floor and committed to examining them collaboratively. In particular, we focused on our 5Rhythms dance meditation practice in staccato and chaos as a vehicle to reflect on similar nuances in our teaching. Our interactions of sharing reflective journals, dancing together, and talking about our experiences in person and on skype enabled us to make meaning together through the deliberate and methodical documentation of our experiences on the dance floor and in our classes.

In some ways, we began this self-study three years ago. We started by practicing 5Rhythms on our own. We familiarized ourselves with 5Rhythms by reading Roth’s “Maps to Ecstasy” (1998) and “Sweat Your Prayers” (1997), and several academic articles that examined 5Rhythms (Boyd, 2015; McCormack, 2002; Tselikas, 2001). In the fall of 2015, we had the opportunity to dance 5Rhythms together for an entire week. Dancing each night together and then having a chance to debrief in person provided us with the necessary extended dialogue space which led us to our research questions. One of our last afternoons together, on a long walk through a park near Monica’s home, we began to brainstorm the sorts of tensions that emerge for us on the dance floor. We both honed in on the rhythms of staccato and chaos, thinking about the ways in which we embraced and resisted those rhythms on the floor as well as how they worked sequentially into one another, and how we responded to those rhythms when they manifested in our classrooms. Our research focus found us that day, and it doesn’t surprise us that we were in our bodies walking when it came to us.
Since then to generate data, we have written individual reflective narratives (about 20 in total) describing our dance floor insights and reflections about our teaching practices. Additionally, we have met on a regular basis whether face to face, via Skype, or through email to share experiences and consider common challenges, ideas, and themes (18 times total).

**Data analysis**

Our data analysis involved a combination of re-reading narratives and email communications, writing through themes, and then cross-checking with one another through discussion. Specifically, using a constant comparative approach (Creswell, 2014), we each read through our texts, examining for patterns and themes. Once we had determined a code, we wrote its description combining chunks for our narratives as well as text to strengthen and clarify the theme. We shared these more extensive code descriptions through email with one another to see if we had patterns in common as a means of triangulation and member checking. In addition to these traditional ways of demonstrating trustworthiness, we also attempted to craft our narratives in a credible and authentic manner so that they “evoke in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 751). We hoped that the juxtaposition of retelling our experiences of the dance floor with those in the classroom would speak to the reader emotionally and intellectually (Richardson, 2000, p. 517). We attempted to represent the five rhythms in our descriptions of our findings, in order to give the reader insight into our experiences on the dance floor and in the classroom.

**Findings**

_The 5Rhythms of the pedagogic process_

We began this self-study with a belief that as Roth (1998) writes, “Your body knows; your body tells. The relationship of your self to your body is indivisible, inescapable, unavoidable” (p. 29). Once we established our research questions, each time we entered the 5Rhythms dance floor we tuned into our dancing bodies to give us new insights about ourselves as women and teacher educators. A core assumption of 5Rhythms is that each rhythm plays a necessary role in the wave of our development, whatever the context of its application. The poem below captures Rachel’s learning about how 5Rhythms wave can be applied as a framework for describing the process of a pedagogical encounter.

I Inertia

In Flowing/ Babyhood/Fear –
Mother nurtures
eases, nudges
students gently in

II Imitation
Staccato/Childhood/Anger –
It’s Father’s time to teach.
Clarity,
Discipline,
Structure,
Rules,
provide
Frameworks,
Safety -

nets
III Intuition
In Chaos/Adolescence/Sadness –
We let them go to teach themselves.
Watch them cascade, nosedive, fall
Into the depths
Of uncertainty’s abyss

IV Imagination
In Lyrical/Maturity/Joy –
We are one,
A community.
Teacher-
-learners
all,
sharing the building of knowledge.

V Inspiration
In Stillness/Death/Compassion –
The universe teaches all.
Ours, only to ask
new questions
design
new approaches
see
and respond
to an
ever
changing
world. (Rachel)

Stuck in Staccato

Stuck in Staccato, stuck in staccato, stuck in staccato.

“Stepping in a rhythm to a Kurtis Blow
Who needs to think when your feet just go
With a hippie-the-hip and a hippie-the-hop
Who needs to think when your feet just go.” (Tom Tom Club, 1980)

The doing.
Discipline.
Making decisions.
Taking charge.
I have power. I have control.
Setting boundaries. These are the lines. Don't cross them.

Here comes staccato. The beat, the beat, the beat.
I know how this works.
Here we go.
It starts in my hips, knees, and feet, low, low, low to the ground.
Heart beat, heart beat, heart beat.
Auto staccato, staccato, staccato.
I am always stuck in staccato.
I have things to do. I am busy. I am taking care of business. It is serious, focused, and goal oriented.

The beat resides in me- it comes from within. I know staccato- it energizes. (Monica)

The above narrative expresses Monica’s sense of how she experiences staccato, how automatic and everyday a rhythm it can be for her, how much it drives her productivity, but at the same time can restrain and limit her creativity both personally and professionally as a teacher educator.

By thinking about the role of staccato in her coursework design, Rachel also saw that she placed a lot of importance on providing theory, structure, clarity, and frameworks (staccato) so that during their practicum, preservice teachers could apply this learning in order to develop their own unique approach (chaos) to planning and teaching. She realized that with limited class time, she tended to get stuck in staccato, undervaluing the importance of letting preservice teachers explore and apply new ideas during their coursework studies in order to confidently apply those ideas to practicum teaching. More significantly, she saw how this created a mismatch between the explicit and implicit messages she hoped to give preservice teachers (Berry, 2009) about the structure and agency when learning to teach. If their class experience emphasized learning theories of how to teach over practicing them, how could she expect them to trust her encouragement that powerful practicum learning would require them to move beyond imitating the style of their mentors (staccato) and to experiment with their own ideas (chaos). Like others (Bullock, 2017; Thomas, 2017), she was prompted through 5Rhythms to imagine ways to better support preservice teachers’ practicum learning by rethinking her teacher education practices in the coursework component of their initial teacher education. We ask the readers to consider what staccato may feel like in their lives, where does it manifest, and how is it taken up, embraced, or resisted.

Chaos: Letting go and giving in to feminist pedagogy

How do I help my students to let go?
No---we will construct the curriculum together. No--I won’t tell you what to do. No. No. No. (staccato creeping back in)
What do we know? What do we want to know? How will we learn?
What is our agenda for the day?
How should we discuss the readings?

Whispering: be free, be free, I trust you, trust yourself.
Inviting chaos into my classroom I go into auto. Listen, listen, feel, feel.

IT CAN Be LOUD, this CHAOS in the classroom. IT CAN BE LOUD this SPEAKING TRUTH.
Emotions like smoke implode around the words. ANGER! SADNESS! FRUSTRATION!
Shut down, rise up, resistance, silence, invisibility, screaming!!!!!!!

Students speaking over each other, emotions
Stomach knotting, I feel it in my gut, listening to students, struggle, speaking truth, silencing themselves, their frustration manifested in LOUD or quiet ways!

I hear you. I do, I do, I do.
What I hear you saying is . . . . yes, yes, yes.

Trust the process, ask questions, listen to each other, make meaning, reflect, repeat. We are in this together. (Monica)
The rhythm of chaos is daunting whether in day to day life or the classroom. It takes an act of radical trust on the part of both the teacher educator and the student to surrender to chaos, and yet without chaos in the classroom much creative engagement and learning are missed. Because of its riskiness, inviting and supporting chaos in the classroom involves a faith in the possibility of what it can bring in the context of a community of learners. This is particularly important when exploring issues of social justice, of power, oppression, and invisibility, in teacher education.

Resistance to chaos

I wanna let go. I'm gonna to strip back. Trade in stuff for space. Conversation for chaos. Exploration, discovery, experimentation, application, trying things out, getting things wrong, making things mean what they mean to you. I'm gonna give you more choice to follow your hunches, pursue your interests, make your case for what and how and why. But you can't go there. Won't go there. Don't go there. Except kicking and screaming and freaking out. You want me to tell you the stuff, but only enough so that you can show that you know and you're ready to go Out Into The Real World. You are afraid of getting it wrong and you are right to have that fright, to mistrust being thrust into freedom in The Real World of the here and now but some way, somehow, we will take that plunge together. (Rachel)

As Rachel discovered, the risk of invoking chaos as a pedagogy for teacher education is exacerbated for teacher educators and students alike within the contextual realities of standards-based program accreditation and teacher registration processes. In such times, balancing the tension between telling preservice teachers about teaching and providing pedagogical experiences that encourage growth (Berry, 2009) becomes an even more important, and delicate matter.

Conclusions

Our embodied collaborative self-study using 5Rhythms has really just begun. It has offered us a chance to begin to explore how “we learn in and through our bodies and, yet, we tend to neglect the body as a source of knowledge in our teaching” (McDonough, Forgasz, Berry, Taylor, 2016). The dance floor has become a mirror for us to examine who we are personally and professionally through the body as a way of knowing. We have appreciated applying 5Rhythms as a critical framework to examine pedagogical encounters and gain a better sense of the phases of our students’ learning, and our changing roles in how we support their learning as teacher educators. Finally, we realize that in order to create real, open spaces in our classes, which support potential truth telling and hold, honor, and give voice to the emotions that emerge, we must rely on the rhythms of staccato and chaos for structure and freedom.

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5Rhythms. https://www.5rhythms.com/gabrielle-roths-5rhythms/


Chapter 13: Crossing from the personal to the professional and back


Teacher education as good work: A collaborative self-study using aesthetic education

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Petts (2008) framed William Morris’s conception of good work as philosophically rooted in the “global significance of, and opportunities for, aesthetic experience” (p. 30). Aesthetic experiences can be described as experiences wherein: your senses are operating at peak levels; you are engaged in creative processes and have original ideas of value; you explore divergent thinking in creations and see different solutions and ideas. Petts (2008) further argued that good work is authentic and unalienated in production and reception, which for us offers a heuristic for understanding the relationship between aesthetic value, aesthetic experience, and the craft of teacher education (Grimmett & MacKinnon, 1992). In this collaborative self-study, three teacher educators uncover features of their selves in relation to practice through the lens of good work and aesthetic theory. S-STTEP provides a methodology “to better understand: oneself; teaching; learning; and, the development of knowledge around these” (Loughran, 2004, p.9) in relation to teaching and researching one’s practice. The objective of this collaborative self-study is to understand: 1) what it means to frame self-study methodology as good work, the way that art is framed as good work, and 2) what it means to do good work in teacher education.

Theoretical framework

We draw from the anchors of Morris’s notion of good work and from aesthetics theory in this collaborative self-study to unpack our understanding of teacher education as good work. “Good-work aesthetic theory encompasses a broader range of working methods and materials without compromising the core of Arts and Crafts with authenticity principles of control over production and creative autonomy” (Petts, 2008, p. 30). Morris’ Arts and Crafts philosophy suggests that good work has aesthetic consequences, and it is good work that makes the arts thrive, it is a culture.

Morris and Ruskin argued that the industrial revolution took away people’s ability to engage in the good work that comes with directly engaging with the creation of craft in particular.

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Ruskin advocated for the integration of art instruction in education for ethical reasons, namely that he felt the moral debt of education is beyond knowledge acquisition (Atwood, 2011). Morris further links good work with spectatorship to aesthetic education in the lives of people. Many characters contribute to the philosophical history of aesthetics and in common they share the flagships that aesthetic experiences are free of “obsessions with purpose and utility [and] the simple contemplation of beauty” (Petts, 2008, p. 31). Rather, aesthetic experiences allow for the development of “imagination and cognitive capacities, to gain knowledge of ourselves and others, and to image a new way of life” (Petts, 2008, p. 31). Morris underscores the developmental nature of the art-life nexus to say that it goes beyond the experience of fine art in a contemplative manner (Petts, 2008) and extends the aesthetic experience to non-art objects.

Petts (2008) eloquently describes the deeper philosophy of Morris’s outlook as good work encompassing anchors such as: having no control over production; and, allowing for creative autonomy. Other flagships of good work according to Morris is that there be no division of labour and men as this is alienating on morality and the creative worker; it would therefore be in contrast to artistic freedom and not considered good work as the underpinning is for economic growth (Petts, 2008). Morris advocates for a community of spectators that have shared ideals and face the problems of art through locating them in the broader context of how things are made. For example, issues of creative autonomy and control are anchors of good work because the process of production may be deterministic of the aesthetic value (Petts, 2008).

**Methodology**

We hold the ideals of S-STTEP, wherein the belief is that research on teacher practices “hold invaluable promise for developing new understandings and producing new knowledge about teaching and learning,” to be fundamentally linked to ideas expressed about the value of good work (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998, p. 243-244). We take our idea of good work from philosophy articulated during the 19th-century arts and crafts movement; we see significant resonance between the importance of articulating practice as a teacher educator with the importance of articulating and understanding practice as a maker of arts and crafts. These comparisons help develop our ontological stance, which “directs the researcher to capturing clear, defensible, and compelling accounts of the contexts and experiences from which understanding emerges. To capture our ontological position, this collaborative self-study explores three particular sets of catalysts for our analysis of the self-in-practice.

The self-study is situated within the context of the Maker Pedagogy research program, which “is an approach to working with teacher candidates drawing from principles in the maker movement that, in our view represent a potentially useful way forward in engaging teacher candidates in thinking about curriculum and working with students” (Bullock & Sator, 2015, p. 61). Making as a “class of activities [is] focused on design, building, modeling, and/or repurposing materials objects, for playful or useful ends, oriented towards making a product of some sort that can be used, interacted with, or demonstrated” (Martin, 2015, p. 31). Maker pedagogy is a powerful educative approach that supports learning and knowing through experiences; it allows for the consideration of “curricular possibilities of asking students to design, create, adapt, or ethically hack (take apart for purposes of understanding) technological devices” (Bullock & Sator, 2015, p. 75).

The self-study data includes transcribed conversations between the first and second researcher and a written narrative by the third researcher. The conversations focused on theorizing the philosophy of good work and aesthetic theory motivated by a shared experience at the Vancouver Art Gallery: Mash-Up: The Birth of Modern Culture. Our purpose in visiting the exhibition was to further theorize the concept of making and thus maker pedagogy by providing catalysts for discussion about the value and purpose of making and craft within our maker pedagogy research group. This art exhibition was rich with photographs, art objects, graffiti, technological artifacts, music, and text all framed by the idea of combining artistic ideas in unexpected ways – similar to our idea of using principles such as design, create, adapt and ethically hack as foundations for
thinking about teaching and teacher education. The third set of data is a written narrative that involves the researcher with a long history in the arts combining experience and thinking from two disparate fields of practical deliberation and production as a pathway to enhance the learning in one context with that of another.

The researchers engaged in a collaborative self-study using the theoretical framework as a lens to help uncover features of their selves and unpack their identity and relationship to good work in self-study, teacher education, and maker pedagogy. The researchers interpreted their learning in collaborative dialogues that come from “our minds, our talents, and our hearts as we seek to understand the concepts that we create in understanding ourselves and our self-study” (Allender & Manke, 2004, p. 21).

The importance of critical friendship as a method (Costa & Kallick, 1993) to support the study of practice cannot be overstated in this collaborative self-study. Schuck and Russell (2005) attribute critical friends with having shared and common goals and purposes for the research as well as a commitment for the advancement of practice the researchers aim to improve. To advance ideas and knowledge about practices in the process of coming-to-know (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009), sustaining the critical friendship through dialogue supported arriving in self-study methodology. Encountering the self in conversation with another can support the consideration of beliefs, assumptions, and experiences in different ways than individual interpretation allows; this includes reflexive practices that seek the self as the other as Ricoeur (1992) posited. The value of critical friendship is particularly relevant given that “when you are personally involved in a situation it may negate your ability to understand the contradictions in your practice making it difficult to step back and examine it in a detached manner” (Loughran, 2004, p.20).

Committed to sustained scholarly engagement, the researchers bring reflexive methods to the collaborative self-study as a framework for understanding learning. Reflexivity as a method provides understanding about one's positionality and the intersectionality within the body of educational research, and as Bullock (2014) notes, it is also useful as a lens to understanding one's practice. Self-reflexive forms of inquiry can lead to fundamental changes in our selves” (Feldman et al, 2004). A study, which turns back on itself is one that examines the space between self and the other in practice, as well as the space between history and autobiography, and research and teaching (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009) in order to develop understanding of practice. This aspect of self-study methodology goes beyond the descriptions and discloses the process of coming-to-know in understanding of the self and practice. The journey of arriving in self-study engages the researchers in understanding their practices and identities in relation to the other through illuminating their actions through reflexivity. This method gives the study authority because it is based in the “process of dialogue with other analytical tools” (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p.50) by way of the reflexivity and critical friends.

**Intersections and interactions between self-study and good work**

*Excerpt 1: Reclaiming good work*

The following excerpt from our dialogue demonstrates how we unpacked the flagships of good work and aesthetic theory as it relates to self-study methodology:

Andrea: Can I take you back to something you said at the Invisible College: “Aesthetics, how do you engage the reader? Is it believable? How do you tell the story and write it in a way that makes the work, virtuous?” Virtuosity is not in the [self-study] framework but if it is laid out in the work when you read it, then you establish a trustworthiness.... when you are making aesthetic choices, you are convincing the reader that it is the representation.
Shawn: Most people use the term virtuosity almost as something magical, a virtuoso piano player . . . what does it mean to be virtuous? I think that if we make a case for self-study as good work, then I think there has to be an element of it as virtuous work as well, which links to ontology before epistemology. So Pinnegar and Hamilton, and Hamilton and Pinnegar, and the Arizona Group have written about ontology over epistemology from the standpoint of the postmodern turn. They’ve argued convincingly that self-study is a post-modern methodology. They also argue it, and I think that the self-study community accepted this, mostly from the obligations to unseen children, and the reason why we have to privilege what is, is that when we work with future teachers, we have thousands of children, every teacher, every future teacher will have two to three thousand students in their career. That’s a huge responsibility, so there’s a moral debt there. To add to that, what might be another reason that we engage in ontology over epistemology, another reason is that because self-study might be virtuous, that engaging in that process itself is good work regardless of what the output might be. . . . If you think of an art object as epistemology, as a piece of knowledge, so that matters far less than the process for from whomever is making it, just like you know a child painting a picture. School is something that we sort of intrinsically value, preschool and kindergarten because that’s just “good for children to paint” but somewhere along the lines that becomes as though it is lost. I think there’s a case to be made between what Morris and Ruskin were arguing that the industrial revolution was taking away people’s ability to engage in the good work that comes with craft in particular. Self-study might be a reclamation of the good work of studying one’s own practice.

In this excerpt, Andrea encouraged Shawn to re-think his comments at a conference earlier in the year and, in so doing, to be more precise about the importance of virtuosity in both self-study work and in art. Thus, Shawn stated: “self-study is a reclamation of the good work of studying one’s own practice”; it is this notion of reclamation that encouraged the authors to consider how we might justify the process of studying our own practice using aesthetic theory. The excerpt demonstrates that virtuosity, a flagship of good work, is a lens to think about the quality of work we do in self-study methodology by thinking with phronesis. The self-study also discusses the moral debt of education as going beyond knowledge acquisition, and suggests that process is more important than product, therein aligned to Morris’s good work and aesthetic theory by not being obsessed with purpose and utility. Further to this, the exemplar highlights the role of transparency in demonstrating ontological processes and the contexts within which we locate our work. Self-study can be described as good work, the way art is framed as good work, as it positions ontology before epistemology and undergirds the virtuous and affective work in the methodology, which is another flagship of good work in art. The researchers give pause to the affective dimensions of self-study, which allow us to see things in new ways, and consider why we feel a temptation to minimize affect in self-study.

Excerpt 2: Maker pedagogy as a safe space

The following excerpt from a transcript illustrates the ways in which we unpacked our shared experiences from the art exhibition – how the signs at the gallery stimulated additional ways in which we think about our work with teacher candidates in our maker pedagogy lab.

Andrea: I think mash-up for me, let’s say somebody that doesn’t identify as a maker, a mash-up is a lower barrier to entry. Because there’s all sorts of different types of forms, there must be something that affectively impacts you or something that you can relate to whether it’s the craft, whether it’s the digital, whether it’s the music, whether it’s the graffiti. There’s something likely that will get your attention and I sort of feel a little bit like that in the Maker Pedagogy labs. There’s a lower barrier because you do play dough, you do t-shirts, and then you do programming; there’s a mash-up of different
types of art and objects and technology and craft that people can sink their teeth into and get access to. It's a lower barrier, not just the Picasso, that's just this big thing. I don't know if that's the mash-up in the barrier and the accessibility as a link to making.

Shawn: I think it totally is and that's actually one of my big concerns about making that it becomes elevated to this thing that people truly feel like they have to be special to do. I'm sure there are some artists and art historians who feel this way, but I like to think, the majority of them really more care about just somebody enjoying a work of art even if they don't know who it is. Or they don't know “what the critique or history is” but they could look at a painting or sculpture and have some sort of connection or emotional experience. I would like to think that most of them that's what they're concerned about. There is this meta narrative of, and it's valuable to know the history and to have it critiqued and interpreted in a particular way, but it also runs the risk of alienating people to feel that you have to have that.

Andrea: If you think about the Vancouver Art Gallery, the way they did too there, was a very educational purpose behind it. I wonder if that's participating in contributing to the good work, so breaking it down for people; helping them both in the making and appreciating aspects of it. I think that's what you do in the Maker Pedagogy labs, you break it down for people. But in a very particular way because they're involved in the process. There is no question of the theory-practice distinction, it is the theory in practice in one.

Shawn: So, this it safe then to the say that this is part of the ontological commitment that we're making through Maker Pedagogy is to provide a space where people feel like they can enter in. I know that there is intention in the fact what I chose, so electricity is typically a topic that a lot of people are kind of scared of, but you're not going to hurt yourself with squishy circuits and play dough.

This excerpt demonstrates the researchers’ reflexive turn through their examination of the spaces between their selves and the other in their practice. The anchors of good work provide the lens to extend our reflective lens and support the identification of reframing points (Schön, 1983). Reflexivity supports the authority of experiences and makes transparent the ways in which the researchers position their practice-experience-theory. Maker Pedagogy provides this catalyst for understanding good work in teacher education and the role of aesthetics experiences in teacher education for drawing attention to the meaning-making process (Davidson, 2014). For teacher education, this excerpt demonstrates that good work includes providing opportunities for aesthetic experiences that have creative autonomy and spectatorship at their core. Further, the aesthetic education in unalienated in production and reception as the process is in focus, not the obsession with purpose and utility.

Excerpt 3: Written narrative: playing guitar in the art gallery

As a sideline to my work as a professor of education I am the resident musician at a local art gallery. I play guitar for exhibition openings and various gatherings throughout the year. I sit in a corner watching people engaging in the works of the exhibit, sometimes alone, sometimes in groups talking, pointing, gesturing to each other—all in a manner I think of as a 'dialogue' among people and the works of art they are viewing, discussing, critiquing, making sense of, etc. I see the room in terms of developing understandings and appreciations, and so my guitar becomes a part of this interaction, this conversation; it becomes a part of the room. I simply 'make it up as I go' taking a note here and there in little melodic phrases designed to emphasize the moment. At times the unfolding chord progressions and phrases, voicings, almost become reminiscent as my hands
move over the strings, but these almost recognizable parts soon fade away, dissolving into patterns that no one, not even I could anticipate. If someone asks me to play a particular piece—say, *The Girl From Ipanema*, I usually do. At those times I feel that the music becomes more monological—less about the room, and more about something else. It's a different kind of music, no longer a dialogue with the room speaking back into the music that is evolving. One man commented at a recent opening, “…the music helps me feel the paintings.”

Moving from this notion of dialogue in the art exhibition to the world of education, from the gallery to the classroom, one can find the same kind of feel as the guitar player in the corner. As a teacher, one can find ways of being in the moment in very practical ways, part of an ever-evolving conversation. This, for me, is the beauty of Maker Pedagogy. Once in a while there is a need for one voice in the classroom, but the bulk of learning in the maker mind is in the doing relationship—learning how to hear your own voice in a choir, learning what it means to be part of a learning community, or part of a team. It has been illuminating for me to think about both the gallery and the classroom in this way, to juxtapose the two, and to examine myself in one sitting as a musician and an educator, to use the one arena to understand the other in a more holistic way.

**Figure 1. Photo by Les Raskovitz**

**Self-study and aesthetic liberty**

Critical friendship plays a significant role in unpacking this written narrative. It is the temporal nature of the present moment of practice that is the recipient of the supports for reflexivity and this influences the researcher’s ability to reframe a problem (Schön, 1983) through multiples and diverse perspectives. The present-moment includes how people are moved and touched, evoked, and their emotions, and these all contribute to understanding the self in practice in relationship to the other. This narrative demonstrates that the self has aesthetic liberty, and this is relevant to good teaching as it brings to the forefront what people offer, share, consume, and say, all the while, offering them space to be part of the aesthetic moment.

Aesthetic experiences are the gateway to the artifacts of good work, and these artifacts are a gateway to practice. In teacher education, we draw warrants for aesthetic education that arise from the authority of the experience to understand practice in order to develop self-knowledge gained through collaborative self-study. The researchers' stance also demonstrates the ontological focus and their belief that the moral debt of education surpasses epistemology. The flagships of Morris’s good work and aesthetic theory in this collaborative self-study, and the reflexive method, supported the journey of becoming while managing the momentum of the research from focusing too much on the self as a learner (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004).
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Self-study of a teacher’s practices of and experience with emotion regulation

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During my second year of teaching, I was helping a group of students at the back table, when I looked across the room and saw one of my boys doing something that is unacceptable classroom behavior, the details of which I no longer remember. I do know, however, that it shocked me enough that I literally stood up and yelled in a loud, firm voice, “Hey! Knock it off!” In that moment, chilling air filled the room and my entire class turned around to see what had happened. I looked around the classroom to see 66 piercing eyes staring towards me in shock and awe. I was equally as stunned at myself. I had never yelled at a student before, nor do I believe that is an appropriate thing for a teacher to do. I am a teacher because I love kids and want to help them reach their full potential. Unloading my emotions on them does not align with my purpose of being there and helping them grow. Within seconds I realized what I had done; I relaxed my face and in a soft, apologetic voice, addressed the student again, saying, “Oh my goodness, I am so sorry. I didn’t mean to do that. Now, go back to your desk and get to work.” Although the boy told me later that he didn’t care that I yelled at him and said that he felt that he deserved it, I told him again that I was sorry and that it was not acceptable behavior on my part. He forgave me and we seemed to continue to have a great relationship the rest of the school year.

Although this kind of episode has not happened since, to this day it is a very memorable experience for me because it was such a real moment of lack of emotional self-control. I am better now in both controlling my frustration as well as containing my feelings of overwhelming joy that I get from being a dedicated teacher, but possessing self-control is still a challenge for me. Indeed, I exert so much energy on a daily basis in regulating my emotional reactions to the stresses of my job that at times that feels like another job all on its own. This has driven me to research teacher emotion regulation in the classroom.

Struggling with one’s emotions is a common experience in the teaching profession. The “emotional needs, labor, and work required for a teacher are significant compared to other professions” (Chang, 2009, p. 194). Since emotions are such an integral part of teaching and

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assessment, in order to understand teachers and teaching you must understand teachers' emotions (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). Therefore, a personal look would provide more insight. My study intends to answer the question of how a teacher experiences and deals with emotions in the classroom. Providing my day-to-day experience of identifying and responding to emotion-promoting situations in the classroom will provide insight into the lived experience of emotional regulation of teachers.

**Literature review**

Teachers experience both positive and negative emotions while teaching. Positive emotions improve teachers’ productivity as it strengthens their motivation and happiness at work. Research shows that teachers who have more positive emotions in comparison to negative emotions have a better thought-action ratio, meaning they can think quicker and act on those thoughts. They have more problem-solving skills, as they are able to step back and objectively come up with a solution (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2001). Positive emotions may increase teacher performance by strengthening a teacher's involvement and internal motivation. When teachers experience feelings of happiness at work, they perceive that they are doing a good job (Kavanaugh & Bower, 1985). Locke and Latham (1990) theorize that people who have positive moods have better goal setting skills. They also have more ambitious goals and work hard to achieve them (Locke & Latham, 1990). One of the biggest sources for joy and excitement in teaching comes when teachers see their students learn and make progress in different areas (Emmer, 1994a; Hargreaves, 1998b; Hatch, 1993; Jackson, 1968; Lortie, 1975; Nias, 1989; Sutton, 2000a; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). Therefore, teachers who enjoy working with their students have their goals elevated and their motivation to achieve them increases as well.

There are also many negative emotions that emerge in such an emotional job. Sutton and Wheatley (2003) identified five most common negative emotions that come from teaching: frustration, anger, anxiety, guilt and sadness. Situations influencing anger and frustration in the classroom are the perception of uncaring and irresponsible parents (Lasky, 2000), students who don’t do the work because they are perceived by the teacher as being lazy or aren't paying attention to the instructions (Reyna & Weiner, 2001), and seemingly uncooperative colleagues (Bullough, Crows, & Knowles, 1991; Erb, 2002; Nias, 1989). Anger is especially seen in teachers when they are tired and stressed (Bullough, Crows, & Knowles, 1991; La Porte, 1996; Nias, 1989; Sutton, 2000a). Teachers feel anxiety when talking to parents (Erb, 2002), as those teachers are wondering and worrying about whether they are doing a good job, and they feel anxiety when they stress over their desire to be a great teacher (Lazarus, 1991). Guilt often comes when teachers feel at their limit of efficacy and therefore the sense of helplessness leads to feelings of guilt. Sadness sometimes results in conjunction with guilt, but also over considering the difficulty of the lives of the students.

Emotion regulation in teaching comes as teachers consciously regulate their unconscious thoughts/feelings based on circumstances where context could make it better or worse (Gross & Thompson, 2007). They use processes to modify the intensity, duration, and expression of their emotions (Koole, 2009). As they modify their emotions it is called emotional labor because it is taxing emotional work in the workplace. As they go about the teaching day, teachers have to use a strenuous amount of regulation to keep their emotions in check. Teachers may mask their emotions by either putting on a smile to not have to deal with conflict, or acting like they like students that they don't naturally have a connection with, trying to remain professional (Newberry & Davis, 2008). They also sometimes fake emotions in order to get students excited about activities. This is referred to as up-regulating positive emotions and down regulating negative emotions (Deng, Sang, & Luan, 2013).

When the emotions are taxing, teachers need coping strategies to deal with the emotional labor and not get burned out. They need to be able to control their overly excited feelings as well as their negative feelings. Gross (2002) suggests fluctuating emotions are dealt with in two different ways: reappraisal and suppression. In the reappraisal strategy, teachers try to look at things
differently to increase positive emotions and decrease negative ones. Contrarily, suppression is when teachers try to resist acting on their emotions, which ends up not helping their emotional situation. Teachers who report suppressing their emotions have a higher level of stress and burnout (Chang, 2009; Cropley, Griffith, & Steptoe, 1999; Mearns & Cain, 2003). Unfortunately, despite this research, teachers suppress their emotions more than they express them because of their fear of endangering their career. This inevitably leads to greater burnout (Carson, 2007; Chang, 2009).

Other researchers hypothesize that teacher emotions may be more complicated and need to be studied more in depth to better understand the complexities of teacher emotions and to come to understand how to cater to them (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). Sometimes, teachers may react emotionally even when they’re trying their best not to. When this happens, it can lead to habits that do not line up with their beliefs if they do not carefully reflect on the emotional situation that they are exposed to (Newberry & Davis, 2008).

Method

Changes in teachers’ experiences shape theories on teacher education as it progresses (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). Self-study is a research method that focuses on the self and one’s own experience (LaBoskey, 2004). By conducting a self-study in my classroom, the data produced on teacher emotion regulation would provide insight to what kinds of situations produce the need for emotion regulation, and how I, as a practicing teacher, perceive, respond to, and resolve those situations. My theoretical framework for this study includes looking critically at myself in my emotional regulation, knowing that I am responsible for my emotions and the regulation of them. This method is the most appropriate for my study because the purpose is to produce an in-depth look at my own experience of regulating emotions throughout the day, during the school year. I am using self-study to understand myself and to improve my classroom relationships.

The study took place in the Western United States in my 6th grade class of 32 students. This is my fourth year teaching in a predominantly Caucasian school district. I am a twenty-seven year old, Caucasian, female teacher, who is an extremely passionate teacher. Over the four years of my teaching experience, I have had many episodes filled with emotion—both positive and negative. The classroom, and the emotions that arise there, was the setting in which I explored my emotions, as well as my handling of those emotions throughout the first semester of a new school year, August – November, 2017.

There were two main sources of data for this study. First, were my “in the moment” recordings of my emotional episodes. Throughout the week as things happened that aroused my emotions, I took the first available break to record how I was feeling about the situation. I explained who was involved, the events that transpired, how I felt, what I did in response to my original feelings, and what consequences that had on myself and how I saw the classroom seeming to be affected. My second data source was my weekly journals. Each Saturday morning, I reflected on the past week’s emotional episodes and journaled my thoughts of the situations and my reaction to them, and what affect that had on the class and me.

Data analysis was iterative and ongoing. First, I highlighted moments of up-regulation and down regulation. I then re-read the highlighted portions and looked for triggers, emotions, reactions, and regulation strategies and I memoed the patterns that emerged. After this was done, I conducted a second pass of the data, examining them for the themes that I uncovered during the first pass (Kim, 2016). I then wrote a reflection of things that I saw, and compared/connected the current week’s themes with the patterns from previous weeks. This process is important and meaningful because living and reliving experiences is a process that helps one to see who they are and attend to change in oneself (Clandinin, 2007).

During this process, I used a critical friend, another teacher colleague, who helped me analyze my memos. Every Monday morning, we met to go over the last week’s data. She read the transcriptions of the ‘in the moment’ recordings as well as my analytic memos from the Saturday before. We then discussed them and she helped me identify emotions or regulation techniques that I may have missed. Throughout the week, I reflected on those notes and used it to work
on my emotional regulation in the classroom for that current week. That also lead to a more in
depth progression and refinement in the memos the following Saturday. After the 14-week data
collection and analysis, I used an excel spreadsheet to organize the data in different combinations
of emotions and coping strategies in order to find patterns and evaluate my experiences.

Findings

Conducting a study on one's own practice can be enlightening and also vulnerable. I learned
patterns of behavior that were enlightening to what my beliefs are as a teacher and the changes
I needed to make to correctly emotion regulate. The three main findings from the data are
1) patterns of taking on the emotional situation of the students, 2) struggling with feelings of
disrespect, and 3) the use of coping strategies. Each will be addressed in terms of what it means
for me as a teacher and how it affected my classroom.

Taking on emotions of the students

One of the first patterns that I saw clearly was that I took upon myself the situations of my
students. Every time my students were happy or successful, I had overwhelming joy. Also, when
they were unsuccessful I was extremely upset about it. With the strength of my emotional responses
to the students, I realized that my daily emotions revolve around completely empathizing with
my students. I don't just understand or care for them superficially, but I take in the depth of
their situations onto myself. For example, when my students did well on their math test I had
overwhelming joy. On the other hand, times when students were frustrated with math or struggling
with something I too felt frustration or anger. Throughout my journaling process, I said over and
over again that I was excited to see them doing so well. My belief that as students that are well
behaved and learning academics it gives them a better life drove me to empathy for what they were
going through and wanting them to do their best.

Disrespect

In the first half my semester long data collection, there were mostly in the moment reflections
of frustration about students not doing their work. I would describe how frustrated I was that I
could see a student sit there and not do his/her work, or even seeing a student walking around the
classroom talking to avoid doing their work. My critical friend one Monday pointed out to me that
when I said that I was feeling frustrated, perhaps I was really feeling disrespected by the students.
She was very right. I journaled often about how I put in so many work hours to make the lessons
exceptional and to help my students learn the standards, that when they don't try and completely
ignore my lessons, I feel frustrated that they choose not to care about me and what I am doing for
them. I feel rejected and like a failure. This defensiveness seemed to stem from the belief that if my
students were well behaved and learning, I was a good teacher. It was a defensive reaction. I had to
realize that the students were not trying to disrespect me, and that they were just kids feeling out
life. This led to coping strategies.

Coping strategies

Interestingly, the two main types of coping strategies that emerged in the data were completely
divergent and opposing methods: avoidance and addressing the situation head on. These seemed
to come about as a cycle, that as I avoided and the situation got worse, in my reflective practice of
self study I had to address it head on to relieve it.

Avoidance

Many times, I would avoid my frustrations by getting angry, venting, and avoiding the student
or faculty member that made me upset. If a faculty member disagreed with me or did something
to offend me, I would have to go talk to a neighboring teacher that I trusted to talk about my anger,
or I would call my mom or husband. I would talk about how angry I was at the person and rant about how they were wrong. A situation where this happened was when another faculty member ignored my request of how to handle a whining student, and then the next day they didn't let me speak in faculty meeting. As my frustration with this person built and the lack of trust increased, I vented to my team without feeling any better. In my memo that day, I used 6 different negative words to describe my feelings towards the faculty member, showing an increase of the negative emotion. Venting and ignoring the situations did not help me, and I had to look for a different coping strategy. This is when my critical friend one Monday suggested that I do not ignore the problem so it doesn’t get worse.

Addressing directly

When I tackled the situation head on, such as giving a consequence to the student who was being disobedient, I felt a sense of relief and positivity. The following is from week 10 of my data collection: “took his baseball cards, I was pretty proud of myself because as annoyed as I was, I ended up just telling him, “why do you think you’re putting them away?” and let him answer me and I said, “Yep”, and as he was mad, I said “you’ll do better next time.” I felt a surge of joy come through that I knew how to handle it correctly and without emotion.” The result of handling my angry emotions by resolving the classroom issue was a replacement positive emotion of joy. This validation that I was doing the right things is what I look for in my career. I have a need to be making a difference in the world, so as I started seeing my students doing better, I felt more satisfied and accomplished. I learned how to communicate better to get things resolved. This gave me more confidence in my career and myself.

Conclusion

This newfound knowledge is important for me and my classroom in many ways. First, as I realized my deeper feelings, such as disrespect, I could start adjusting my classroom procedures and my ‘in the moment’ reactions to target the root of the emotional responses and make the proper changes in order to appease my values. I made more think times for students who were being disrespectful, I made the students do something to earn back my trust and show me respect, and I also started positive self talk telling myself that they were not trying to do it to me personally, they were just struggling themselves. This change of thinking and acting gave me the validation that I was looking for as it helped my students be more happy and successful. It also helped me to realize that venting and avoiding situations didn't make me feel better, it just masked my shame and temporarily postponed the time when the person or situation was brought up again and my anger is then heightened.

These are important ideas for teachers to realize that they will be given respect and feel validated as they tackle issues head on rather than ignoring them. It helps the teacher turn negative emotions into positive ones, which strengthens their resolve to keep going and helps them have a more pleasant career. Further researchers may look into all different types of emotions that teachers go through. They may also look into the emotions that I felt asking the question of why the teacher is really feeling those emotions, and what purpose does that underlying emotion play in the teacher’s world.

References


Positive psychology and the nurse role as educator: A collaborative self-study

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Patient education is a fundamental responsibility of a professional nurse. Unfortunately, nurses often experience frustration when working with patients who do not successfully demonstrate learning outcomes that can lead to enhanced well-being, increased length of life, and decreased cost of care. A team of undergraduate nursing students and faculty sought to explore how our own attitudes and behaviors as educators influence patient and student outcomes. The field of positive psychology became of interest to the research team as an alternative paradigm to approach challenging educational scenarios. The research team, all of whom were new to self-study, decided to engage in self-study methodology due to its emphasis on collaborative and critical reflection, learner outcomes, and practitioner outcomes (Samaras, 2011). The goal of this research project was to explore how our examination of positive psychology influenced our own practice as educators and the learning outcomes of our patients and students.

Literature connection

Positive psychology can be described as the scientific study of “the strengths that enable individuals and communities to thrive” (University of Pennsylvania, 2017). While typical Western health care emphasizes identifying and fixing problems within a person, the field of positive psychology emphasizes exploiting what is good (Pluskota, 2014). Human goodness is considered as important and authentic as human flaws, and failure to emphasize goodness contributes to a peculiar view of humanity (Peterson, 2006). It is this peculiar view of humanity that the self-study group sought to challenge, particularly in light of challenging patient or client scenarios. Improving health often requires deep and complex learning, especially in the context of chronic disease. Nursing, while fundamentally relational in nature, has not traditionally emphasized strengths-based approaches to patient or student education. The application of findings from the field of positive psychology to nursing educational endeavors may encourage more learning and positive health outcomes for patients and students.

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Self-study was chosen as our methodology due to the potential for significant personal insight related to our own practice. Each participant verbalized a desire to enhance his or her nursing practice and create more meaningful connections with clients, particularly in light of the rapid pace of the health care system. Personal reflection is associated with deep study in nursing (Mann, Gordon, & MacLeod, 2009), but the additional structure of self-study methodology provided guidance for individual and group exploration. The broad, personal goals of the research team were positive changes in our own practice and increased effectiveness in our role as educators. Importantly, this was not structured only to support the faculty role as educator. Student and entry-level nurses serve a critical role as educator to patients. This self-study was conducted to create practice changes for all the individuals involved. While the resulting practice changes varied by individual, the critical collaboration was a powerful tool for challenging our assumptions related to our behaviors and the outcomes of the learners we served.

**Physical context**

This self-study took place in an undergraduate nursing leadership class at a multi-campus, teaching-focused institution in the southeastern United States (US).

**Theoretical framework**

“Positivity” was a central concept in the theoretical framework for this self-study. Positivity, which the researchers defined as conscious attention to good, was explored conceptually and practically. The standard nursing diagnosis for most patient educational interactions is “knowledge deficit,” emphasizing deficiency on behalf of the patient. The fundamental contributions of the field of positive psychology emphasize a strengths-based perspective. This research team sought to explore how these contributions may influence nursing pedagogy/andragogy and ultimately lead to better educational outcomes for the patients and students we serve. As the self-study progressed, the initial definition of positivity was adapted as the concept of “purpose” was discovered to be critical in our enactment of positivity. Finally, the concept of “relationship” emerged as an additional critical element of our positive nursing practice. While “positivity”, “purpose”, and “relationship” are familiar in the practice of nursing and the theory of positive psychology, this self-study resulted in a unique time of personal inquisition and testing our assumptions and practices related to these concepts.

**Aim**

The primary aim of this study was to explore changes associated with our examination of positive psychology and the nurse role as educator. Specifically, we used collaborative, critical analysis to understand 1) how tenets of positive psychology relate to the nurse role as educator 2) how our practice changed as we incorporated tenets of positive psychology, and 3) how learner outcomes were affected by these practice changes.

**Methods**

**Participants**

This self-study was a collaboration between five undergraduate nursing students in the final semester of their nursing program and two full-time nursing faculty. All participants volunteered for participation, and an alternative assignment was available for student participants should they choose to withdraw at any time. This study was part of a class project, with credit being given for engaging in the self-study process. Ethics approval was obtained before initiating data collection by the university’s institutional review board (IRB).

**Data sources**

Data were obtained primarily through entries into a group blog and scheduled face-to-face meetings. All participants contributed blog posts that progressively explored critical events and
challenged assumptions related to the research aim. Face-to-face meetings served as a time to further explore topics that appeared in the group blog. These research conversations allowed participants to seek clarification about team member’s blog narratives. They also served as a time for group members to “try-out” perspectives that they may have found difficult to distill into words in the blog posts. This cyclical process of writing and group exploration allowed participants to evaluate their ideas and behaviors in an environment that was both critical and supportive. Informal conversations between study participants over the course of the semester also emerged as important sources of data. While these conversations were not a part of the formal data collection plan, participants noted that the ongoing reflection on study topics was beneficial in elucidating and catalyzing their own practice changes.

Analytic strategies and techniques

Interactive data collection and documentation occurred throughout the semester by all members of the research team. Preliminary data analysis occurred throughout the research process as our educational practices evolved and assumptions were identified, altered, and tested. Student researchers met at the close of the data collection period to initiate formal data analysis by open coding narrative blog data as a group. This process, which was informed by a phenomenologic interpretive lens, involved the iterative assigning and refining of codes to each blog post, ultimately condensing to form themes. Themes were discussed, compared, and evaluated with experiences and conversations held throughout the data collection process by the entire research team.

Outcomes

Findings

Four final themes emerged through this self-study:
1. Positive self-care as a critical starting point
2. Identifying and connecting with patients’ sense of purpose
3. Contributing to a positive organization
4. Positivity in nurse training

Positive self-care as a critical starting point can be described as purposeful, strengths-based attention to self. Nurses, as with other service professions, are regularly faced with a multitude of client needs. We found that we sometimes behaved as if we had to choose between acting in the best interest of our patients or in the best interest of ourselves. We felt the repeated neglect of our own needs, such as for a lunch break, rest, or time for non-work activities that we enjoy, made it difficult to remain focused on our individual sense of purpose. The stress and distraction of daily routines often led us to place our attention on our perceived shortcomings. Thoughtfully reconnecting with our own sense of purpose, both professionally and holistically, provided the necessary foundation for us to connect with our client’s beliefs about purpose. Giving ourselves permission to acknowledge and place attention on our strengths, as supported by positive psychology, led to increased feelings of power and effectiveness in our nursing practice.

Identifying and connecting with patients’ sense of purpose followed reconnecting with, or sometimes articulating for the first time, our own purpose. Relationships are fundamental to the nursing profession. We realized that often, our relationships with our patients were centered on the completion of certain tasks or even the treatment of medical conditions. Taking the time to holistically know our patients, while a common ideal in nursing practice, we found much harder to implement. Further, taking the time to connect with patients in this way required a certain degree of rebellion against the routine created by the organizational systems we practiced in. We found that purposefully seeking interactions with each patient that allowed us to learn what aspects of life they most enjoyed and what they dreamed for their future was a relatively simple first step to developing deeper and more powerful relationships.
The theme contributing to a positive organization developed as we explored the powerful effect of context on our ability to choose to spend time and energy engaging with patient strength and purpose. While the organizations we found ourselves practicing in valued health and holistic care on a broad level, we found the pressures we faced at the point-of-care sometimes reflected different values. We explored previous experiences of patient interactions we perceived as highly effective that resulted in good outcomes. While we found strength-based organizational interventions to be highly variable, as with interventions for our individual clients, contributing to a positive organization by preferring positive conversation, when possible, was a useful first step. Ultimately, this theme can be described as purposefully identifying and promoting best aspects of our units or organizations.

The final theme that emerged, positivity in nursing training, was likely influenced by our setting in an academic institution. This theme can be described as identifying and promoting personal purpose and strengths in developing nurses. Many on the research team observed how the dominant memories of our educational experiences were memories of trying to overcome weaknesses. The culture of high-stakes multiple choice testing in nursing school was associated by members of the team with an emphasis on failure and weakness. Educational experiences purposefully designed to identify and develop a sense of professional identity and strength was powerful for developing a positive professional mentality.

Discussion

Positive self-care as a critical starting point

The first theme, positive self-care as a critical starting point, emerged early through discussion of highly emotional patient care experiences, many which ended with poor outcomes. The differences in individual personalities, cultures, and preferences within the self-study team became evident as discussions evolved through successful and seemingly unsuccessful learning-focused patient interactions. Importantly, though finding happiness is an important goal for individuals in the field of positive psychology, utilizing these findings does not require an individual to always feel happy (Kobau et al., 2011). The identification and expression of personal rationales for life and nursing and discussion of how these rationales are demonstrated through patient education was seen as a critical starting point to connecting with the patient’s sense of purpose. This first step was seen as necessary to have a fully human-to-human patient interaction that acknowledged and respected the value brought by all individuals. Increased awareness of our own professional purpose served as a foundation for changes in our professional practice throughout the self-study.

The primary behavior change that emerged alongside this theme was a conscious, critical reflection of our own level of self-care, both professionally and personally, along with explicitly stating and evaluating our sense of professional purpose. Discussing and clarifying our professional purpose was seen as a healthy act of self-care. This was initially accomplished in our self-study through written reflections and critical discussion, but continued personal reflection on self-care and purpose was considered necessary for sustained positive nursing practice. Some participants noted that as they developed their purpose, they observed a shift in self-perception from a role as someone who does to patients to someone who partners with patients. One participant described their evolving understanding of their sense of purpose with the following:

Following this train of thought I would continue shaping what I see my role being as a nurse. I have seen that it is easier to interact with my patients when defining my personal purpose as a nurse. Before realizing that I am only a partner in other’s lives assisting them to reach their potential it was common that I just performed the tasks needed to manage their medical diagnosis. Now knowing that I am only assisting my patients I really have to engage them and learn about them. This allows me to see what patients need on an individual level.
Another topic relating to this theme was the ongoing process of self-care and evaluation of purpose. One participant commented on how they see continued practice as a means to continue refining their purpose and its ultimate influence on patient care:

I think that finding our own purpose as a nurse is the first step, and using and developing that through practice can only improve our care.

The research team observed that conscious awareness of our own purpose influenced the types of questions we asked our patients, and thus influenced what information we used when planning and delivering patient education and other nursing care. Conscious awareness is a nursing concept that is part of nursing theory. Two aspects of conscious awareness can be identified: implicit and explicit (Fitzgerald, 2013). Explicit attitudes are in a person's control, and that a person recognizes when they are having the feelings, perceptions, or attitudes towards a specific situation or person (Fitzgerald, 2013). In contrast, she emphasizes that implicit attitudes are hidden from the person; simply unaware the attitudes exist at all. This self-study was a bridge between the participants and both explicit and implicit awareness of feelings and emotions towards patients and students. The researchers were able to see the difference in personal conscious awareness throughout the course of the study in that they became purposeful about recognizing attitudes, feelings and perceptions, thus having more positive patient experiences.

Identifying and connecting with patients’ sense of purpose

The second theme, identifying and connecting with patients’ sense of purpose, also emerged early and was linked to the first theme. Mutually acceptable learning and health outcomes were seen as situated within the context of both the nurse and patient’s sense of purpose. The emphasis in this theme was on the patient’s sense of purpose and the development of a purpose-centered relationship. A purpose-centered relationship was considered to be a patient-nurse connection where therapeutic actions were both grounded in and contributed to the patient’s perception of life meaning, purpose, and hope. Though this theme is highly consistent with the professional values of nursing, which reflect holism and health promotion, contradictions were found with the realities of surviving a shift in many acute care organizations, where medical models emphasizing illness and speed are dominant. One participant described this challenge this way:

Ironically, relationships are definitely not what I see being pushed in the health care environment. I don't anticipate an immediate change in that regard either. The question for me then becomes, how can I sustain a positive approach to patient care and education when it is so counter-culture?

We noted unique practice changes associated with this theme as we each sought to identify and connect with the sense of purpose within those we serve. Increased attention to holistic nursing assessment was an important practice change experienced by several members of the research team. Nursing assessment, which includes collecting subjective and objective data about patient condition, is sometimes focused on the most critical medical problem to practice efficiently. While this is sometimes necessary, taking a broader approach to patient data collection may lead to better outcomes. One participant described their approach to holistic assessment this way:

When I really need to change something, I often try to focus less on the behavior I want to see changed and more on the underlying assumptions/beliefs that cause it. The thing I think I need to continue to try to foster in myself is a deliberate attitude of positivity (and I of course mean the deeper definition of positivity, not shallow optimism). When my goal for my patients really switches from fixing what is wrong to helping them be well, I think it will change a million tiny decisions over the course of time.

This quote illustrates one participant’s evolving understanding of how actively identifying the patient’s understanding of life purpose may influence care.
Contributing to a positive organization

The third theme, contributing to a positive organization, evolved as we evaluated our attempts to remain engaged with a sense of purpose within ourselves and patients. Health problems and solutions are complex and require collaborative effort on the part of many people and disciplines. Strengths-focused organizations may be an ideal setting to engage in deep, meaningful learning with patients. We noted increased awareness of positive strategies, ranging from individual praise to the formal development of committees designed to catalyze positive nurse practice changes, within our organizations. The necessity of resisting the typical ways of thinking and approaching problems we found common in health care continued in this theme.

Many research team members identified with the notion of being “counterculture,” and found this to be an engaging, positive perspective. One participant stated, “I think that counterculture is vital for the evolution of healthcare.” The concept of “counterculture” was generally defined as acting in the best interest of the individual patients in the nurse’s care despite system pressures to prioritize efficiency. Dissonance was noted in our initial tendency to focus on areas in our organization where positive approaches were lacking, which we determined was in itself an approach grounded in negatives. The research team found consensus in the belief that while sometimes addressing negatives in our organizations is necessary, our own efforts to contribute to a positive organization could include identifying and engaging with areas of strength within our organizations. Further, personal attempts to ensure our communication with both patients and coworkers reflected our purposeful, strength-based perspective was considered an additional way to contribute to a positive organization. One participant noted:

*I realize now that while my standards can (and should) remain high, my attitude can be positive and inviting, rather than strict and unapproachable.*

Our role as educators was specifically considered in relation to positivity in our organizations. The research team explored our goals in patient education, and noted often we act to rectify deficient knowledge when a behavior or lifestyle change is needed to promote patient health. It was observed that often a deeper cause for the acute illness was not a knowledge-deficit, and a holistic assessment could help to identify more powerful learning strategies to implement with our patients. Documenting and implementing these strategies represented a challenge, as charting systems often revolve around patient problems. In the end, all sought to find wisdom to improve our roles as educators.

Positivity in nurse training

The final theme was positivity in nurse training. Contradictions between a strengths-based approach to patient education and a deficit-based approach to nurse training were identified. Two subthemes emerged within this theme. The first subtheme dealt with training in positive, strengths-based caregiving. Some on the research team observed incongruency between practical learning focused on treating patient problems and their evolving definition of caregiving. One research team member described the contradiction this way:

*I feel that there is a disconnect in the way nurses go about providing care. In nursing school, you are taught what meds to give and how to place a foley catheter but you are not taught how to actually care for a person.*

This comment illustrates a researcher’s perspective on the physiologic and task-based competencies in the nursing curriculum. Efforts to hone skills in building rapport, diversifying interventions, and conveying caring may further enhance program outcomes.

The second subtheme addressed the approach of the nursing educational system toward students. Personal explorations of this subtheme varied by the role of the research team member, but a common resulting practice change was a focus on developing trusting relationships between students and faculty members. Student members of the research team reported that
acknowledging the bias of the nurse training system toward acknowledging the negative, and not the positive, allowed them the freedom to explore different approaches to their own development. Faculty members observed the challenges associated with obtaining skills and decision-making competency in high-stakes scenarios while allowing students to develop and identify their personal rationales, which were seen as causes of stress and early burnout. Meaningful connection between the rationales of students with the rationales of instructors was seen as an important strategy to apply principles of positive psychology into nurse training. One participant acknowledged the changes in their practice before and after this self-study. The participant found the application of positive psychology significantly changed their behavior and role as a nurse educator from one of doubt, distrust of students, and unapproachability to self-confidence and encouraging relationships with students. It is the new belief of the participant that the salience behind positive psychology within the role of nurse educator is to be approachable, open, giving, and genuinely caring for the nursing student. This self-study is a pathway to finding wisdom and salience in the nurse faculty role. One participant explained their dreams for the application of positivity in nurse training this way:

I would like to be brave and fearless, borderline careless, so that I would just be a trailblazer without caring what anyone thinks or about criticism. I would like to think that one day I can be brave and fearless this way because if I don’t change then I won’t be able to make the changes I want to see in nursing.

Conclusions

This collaborative self-study resulted in changes in thinking and practice by participants. Practice changes included efforts to increase personal awareness of professional purpose, increased attention to holistic patient assessment that allows for identification of patient strengths and purpose, increased conversation in our practice environments of patient and organizational strengths, and increased attention to positive academic relationships between students and faculty. Self-study provided a unique avenue for nursing students and faculty to collaboratively examine our role as educators. This process will be a continual evolution as we work toward more meaningful learning experiences within our health care and academic systems.

References

What makes a critical friend?: Our journey in understanding this complicated term

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The notion of critical friends (CFs) has been encouraged (Samaras & Roberts, 2011) and extensively documented within self-study methodology (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Indeed, “a defining feature of self-study research and practice is its emphasis on collaboration with others” (Berry & Russel1, 2014, p. 195). We, two teacher educators and close friends (personally and professionally) from the United States, have been conducting self-studies over the past ten years, often employing CFs. However, not until this self-study did we realize we were not always responsible brokers of this complicated term.

That said, in our previous self-studies (Frambaugh-Kritzer & Stolle, 2016; 2014) our ‘behind the scenes’ use of CFs was ethical within the research process, yet we often referred to CFs superficially in our publications, essentially using it as a way to ensure trustworthiness, without a clear description of how we overtly applied CFs. Although humbling to declare, we recognize that identifying this limitation in our own work allowed us to work towards a “pursuit of enhanced understanding” (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 840), which is the central focus of this self-study.

Therefore, guided by LaBoskey’s (2004) five conditions for self-study, we engaged in an interactive inquiry to explore the complexities of engaging with CFs. Specifically, we sought to answer: How does our interactive inquiry on the topic of CFs, while working with two additional CFs, coupled with a content analysis of peer reviewed self-study literature, lead us to new understandings of CFs?

We recognize that CFs is not an exclusive term for self-study methods (Baskerville & Goldblatt, 2009), and we are not the first to inquire about CFs as many have explored definitions (Costa & Kallick, 1993), offered critiques (Russell & Schuck, 2004), explored diverse roles (Kember, et al., 1997), argued for the need and process (Loughran & Northfield, 1996), and presented models on the developmental phases CFs may go through (Baskerville & Goldblatt, 2009). Despite these numerous contributions, we seek to fill a gap in the literature by offering a unique context in
which we conducted a content analysis, while applying CFs, to better understand CFs as a research tool, thus improving ourselves as self-study researchers versus teacher educators. We highlight this differentiation because, in the literature, CFs is applied most consistently in two areas: someone supporting/coaching the transformation of another's teaching, or someone supporting the trustworthiness of research methods.

Three theoretical perspectives served as our lens for examining and reflecting on CFs. First, social constructivism guided our work. In particular, Vygotsky (1978) explained the notion of More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), which means looking to others who have deeper or different understandings. Vygotsky further stressed the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition, as he believed these interactions were central in the process of making meaning. Therefore, we embraced Vygotsky’s ideas to generate understandings through talk by inviting two additional CFs participants to serve as MKOs.

We also drew from Fleck’s (1935/1979) notions of Thought Collective, which situate the discovery of new epistemological cognition within the greater environment of knowledge. In this, Fleck understood knowledge creation as a social practice dependent on a shared framework. Considering both our personal understandings for CFs, and the collective, our knowledge discovery was an interaction between the discovered phenomenon (new understandings of CFs), the discoverers (Authors and CFs), and the existing pool of knowledge (literature defining and using CFs). By situating our individual discoveries within the community of interacting researchers, we met the purposes of self-study—to grow the individual while growing the field. However, more importantly, we felt confident in our own thinking, as we tangibly saw how it fit within the collective.

Finally, we drew upon Dewey’s (1910/1933) conceptual work on reflective thinking. The term reflective thinking, like CFs, has become loosely defined and commonplace. Rodgers (2002) synthesized Dewey’s work, paring reflective thinking down to four criteria. Reflection is: (1) a meaning-making process highlighting relationships, (2) systematic and rooting in scientific inquiry, (3) collaborative and happening in community, and (4) personal and valuing intellectual growth. As we engaged in this inquiry, we noted how our thinking displayed these criteria while complementing the MKO (Vygotsky, 1978) and Collective Thought (Fleck, 1935/1979) perspectives and generated new meaning with others through reflection. We noted power in these three perspectives coming together, providing space to discuss and question, reflect, challenge, and push our thinking and learning.

**Methods**

**Participants**

We both self-identify as white, middle-aged females working as tenured literacy teacher educators at different universities in the United States. Prior to this self-study, Elizabeth had been engaged in self-study research for seven years, while Charlotte had ten years of experience in self-study methods. Yet, we still could not pin down what we meant by CFs. So, informed by the literature, in particular the term “layered CFs” (Fletcher, Chróinín, & O’Sullivan, 2016), we strategically invited two more participants to serve as additional CFs in this study. Anne Freese, a U.S. self-study scholar acted as our MKO in the field of self-study. She is an insider who has published multiple self-studies and is also cited extensively for her contributions. Anne is a colleague and friend of Charlotte, but stranger to Elizabeth. Anders Persson, a veteran sociologist in education from Sweden, acted as our MKO in critical research. He is an outsider to self-study. Anders is a colleague of Elizabeth and stranger to Charlotte.

**Data collection and analysis**

To address our research question, we collected: (a) artifacts from the self-study scholarship/literature, (b) written and real-time (audio recorded) dialogue, and (c) CF response memos.
First, we conducted a content analysis of the CFs literature. We positioned the authors of these studies as our ‘distant MKOs’. To learn from them, we gathered previous Castle Proceedings (2008-2016), and applied digital search tools and manual scans to obtain any article that applied/mentioned CFs. Next, we created a table to record: each reference, the research questions, and a summary of use and definitions of CFs. We used frequency counts to categorize the data and establish patterns for how CFs was defined and implemented. In our initial analysis, we noted, similar to our own work, CFs was often referred to shallowly (i.e., namedropped or brief sentence mentioned) without describing the ‘how’ of CFs. We wondered if this was largely due to word-space limitations in the Castle proceedings, or the presumption that other self-study scholars already know what CFs means. Hence, we expanded our review to examine reputable teacher education and self-study journals spanning the past 10 years. We found overall that these articles were more robust in CFs explanations. Further, our intensive review provided multiple examples of the characteristics of CFs, which will be explored in the findings.

Simultaneously, we exchanged lengthy written responses shared in a Google drive document over a 7-month period of time. We also orally dialogued 1-2 times a month, serving as CFs who sought to co-construct CFs in a safe space. Next, we determined clear goals/expectations (Russell & Schuck, 2004) for Anne and Anders, asking each to write “critical friend memos” (Samaras & Roberts, 2011, p. 45) to our dialogue and manuscript drafts with the following guiding questions: (1) What questions do you have that can push our thinking about CFs?; and (2) Do you notice any blind spots in our thinking? Based on these response memos, we continued our dialogue, writing two more responses and engaging in two additional real-time conversations. These memos were included as data sources to consider, unpack, and juxtapose with our own initial thinking and findings.

Finally, we each individually read and reread the data, coding for recurring themes. Applying Coia and Taylor’s (2009) argument—“real-time dialogue” is critical “to process and discuss meaning” (p. 177), our analysis occurred as we analyzed our coding when we spoke in real-time, which led to the determination of our initial themes. Moreover, these meaningful exchanges allowed us to enact our theoretical belief that thinking is socially constructed (Vygotsky, 1978). Combining these various methods allowed us to systematically analyze our data (Samaras & Freese, 2009), and link the initial themes to our theoretical framework resulting in the following findings.

**Findings**

*Complicated terms require flexibility in definitions*

Through both our extensive content analysis and collaborative dialogue, the data implied CFs is diversely defined and actualized and takes on a lot of variance. Despite this reality, in analyzing the CF response memos, we became aware of our own insistence on pinning down a definition of CFs. For example, in a few of the written dialogues Elizabeth continuously sought to reign in the term, even resorting to look up ‘critical’ and ‘friend’ in the Webster dictionary for a more-narrow definition. This influenced Charlotte to seek a narrower understanding as well. However, it was our CFs who independently prompted us to consider establishing a more flexible understanding of CFs.

With this new insight, we continued dialoguing—systematically sorting out our thinking, which resulted in our creation of a continuum we call the Critical Friend Definition Continuum (see Table 1). Each term within the continuum, both on the left and the right, reflect the repeated definitional terms used within the literature when describing the different ways CFs can operate. We want to stress that these terms never implied value (e.g., CFs who are close friends are more effective/productive than strangers, or vice versa). Therefore, the continuum demonstrates variance in the term as it can be applied.
Table 1. Critical friend definition continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Close Friend(s)</th>
<th>Stranger(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insider(s)</td>
<td>Outsider(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert(s)</td>
<td>Non-Expert(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully Involved</td>
<td>Loosely Involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple CFs</td>
<td>Single CF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productive</td>
<td>Not Productive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defined Expectations</td>
<td>No Defined Expectations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Constructing this continuum illustrated the dynamic interactions in relation to the Thought Collective, which ultimately made what appeared complex and messy into something clear and flexible. Charlotte reflected, “Anne and Anders have opened my eyes. It was their encouragement that has brought me more flexibility to the CFs definition”. Elizabeth also noted that she no longer felt rigid about this term, but felt new freedom in how she could apply CFs within her own research.

Complicated terms require complex characteristics

After we constructed Table 1, we also identified three characteristics embedded in CFs that we think central to CFs effectiveness—vulnerability, reflection, and skepticism. However, influenced by our new understandings of a continuum, we also found variance exists in how each characteristic is employed, valued, or enacted.

Vulnerability. We align with Brown’s (2013) definition that vulnerability means uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure. Our content analysis showed vulnerability as a central concept of CFs, yet a range of experiences was described in the literature. Our dialogue exposed the conundrums we have faced in our own CFs work surrounding vulnerability. For instance, as close friends, we feel safe to take risks in our collaborations. Yet, we recognize our limitations such as: worrying about hurt feelings or our limited perspectives. For example, Elizabeth wrote:

My gut reaction is that self-study researchers need to be ‘tougher-skinned’ and less sensitive. However, does sensitivity lead to honest insight? . . . Ultimately, if we avoid vulnerability, we block out uncomfortable feelings, yet we also lose on the joy of discovery. Vulnerability gets to meaning.

Charlotte embraced vulnerability more readily as she wrote:

I recall 10 years ago my doctoral advisor suggested I make my vulnerability visible in my dissertation, which used self-study methods . . . I agree vulnerability is critical to CFs, but I know vulnerability is a central notion to self-study in general.

Based on this initial finding, we decisively embraced vulnerability by inviting our CFs to the study, bringing in additional critical lenses. Anders added to the data set by asking, “So what kind of relation is needed if CFs is going to work? CFs is about having a friendly (meaning trustful) relation so that you, if needed, can give hard critique.” We agree, while recognizing the vulnerability needed to both give and receive the ‘hard critique’.

Reflection. Using Rodgers’ (2002) synthesis of reflective thinking, we came to see the importance of true reflection within CFs, specifically when we systematically reflected on “definite units that are linked together so that there is a sustained movement to a common end” (Dewey, 1910/1933, p. 5). This resonated with our understandings of Fleck (1935/1979) in that our knowledge discovery was an interaction between our new understandings of CFs, us (the participants), and the current literature defining and using CFs within the field. Therefore, reflection required the ability to move between personal discovery and an appreciation for the
Thought Collective of CFs in the field. For example, Elizabeth wrote:

To think through these ideas, I’m exploring the literature. First, I looked at how researchers have used CFs as a data analysis tool. Then, I looked at how others have written about CFs. Today I read two pieces that unpacked complexities within CFs.

Charlotte responded:

I read the Russell and Schuck (2004) article you referenced earlier—this as an influential study using CFs. They write, “A CFS becomes an additional layer of self-study...” This can be a starting point for our paper as we identify a gap in the literature.

The data revealed our reflection was systematic—a rigorous way of thinking about CFs, while seeking to make meaning in logical, yet connected and interactive ways. And, as CFs is essentially a specific form of collaboration, it seamlessly relates to Dewey’s notions that reflection happens in community.

Our CFs were instrumental as well in our reflection. For example, Anne consistently encouraged us to reflect on the role of reflective practice within the field of self-study, not just within CFs. Anders offered critique that at times our reflection was too individualistic, and we needed to look at the collective perspective of CFs. Thus, grounding our reflective work in the greater conversations, often with those we considered MKOs, felt empowering and collegial.

Skepticism. The data highlighted recurring questions we couldn't shake, such as: How do we know a CF has met his/her responsibilities? Therefore, we came to understand skepticism as a healthy characteristic of CFs. For example, Charlotte wrote:

Although there are many requirements of CFs (i.e., fresh eyes, alternative perspective, overcoming bias), I still wonder—what if the CF fails to do this? What if the CF thinks he/she is offering fresh eyes, but actually isn't? How can we better ensure the CF meets these goals overtly? Is there a better checklist, especially when CFs come from the same sociocultural worldviews?

Elizabeth offered a solution to some of her own skepticism when writing:

As I take a personal look at our work as CFs, I wonder if we are limited in our abilities to ask the critical questions always necessary to push our thinking further because we are best friends. This is where the ‘outsider’ is key to insure CFs is effective.

Our content analysis showed that knowing if a CF met his/her responsibilities was not always clearly presented in the literature where CFs was applied. Anne shared specific questions she believes should be asked when using CFs within a study:

Start: Why should I have CFs?; What is the purpose of CFs?; What do I hope to gain?

Throughout: What do the CFs do? What should the CFs reflect on?

End: How did the CFs impact the study? Did the CFs offer alternate perspectives, lead you to new insights, or help to reframe your thinking?

Asking these questions at various points throughout a self-study could bring more clarity and purpose to the use of CFs. Thus, healthy skepticism insures the CFs’ success.

Complicated terms require multiple learning phases

Anne and Anders introduced phases they noted we were experiencing in our learning process, similar to others grappling with complicated terms.
**Phases of understanding.** Anne compared our inquiry to her own when she first started self-study. Like us, she sought to lock down a definition of self-study versus seeing it on a continuum. She and her co-authors (Freese, Kosnik, & LaBoskey, 2000) went through five phases they identified as: (a) confusion, (b) conflicting agendas, (c) multiple agendas, (d) understanding, and (e) internalization. After reading our dialogues, Anne shared, “every scholar, at some point in self-study, takes his/her turn at being confused, while other self-study researchers, who have been exploring CFs for a number of years, may have moved to a different level/understanding of CFs”. The data shows we progressed through various phases of understanding, similar to the phases Anne highlighted.

**Phases of enactment.** Anders explained in one memo that CFs could entail a range of enactment phases; one being a “traditional academic seminar”, which he came to know as “the purgatory” during his doctoral studies. In this purgatory setting, critique is brutally honest with no rules, as often the actors are unsure of the purpose of the critique (a contribution to the other’s text or a show of the critic on a stage called the seminar). The other extreme includes what Anders referred to as the “safe room”—an overregulated space that is too friendly, and thus less productive.

The data revealed multiple ways we attempted to make sense of how CFs was being enacted. For example, we considered the differences between CFs and blind review, specifically in relation to the different roles each has/places his/her loyalties. Anders suggested CFs should be loyal to the person being criticized, especially the text, idea etc. created, while the reviewer is supposed to be loyal to the community he/she represents. Our dialogue identified an attempt to distinguish these different enactments. Elizabeth highlighted a quote from the Forward of the 2016 Castle Proceedings:

> We strive to look at our data systematically, to ensure that we do not attend only to the findings that support our hopes and wishes. We work to ensure our interpretations are ones others could support, and this is the reason why self-study requires not only a critical friend, but also a critical community. (Trumbull, 2004, pp. 1225-1226)

Elizabeth then wrote, “So, is the whole S-STEP community my critical friend, and if yes, then does a blind-peer review act as a CFs? Where does that fit within Anders's range of enactment?”

**Discussion and implications**

Our interactive inquiry filled a gap in the literature—not only expanding meaningfulness of CFs for our own purposes, but for the self-study community as a whole. To illustrate this new understanding of CFs, we offer a journey metaphor as it applies to our own learning, yet aligned with our three theoretical perspectives, which showed learning from our MKOs (Vygotsky), reflection (Dewey), and knowledge gained via Collective Thought (Fleck).

We, the primary travelers (Elizabeth and Charlotte) of this self-study, embarked on this journey asking a research question to determine our destination. However, as avid travelers, we recognized the unpredictable nature of travel, which requires flexibility and numerous resources for safe arrival at the destination. So, we invited two CFs/MKOs as travel partners to serve as resources along the journey. Together, we collaboratively used the research question to determine goals and purposes for their inclusion. Anne shared veteran wisdom to the paths we traveled as she acted as an *insider to self-study methods*. Anders acted as an *outsider to self-study*, yet shifted our path through another country (Sweden) where his landscape and fresh eyes gave us a new lens. Each traveling partner positioned CFs differently, offering something unique and acting as a distinct resource, specifically when we faced obstacles. During our travels, both CFs recommended alternate views for us to consider, often highlighting unexpected issues that we didn’t anticipate or recognize. This journey became a highly infused experience as Elizabeth and Charlotte acted as CFs and co-researchers while layering in Anne and Anders. And, although the destination is now realized within this publication, we recognize the ongoing journey in which we engage as lifelong learners.
Although the journey metaphor is often overused; it assisted us in reconciling the diverse use of CFs found in our content analysis of the literature. Additionally, we hope our journey provides more clarification for how CFs could be used in future endeavors. That is, the interaction between the determined destination (new understandings of CFs), the travelers (Authors and CFs), and the landscape (literature defining and using CFs), not only grew us as self-study researchers, but also added to the Thought Collective around CFs. Therefore, before we make any new trek, we assert from our learning that we must be responsible travelers by explicitly explaining our purpose, definition and use of CFs within the Critical Friend Definition Continuum we developed.

References


Chapter 17: What makes a critical friend?: Our journey in understanding this complicated term


Co-conspirators and critical friends: Mentorship and collegiality in the social and professional worlds of academia

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In this chapter, we explore our interactions as a self-study research collaborative. Specifically, we focus on the complexities of the mentor-mentee connection amongst our collaborations as critical friends. This collaborative mentoring supports and balances our professional commitments of teaching, scholarship, and service in the circumstances of our personal lives (Mills, Hostetler, & Hawley, 2014; Hostetler, Crowe, & Mills, 2016). We argue that hierarchical mentoring relationships are inauthentic and instead we have relied on a more flexible mentor-mentee relationship where those positioned as mentors in one circumstance may well be positioned as mentees in another. It is our hope that outlining our mentor-mentee collective will reframe notions of linear mentor-mentee relationships, thus liberating us as mentors and mentees to facilitate a reciprocal learning process.

Conceptual perspective

The origin of our collective was serendipitous, and the mentoring that is present within our educational quintet is both personal and professional (Perna, Learner, & Yura, 1995). Gehrke (1988) described mentoring as gift-giving, germane to the informal. In our group, this notion serves as foundational. Gift-giving provides the opportunity to find comradery within the social structure of the group (Hyde, 1979); however, it also offers perspective in that each gift can provide “a new and whole way of seeing things” by working through four distinct phases of gift-giving: creation of the gift, awakening, commitment to labor, and passing the gift (Gehrke, 1988, p. 192). Within our collective, mentorship unfurled much like the gift-giving that Gehrke (1988) described. In creating a gift, a mentor passed-along perspective to a mentee in an attempt to “illuminate mysteries,” while awakening helped the mentee to transform and adapt their thinking and action as a result of the mentor’s “gift of wisdom.” By passing the gift the mentee shifted to become a mentor, forever changed in some theoretical, ideological, or pragmatic way; and offering

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new learning and/or knowledge from interacting with the mentor’s original gift and therefore increasing the social cohesion between the initial mentor and mentee (p. 192).

**Methods**

In this study we drew on collaborative self-study as a method to explore our interactions and learning together over two years. Self-study is not simply “reflective practice” (LaBoskey, 2004), and is much more about a “formalization of reframing” (Hamilton and Pinnegar, 1998 p. 1). Self-study facilitates an examination and reconstruction of the self that is necessary in developing and continuing to develop a self-image as a teacher (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 828-830). In order to do this, we relied on two main sources of data. First, we used a group text message thread of communication between Castle X and XI. Second, to better understand our positions we shared written personal histories that outlined our connections to each other and the academy.

**Data collection and analysis**

Two research questions guided our work: How do mentoring relations emerge in a self-study research collaborative? And how do our mentoring relations shape our self-image and practice as educators? In approaching these questions, our collaborative text thread served as our primary means of communication, personal and professional. Our personal histories allowed us to examine the ways we intersected and interacted with one another in coming to self-study.

To analyze our data we read two-years of text exchanges looking for themes related to professional and personal support and mentoring. Next we each wrote and shared personal histories/narratives. Finally, we developed a coding structure to support both conversing about our data and to organize the narratives around two central findings. As Charmaz (2014) explained, “By engaging in thorough coding early in the research process and comparing data and codes, the researcher can identify which codes to explore as tentative categories” (p. 115). We applied four codes to our data: Professional Support, Personal Support, Sage Wisdom, and “Hands Down Holes” (HDH). The HDH code is indicative of our interactions as blended personal-professional. It is a reference to a phrase suggesting that visitors to Australia ought to avoid putting their hand down unknown holes where poisonous Australian wildlife might reside. The same was true in our mentoring relationships; we must be attentive to personal relations when criticising.

**Findings**

The most significant and overarching theme that emerged from our data analysis was that productive mentoring relationships are nonlinear, multimodal, and move and shift with time and topic. In addition, the collaborative nature of the analysis process offered additional insight. The word *mentor* has come to mean a *wise and faithful teacher*. Over two years we have found the richest learning from each other happens in the diamond shaped zone depicted in Figure 1, not simply flowing from more experienced senior members of the academy to lesser experienced members, but rather widening in the middle where varied experiences and expertise intersect with varied support needs and life experiences. Through this study we realised mentoring relationships are not fixed, hierarchical, or situated only in our professional lives.

The findings are organized around stories of the origins of our work together and perspectives on personal-professional relations. These data tell the story of our self-study mentorship collaborative as critical friends and offer insights into our individual experiences while preserving the cross-individual view of the findings.
Origins of our collaborative

Mentoring relationships are generally perceived as one-directional relationships in which the typically older, wiser member of the group imparts wisdom and the younger, less seasoned members of the academy have much to gain and little to offer. An analysis of our applied codes suggested that while the most seasoned of our group certainly offered wisdom and guidance, advice and expertise came from each member. This was evident throughout the text thread as various members stepped into mentoring roles dependent on the topic and situation. It is clear that in our particular group, each member had a unique journey to the academy, obtaining various skills and knowledge along the way. These skills and knowledge combined to allow each member to both be a mentor and a mentee depending on the situation, making the self-study process an iterative relational activity built around learning from one another.

Andy

In high school I was a swim instructor. The excitement kids experienced when they swam for the first time helped me realize how much I valued teaching. I was interested in history and politics mostly, I liked criticizing government institutions, watching documentaries, reading biographies, and the idea of community. So I applied to Kent State’s integrated social studies education program. My first semester of college I joined a fraternity. Mike also joined the fraternity and we took a road trip to Cincinnati where we got to know each other better. Years later I took my first doctoral course in summer of 2008 and in fall of 2008 in my second class I met Todd. Initially he was in the class observing as a new faculty member. I signed up for his spring class on citizenship (something I later borrowed heavily from to develop a 2016 special topics course at Vanderbilt). In both of those classes, and in a course with Jim Henderson on curriculum leadership I reconnected with Mike who was a Master's degree student at Kent while I was doing my PhD. Todd and my advisor invited a group of us including Mike, to participate in a self-study collaborative about our teaching and graduate school experiences.
I started my teaching career as a high school social studies teacher in the Atlanta Public Schools at North Atlanta High School. It was a powerful learning experience for a new teacher, one that I have reflected on and written about. That experience drives a lot of what I do as a teacher educator. My hope is that my students learned as much from me as I did from them. A few years after my dad died, I moved back to Athens, GA. I taught in rural Oglethorpe County for three years. I taught the first two years in a single wide trailer that they called a “learning cottage.” I just told people I taught in a trailer park. Even though I grew up only about 20 miles from the big OC, I knew less about how to teach poor white kids than I did how to teach poor black kids in Atlanta. My learning curve was steep, but I learned so much about living while teaching in that trailer park. During my last year at OCHS, I looked into the PhD program at UGA. I set up a meeting with Dr. Dinkelman. What I expected to be a fifteen minute meeting lasted for at least two hours. We talked about some Steve Earle song lyrics he had on his wall and about teaching and schools. The next day I turned in my letter of resignation effective at the end of the school year, and never looked back.

My path to education has been a winding path. My path to self-study is no different. I am a first-generation college graduate from rural north Georgia. I grew up in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in a four room, 800 square foot farmhouse my great grandfather and his siblings built by hand in the late 1940s from pine and oak cut from the property. My grandmother, one of the most influential people in my life and one of the smartest people I have ever known, greatly influenced my journey to becoming an educator. She possessed the brilliant ability to understand history and culture while communicating in true Appalachian storytelling tradition. Her dream was always to be a teacher, but she never got the formal opportunity. I do not think I would have ever pursued the path to educator either, but for students in the state of Georgia an opportunity come along in the 1990s called the HOPE Scholarship. The HOPE Scholarship was a game changer for low-income children all across the state. The rules at the time were pretty simple. If you had a 3.0 GPA out of high school and you maintained that 3.0 GPA in college, you went to college for free. All of a sudden, I thought, “Why not?” The HOPE scholarship allowed me the opportunity to pursue a postsecondary education. My grandmother made my path to education possible.

My journey toward becoming a social studies educator started in high school. Junior year, I decided that: 1) I did not want a career that only fed a bottom line, keeping a company, CEO, or stockholders in the black; and 2) I wanted to do something that mattered, that helped me feel like I might be making a positive contribution to people’s lives. A seed was planted by my favorite teacher, Mr. Petersen, who said, “have you ever thought about being a teacher… you’d be good at it.” My fledgling attempts to pursuing a career in education were born. As an undergraduate I began to experience some feelings of educational salvation. College courses tended to bring forth a more diverse and versatile curriculum and I began to find a home for my critical leanings. Although my undergraduate studies did not follow a direct path (I dropped out of school after four years to explore sketch and stand-up comedy) upon my return to school and graduation, my want to learn and lust for wisdom was fruitful and intact.

After nine years as a social studies classroom teacher, I was disenfranchised by a myriad of issues at the district in which I worked and the educational system in general. They both felt like an albatross to the kind of teaching that inspires students. I felt the need to leave the classroom and connect with a different tribe. The support I was looking for was recognized in large part by enrolling in graduate school. Over the last six years, my view of curriculum has been forever altered.
Geoff

By way of context, expectations for “going to college” in Australia in the 70s was far different than in the USA. Acceptance rates for high school graduates into university were relatively low, but if successful, university was free except for the cost of textbooks. I started my life in university with a goal to complete a degree in mathematics. However, my mother’s early death derailed my studies and I failed most of my first year university classes. About this time a good friend of mine suggested that I give up the mathematics degree and become a primary (elementary) school teacher. I completed the three-year program in two years and started teaching third grade in a small “outback” town in 1979. During my first two years of required “bush service” (versus re-paying a “bond”) I started correspondence school to upgrade my Diploma to a Bachelors degree. This was the start of seven years of part time study that culminated in a bachelor’s degree (1981) and masters of education (1985) while still teaching primary school-aged students and working as an elementary science consultant and researcher. In short, I became passionate about seeking answers to questions about teaching and learning. This passion eventually lead me to the United States in 1986 where I completed a PhD at the University of Oregon (1988). Following my studies I was appointed as an Assistant Professor at Southern Oregon University where I spent 29 years as a professor and administrator (12 years as Dean of Education).

The origins of our collaborative are serendipitous yet significant. Our personal histories with one another laid the foundation for what would become two years of intertwined personal and professional interactions that supported our practice and sense of who we are as educators. Coming to our university positions, navigating the academy, and enduring challenging life circumstances in conjunction with the varied lengths of time we have been friends and colleagues no doubt shape our positions as mentors and mentees. The personal nature of our relationships and histories led to the greater curiosity of working to understand our mutual mentorship and to discover wisdom situated among whomever has experience in the circumstance of the moment.

Co-conspirators: personal-professional mentorship

Data analysis revealed that while each of our respective bonds began as professional bonds, they evolved into personal bonds. Due to the nature of the academy, the lines between the professional and the personal blur. While it may seem logical to construct visions of our personal selves separate from our professional selves, our data suggest otherwise. Our interactions and narratives intertwined professional and personal to the point that a clear distinction cannot be made. Through our interactions, each of us express a vision of our rationales and work as teacher educators that is rooted and tied to our personal lives and self-image.

Andy

I ran into Geoff again at AERA the following year, having beers with him and John and Todd at some point. During those personal conversations we formed a friendship and he learned of Claire’s cancer diagnosis. Geoff and Todd and I decided to write a Castle proposal around critical friendship, something Geoff, Alicia and I would follow up in relation to teaching practitioner inquiry (Self-study and action research) on in subsequent Castle conferences. Between the 2014-2016 Castle conferences Todd told me of a friend named Adam who worked at UNG. I followed him on twitter, getting to know him virtually as best I could for a year or so prior to meeting up with him in person (confirmation of his existence) while on a trip to Nashville for his wife’s PhD work. We found we had a lot in common in our perspectives and interests, later he asked me to write a book review for a journal he edits. At the 2016 Castle conference Todd, Geoff and I planned a London excursion the couple days prior, after which Adam would meet up with us and Geoff would drive us to the conference. We spent the days doing sessions, socializing, getting to know each other better, and learning from one another.
While at UGA, I taught and supervised a young Adam Jordan. I remember Adam’s ability to recognize and call out the bullshit. Same as today. First he was my imaginary friend and now we write the Southern Schooling column for the Bitter Southerner. I met Mike during one of my first weeks at Kent State. The first time I met Levicky he was wearing a gold Kent State Women’s Basketball Warm Up suit with a gold doo-rag and gold sunglasses. I was impressed from the start. We have worked on self-studies together, been roommates at conferences, have had lunch together more times than I can remember and deep conversations over beer. We even spent a few extra days in London post-Castle a few years ago. We collaborate on the Swampy Lowlands and the Sound Citizen Project. When I started working at Kent State, I sat in on the graduate-level social studies course and met Andy. Andy and Mike both worked on the first self-study collaborative we set up at KSU - the A-Team. I really appreciated the closeness of that group and the willingness to be open and honest about teaching and teacher education. As for Geoff, well I believe I helped him gain some fame by asking him to buy me so many beers that he famously said, “I ain’t buyin’ you shit, Todd.” Geoff, Andy and I plotted a future as a collaborative a few Castles ago, and have been lucky to have Mike and Adam join us.

My first connection to this group occurred while I was an undergraduate at UGA. One of my instructors for my social studies methods course was Ph.D. student, Todd. Todd proved early on to be alright in my book. We had just read the line by John Taylor Gatto (2002) positing that “genius is as common as dirt.” Todd asked us what we thought. One of my classmates expanded on why he thought the quote was accurate, and I can still hear his words, “Yes. Genius is as common as dirt. People who work on transmissions may not read well, but that is a complicated task.” He meant well, bless his heart. I had watched my father work on countless vehicles, their transmissions included. I had also watched him consume history book after history book on a Saturday morning. I didn’t speak up, but Todd could tell I was frustrated, so he looked at me and said, “What do you think, Adam?” This gave me an opportunity to speak my mind, but Todd made the space safe for me to do so. From that moment I decided Todd was alright in my book. Todd is also my link to self-study and to this group. Todd first connected me to Andy while my wife was pursuing her Ph.D at Vanderbilt, then to Geoff at Castle 2016, and subsequently and virtually to Mike. Quickly, the group became family.

I have known Andy for nearly twenty years and our relationship has developed into a respected and valued friendship over that time. While my views are based on a foundation of questioning the established values that society and different groups hold sacred and wondering about their equity, Andy has helped me to appreciate pragmatic changes in noting progress toward justice.

I met Todd when I was assigned to be his graduate assistant nearly ten years ago. Over that time he has indulged and shared my passionate connections to socially conscious rap music and hip-hop culture, the 1960s counter-culture movement, and stand-up comedy. It is the interest in counter-culture that brought me to the Castle Conference four years ago and offered the opportunity to further develop my relationship with Geoff. Todd also introduced me to Adam and through our mutual experience teaching in rural schools, we have found a common bond.

Considering these personal and professional influences in my own learning and practice, the formal work and informal conversations of this collective help me to think through curriculum solutions that help real classrooms to become ideal classrooms (spaces for students to critically, creatively, and innovatively consider solving civic problems). Andy, Todd, and Adam help me to think about how education can support a more equitable and just society in which stakeholders can find solutions that benefit the differing perspectives of students, teachers, and administrators; while Geoff’s work
and thoughtfulness has provided a path to consider how to carefully study, deliberate, and discuss my own work, ideas, and practice.

Geoff  Mentoring and collaboration are part of the culture of self-study and a research design focused on self positively impacted my life as a dean and professor. Academic life can be very isolating: we are focused on individual teaching, service, and scholarship requirements for promotion and tenure. However, self-study collaborations with colleagues across the world provided me with amazing mentoring opportunities that rejuvenated my scholarship. An example of these powerful relationships is the following email that I sent to my co-authors on the eve of teaching my last university class prior to retiring in July, 2017:

“As I approach my last day as an education professor tomorrow I find myself being reflective and a bit melancholy. I particularly wanted to tell you guys how much I appreciate our professional and personal relationships. In my post-dean years in particular, you guys have added a great deal to my professional life... you kept me engaged in self-study and AERA during a time that it would have been easy for me to fade away quietly. With one exception, I have no close colleagues at SOU. You have all filled that void and I am very thankful for our collaborations. And of course, our good times together in various locations around the world!”

For whatever reason, we did not worry about keeping our interactions limited to professional situations. We found value in relying on each other for support in navigating personal circumstances. Over time, our collegial relationships expanded into friendships in which our mentorship extended into both professional and personal life. As our trust in one another, willingness to be vulnerable, and bonds intensified over time, we found value in sharing professional ideas and work for constructive feedback and personal joys and struggles for social and emotional support. This informal group’s working together became formal when we came to notice the mutual empowerment the group provided and we decided to employ collaborative self-study practices to help better understand how the mentorship within our collective was impacting our thinking as teacher educators and researchers.

Learning from one another: An alternative view of mentorship and life learning

Outside of our main finding expressing a complex view of the mentoring relationship, perhaps our most significant finding is the impact that a purposefully reflected mentoring system can have on our self-image and practice as teacher educators. Much like mentoring, teaching is often depicted as a linear system in which the teacher imparts knowledge and wisdom to the student. However, our analysis of our mentoring relations allowed us to question the nature of teaching alongside the nature of mentoring. Freire (1970) suggested, “Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students” (p. 72). We would argue that our analysis has helped us to re-consider the mentor-mentee relationship. By understanding ourselves as both simultaneously mentors and mentees we are able to more directly embrace the teacher-student contradiction explained by Freire, which posits that students and teachers learn reciprocally from one another.

In conclusion, the outcomes of our study indicate that mentoring is complex and essential. Our own narratives show that while we all have commonalities, we are quite different. We bring varied perspectives and vulnerabilities. Mentoring in the academy is often presented as linear and goal oriented. While that is one form of mentoring, other methods may be more fruitful. Instead of pushing academy mentoring as a regimented and formal process, the results of our collaborative self-study suggest that there is power in discovering, connected, complex relationships where the personal and the professional overlap. It is in this more organic human interaction that we have all experienced valued mentorship.
Chapter 18: Co-Conspirators and Critical Friends

References

Bridging theory and practice: Exploring the boundaries of critical pedagogy through group self-study

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Self-study is recognized as a valuable approach for “developing new understandings and producing new knowledge about teaching and learning” through teachers studying their own practices (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998, p. 243). Berry (2004) suggests that inquiring into how to better improve personal practice, align practices with values, and support students by improving the quality of learning experiences all offer motivations and rationales for engaging in self-study. We engaged in self-study to better understand and improve ourselves as teacher educators by aligning our values as critical pedagogists to our classroom practices. The goals were to investigate individual and collective attempts to embed critical approaches across our courses, and evaluate the extent that these approaches reflected our common commitments to critical pedagogy and social justice in the service of democracy. We attended to how students interpreted their course experiences and translated these into implications for their future teaching, with an eye for continuous improvement of our own current and future practice. Recognizing that these goals reflected Berry’s (2004) reasons for engaging in self-study, we determined a collaborative self-study best aligned to our questions surrounding practical adherence to our values as critical educators (LaBoskey, 2004). Our aim is to improve our practice through interactively investigating and engaging in critical dialogue and reflection about our and our students’ work (Guilfoyle, et al., 2004). Critical theory and pedagogy are central to efforts towards social justice (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). Incorporating critical pedagogy into teacher education develops teachers’ “critical consciousness that enables them to read and act upon the world around them” regarding their own practice, and to foster these perspectives among their students (Bartolomé, 2004, p. 98). Literature related to critical pedagogy is extensive, and complexity related to both theory and practice has resulted in diverse interpretations (McLaren, 2008). Thus, a need exists for greater understanding regarding what constitutes critical pedagogical approaches to teaching for justice and equity, as well as the ways in which these approaches are enacted and interpreted in practical

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contexts. Our conceptualizations of criticality encompass various understandings and approaches related to critical pedagogy, as well as critical thinking. While both emphasize analysis, critical pedagogy explicitly focuses on examining practices and institutions, particularly in educational contexts, for injustice and oppression with the intent to positively transform these through action. This necessitates a greater focus on the roles, relationships, and interactions occurring among participants of the teaching and learning process than emphasized in critical thinking (Burbules & Berk, 1999). Recognizing that most students enter our courses unfamiliar with explicit understandings of critical pedagogy, we view emphasis on thinking critically about education as a foundational basis for critical pedagogy. Thus, though our courses do not explicitly focus on critical pedagogy, we attempt to embed these understandings and approaches within practical contexts of curriculum and instruction by emphasizing thinking and acting critically on these issues.

This self-study is part of our larger six-year longitudinal investigation of critical perspectives in teacher education. In the summer of 2017, we closely examined specific approaches within our diverse classrooms with the aim of improving our practices. We began by asking what being critical means in courses not focusing explicitly on critical pedagogy. After a systematic analysis of course artifacts (syllabi, assignments, personal journals) looking for resonances (Conle, 1996) with our shared critical values, we uncovered the lack of a co-extensive framing of critical pedagogy integrated into our courses, as well as less-than-concrete connections and opportunities to reflect our critical educational values.

These insights led to amendment of our practice to improve outcomes, defining this self-study in the process. We determined to make clearer connections to our goals of critical pedagogy within our practice by emphasizing transparency of purposes in class discussions and embedding critical values and goals within assignments, instructions and grading procedures. Also, we purposefully collected data reflecting critical understandings from our students by integrating context-specific connections to critical thinking (various perspectives, counter arguments, and generating implications) into our classroom framework of feedback. We understood this to be essential to further development of students’ capacities and commitments to identify opportunities for critical pedagogy approaches in their own classrooms.

Methodology

Primary participant/researchers were three teacher educators from three universities, teaching different courses in bilingual, methods and foundations with a fourth critical friend (Schuck & Russell, 2005) walking alongside and offering critical feedback. We determined a collaborative methodology would best serve to answer our question of practical adherence to our critical stance (Laboskey, 2004) and to our ability to coalesce our diverse cases into research cohesion (Zeichner, 2007). We recognized that multiple perspectives are integral to transforming practice and that ongoing dialogue is crucial to the meaning making process in our own experiences (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2016).

Beginning fall 2017 we met bi-weekly (Skype, online, face-to-face) to share reflections (Schön, 1984) and to collaboratively interrogate individual classroom practices, reflect on our experiences, and continue to refine our data and outcomes. As a multi-tiered method, we collected data that reflects how students made meaning of our classwork, how we as individuals understood and interpreted that data, and how our meaning making shifted through ongoing group dialogue. Data sources included teacher-made course artifacts (e.g., syllabi, lesson plans, assignments), student products (e.g., reading responses, tickets-out-of-class, and individual reflections), meeting notes, and researcher reflections. Utilizing inductive coding process (Charmaz, 2006) to analyze texts, themes were determined collectively as each shared and identified points of convergence and dissonance with perceived values and practices (LaBoskey, 2004). Through the telling and re-telling of our classroom stories, we made meaning of the experiences surrounding criticality (Craig, 1997). Our work was strengthened through our long-standing knowledge community (Craig, 2007), where dialogue was unconstrained.
Trustworthiness (Mishler, 1990) in this self-study was achieved through the use of exemplars representing real-life experiences in our practice (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2004). Experience-based exemplars are “concrete examples elaborated so that members of a relevant research community can judge for themselves ‘trustworthiness’ and the validity of observations, interpretations, etc.” (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2004, p. 20). Such exemplars denote grounding of our self-study in the authority of experience (Munby & Russell, 1994).

Findings

Our individual values and practices vary, however, we agree that transparency in unpacking our personal pedagogical beliefs with our students helps us engage in co-construction of knowledge necessary as foundational supports for critical thinking and, by extension, critical pedagogy. Initial findings required us to make changes in our classes that modeled our values that included transparency, explicit opportunities for co-constructed knowledge with multiple deep critical perspectives, and attention to the need of time for this process to occur. By situating these themes and feedback throughout as critical thinking more broadly, we tried to make these concepts more accessible to our diverse student population (Nodding & Brooks, 2017). The findings below reflect student outcomes resulting from the changes we made in our practice to explicitly enhance these goals with our students.

Transparency of purpose and values

As critical pedagogues, we agree that purposes for education should be transparent and derive from personal values. After examining initial findings, we determined to improve connections between our practices and values and made them more transparent for our students. Utilizing a pre- and post-assessment incorporating understandable language of critical thinking to determine the proximity of our students to the learning target, we gained insight into their perceptions of criticality and how they connected that to their own values.

In the shared pre-assessment, we asked students to reflect on thinking critically and their comfort level with engaging in and teaching students how to do it. Initially, many students described thinking critically as considering different aspects or perspectives, with an emphasis on going beyond superficial and unpacking complex ideas. We asked students to apply this to education, where students described thinking critically as considering different teaching approaches or evaluating effectiveness for improvement, primarily in the context of personal reflective practice. Few students suggested thinking critically also included factors influencing educational policies, equity, power or democratic ideals. Many discussed the need to support critical thinking for their own students, however few focused on concrete implementations or underlying values, purposes, and rationales to curriculum or instructional approaches.

In the post-assessment students’ writing across courses expressed the need to reflect about the purpose of their instructional decisions or as explained by one candidate to “think more about the why.” Reflections exemplified importance of clear purposes in instructional planning. Students reflected that assignments helped them “consider how it [plans] would affect students’ academic skills and give them the true purpose of learning,” “didn’t used to be focused as much on student voice and choice...and now considers this more during planning,” and acknowledge that “it is important to not only think about the how when planning, but the why” (emphasis in original). The need for transparency of purpose also showed in allusions to decisions about content such as needing to “make sure that the content presented provides purpose and understanding in order to capture the student’s attention,” and “I have learned to think and reflect about my teaching and what and how I would like to teach” (emphasis in original). Students also alluded to teaching values they hold in the post-assessment. One reflected that the course “helped to really put into perspective what is important to me in my teaching and even as a person.” Others expressed how those values connect “beyond the classroom work” and how the course “made me more aware that there are some problems that affect both teachers and students and makes me want to speak up for
what is right for the future of our youth.” Tension with foregrounding critical values also appeared. One student expressed dissolution after taking a publically critical stand “just to get you to think differently” was challenged by a visiting speaker in a demeaning way.

Co-construction

Another value we share as critical educators is that co-construction of knowledge is central to personal and shared meaning making. We feel that co-construction meets the purposes of democratic practices, privileging student voice in curricular decisions, and model practices successful in engaging students. Multiple perspectives require that students negotiate experiences that may differ from their own to improve learning. In the first phase of this study we found that we did not really look for, ask about, or attend to students’ perceptions of co-construction as meaning making. We each employed group conversations, projects and peer editing as modes of expressing co-construction, and in our second phase actively assessed and elicited responses from our students about it. Our findings revolve around the modes of peer-feedback and multiple perspectives as ways that our students made meaning of co-construction methods in our classroom.

Many of the findings about co-construction revolved around how students felt about collaborating in class discussions and sharing their products-in-process in order to improve. Regarding the value students found in class discussions, one shared, “I really enjoyed the discussions that were given in the class and that we had that liberty to express our thoughts and feelings, and the activities they produced.” Another wrote, “I feel like listening to everyone over the semester, their insights and perspectives; plus my experience with activities, have given me a new goal to be more engaging.” In creating large assignments, like lesson or unit plans, students understood that peer feedback could improve performance. One student reflected, “Sometimes, other people can tell you where your potential problems lie better than you can point them out. I think I struggle with this because I think that I have thought through every scenario. However, like all people, we make mistakes and do not all think alike,” while another offered that “symposiums overall are a great strategy to share ideas and improve your knowledge on a subject.”

Often students discussed how they valued the feedback from us. “You were great with giving and receiving feedback,” making the connection between the modeling we did and the connections students had. Some students even related feedback, listening and working together for critical purposes. “I like how we were able to give and receive feedback...It was also good to hear what everyone had to say about others’ lessons. I feel that it all will help me think critically in my teaching.” Some students found purposes aimed directly at improvement, “collaboration is an extremely important step in order to grow and improve ourselves. It is not necessarily about agreeing with your peers but the ability to hear their ideas with an open mind with the purpose of improving our instruction.” Tension was seen when students found “nothing of value” in peer feedback and methods were perceived as instructor not student-centered.

Multiple perspectives were often seen by students as contributing to both academic and class discussions. These discussions “show[ed] you a new world view,” “[helped] to see other ways of thinking, teaching, and understanding” and “made you think critically opposed of [sic] telling you what to do.” Encouraging multiple perspectives involves risks in classrooms. Students saw that dissenting opinions can create a classroom where “everyone [goes] like ‘huh! how can you say that?’” or sometimes, “comments were rude, insensitive, and intimidating.”

Co-construction of knowledge is challenging to effectively embed and enact in classroom settings. We feel that methods like peer-review, challenging conceptual discussions and questioning agreed upon assumptions are central critical values for our classrooms. Our responses from students about these activities, show us that they value perspectives from others, agree that academic work can improve with multiple feedback, and are challenged to be critical. However, we found less evidence of how students understood how integrate these complex approaches in their own future practice.
Time and depth

We recognize the centrality of experience in informing perspectives and, subsequently, practices related to education. This required us to condense and prioritize our goals so that we could devote additional time to promote depth of experience. Findings from our students include the understanding of the depth of critical thinking, how it relates to classroom experience, and the tension in the time required.

Students understood that thinking critically required both depth of understanding and that it required time to complete. Similar understandings were seen across classes. When describing thinking critically, they unsurprisingly used ideas that resonated with Bloom’s Taxonomy, including phrasing like “higher order” and “evaluate.” Images of “thinking outside the box” and “being under the ocean” were several metaphors used. They also understood that thinking critically involved what was thought, not just the how. Critical thought involved things “serious and important,” about “larger matters,” and issues that “go against the tide,” and “going beyond what is seen.” They connected to internal dialogue; “unpacking a concept for yourself,” “challenging your assumptions,” and “thinking through every single thing you do for students.”

Often students made connections to assignments and activities in class where the goal was to improve or challenge thinking of students through co-constructed activities. Examples of this include one student who saw that class “activities and assignments all in one way or another sparked a new fire in me and challenge me to think harder and further about education than I had,” a second student who suggested frustration stemmed from being forced to be an “independent thinker,” or a student who understood that a teacher-directed activity was designed for them to “analyze critically” although it “fell flat.” There was more limited feedback about how students connected this thinking to their own future classroom experiences. Students felt that they needed to think critically about “everything they do for their students” and another understood the challenge of “covering the material to this depth” in practice.

A finding that recurred in the data was the tension surrounding the time it takes to enact deep thinking needed for effective critical thinking. Students suggested that critical thinking takes a “very long, long time,” and “longer amount of thought [sic].” Themes that we see in this data include students understanding and utilizing connections to educational topics to describe critical depth, an acknowledgement that important ideas require critical thinking and that thinking can be characterized as a self-reflection.

Implications

Collectively, we share the importance of connecting values with practice to develop professional identity and voice. We see students’ abilities to articulate these values as a resource for teachers to use in the face of an oppressive educational culture. Our goals of empowering teachers as knowledge and curriculum makers are at the heart of our value system. Our attempts at clarifying our own values as models for students were intended to support their abilities to do so. Data from our students show that they were better able, at the end of our classes, to articulate critical values in connection to class work. This suggests that we all have improved our articulation and transparency regarding these connections. However, research suggests that novice educators (Hollingsworth, 1993) will espouse a particular set of beliefs while retaining contradictory versions. We are concerned that there is a tendency for students to reflect the perspectives of their instructors, given the position of power at play. Narrative authority (Olson & Craig, 2001) hinges upon values ascribed to positionality in classroom settings. We agree that students’ voices should be privileged and, while we try to ascribe authority back to the students, we often worry that students will not take these connections with them in their future placements.

Another challenge to the findings is the force of ‘technical rationality’ (Schön, 1984) in methods classes, where students are focused on their practices and not on the students. While there are assumptions that thinking critically improves practice, there is little evidence that students find their own pupils capable or part of the co-construction of knowledge we are trying to impart in our models. We are searching for ways to include students’ PK-12 experiences in this quest for
knowledge about co-construction, including ways that students can be introduced to cognitive dissonances surrounding this challenge in future iterations of this study.

A central goal of this work was to encourage students to take an ethical stance to becoming critical. Data showed a stronger connection of some of the critical issues in their feedback, we wonder if exposing them to constraints of education, continued challenges to their own thinking, and the awareness of the time necessary to engage in critical experiences are actually deterrents for students to make this type of ethical commitment. Repeated feedback about time leads us to assume that this time commitment may not be worthwhile in lived practice for them. In our next iteration we seek to emphasize the necessity and benefits of time commitment in practical terms for our students.

A concern that we shared is that students may often misinterpret values and purposes in our classroom. We have characterized this phenomenon as being “lost in translation,” where teachers’ purposes and beliefs become subverted in translation by the students. Sometimes this perspective is most visible in formal student feedback from the university, where there is disappointment that our students did not see us living up to goals, and when there is little way to improve students’ experiences after the semester. We recognize a tension regarding how to be responsive and student-centered while simultaneously having clear structure for students used to seeing classes as a checklist of items rather than a development of growth. We see this as a continuation of explication of values and benefits of engaging in challenging educational experiences.

The amount of time to “do” critical thinking rather than just discuss it is an issue that has consistently emerged in the work from our students and in our own experiences as educators implementing critical approaches. We have all struggled knowing how to balance the heavy workload of educating, which is often in tension with more deep thinking skills and exercises needed in classrooms. We have trimmed methods and other coursework in order to allow more time for the experience of critical thinking and discussions in the classroom. We wonder what other knowledge, skills, and understandings we are sacrificing, because we believe the foundational understanding begin with thinking critically.

References


Considering the relational in online courses

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…the instructor was able to provide meaningful feedback week-to-week that helped frame what the next steps in the course will be and was always able to incorporate feedback from student responses to readings and questions about content into these ongoing communications. I may have felt lost – but never left in the dark by myself. The instructor also worked carefully to create connecting points for classmates – utilizing online group forums for meaningful conversation and, in my experience, these groups helped me feel grounded. (Course evaluation, fall, 2016)

One of the growing issues in teacher education is an increase in the number of teacher educators teaching online teacher education courses (Kitsantas & Talleyrand, 2005; Licona, 2011). The above quote highlights the role of the relational possibilities in teaching online courses; the quote is from an evaluation by a student for an online course that took place in the fall of 2016.

Research has examined the efficacy of online teaching compared to other formats (Prieto-Rodriquez, Gore, & Holmes, 2016); the strategies and techniques for developing online learning environments; the impact of online environments on teacher reflection (Grant & Lee, 2014; Dede, Ketelhut, Whitehouse, Breit, & McCloskey, 2009); and the transition of traditional teacher educators in teaching online courses (Parsons & Hjalmarson, 2017). For some, one of the ongoing focuses of conversation about online and face-to-face teaching revolves around a commitment to relational connections with students. As the student notes in the quote at the beginning of this work, frequent feedback helps students understand the direction of an online course, and helps them to feel less isolated. Also, important to the student is the ability to connect with other students so as not to feel alone in the work. A significant aspect of the quote is the recognition by the student of the work done by the instructor to ensure community.

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In this study, we inquired into our work as online professors, particularly with a focus on our knowing of creating relational online spaces. As educators in all of our course work, we privilege the role of relationship. This research provided a venue for us to inquire into the ways we structure learning opportunities that facilitate relationships among the students, and between the students and ourselves. We consider the complexity of relationship and understand that this knowing is based in relational ways of being. We focus not so much on specific relationships created with students, but rather on our obligation for and knowledge of taking up relational ways of being, as we believe this supports learning. We seek an understanding of the learning to teach process and the need for relationship and its connection to continuity, interaction, and situation (Dewey, 1938) as we develop online courses.

We puzzle about what we know about developing and deepening relationship within online environments. We considered these questions: How do we think of the relational in an environment where we might never meet the other face to face? What learning contexts support or interrupt relational aspects of online course work?

Methodology

We are used to considering the concrete place of our teaching; this study situates our work in an understanding of space, and uncovers how we can attend to place and space in online environments in order to build relationship. This work is a self-study because it meets LaBoskey's (2004) criteria. It is self-initiated and improvement aimed and we use qualitative research. The study is interactive in that we engaged in dialogue in uncovering findings and worked as critical friends critiquing our thinking and assumptions. We used qualitative data and engaged in multiple cycles of interpretation. This allowed us to develop exemplar validation in support of our findings.

Data sources

As we worked on this study we uncovered our knowing about deepening relationships both face-to-face and online. We noted that we used assignments and saw that we designed interaction patterns with students and among them in order to strengthen relationships in ways that better support them in learning to teach. In our work, we used emails to each other and made notes of the content of our conversations. Both authors were involved in creating online courses. One author has designed and then taught an online course across this year. The other author is involved in the design phase of creating six online courses that lead to an ESL endorsement. The second author has acted as critical friend to the first. We have worked together on a number of projects over the years. In this study we take up what has become a growing aspect of our teaching, the turn to online instruction. When Shaun began to do Self Study of Teacher Education (S-STEP) work in an effort to understand his practice better, he began to work with Stefinee. Her knowledge and insight into S-STEP methodology, teacher education, and a dovetailing of interests drew us into a working relationship. We had similar teaching philosophies rooted in ethical and moral foundations (Murphy, Pinnegar, & Pinnegar, 2011; Murphy & Pinnegar, 2010, 2011, 2016; Pinnegar & Murphy, 2011a, 2011b) with attention to the relational, identity, and curriculum. Our interaction as critical friend has focused on responding positively and honestly in interaction with each other on professional problems we face as well as in an ongoing research relationship. Interacting as critical friends has been beneficial as this friendship across institutions has shaped stronger practices and provided insights into our work as teacher educators.

The data have several components: the syllabi for the course; anonymous student final surveys/evaluations regarding the classes; e-mail interchanges with students; and, the assignment structures of the classes. Together both authors engaged in analysis and interaction around these documents and in terms of both their experiences structuring and enacting online courses. We also considered the anonymous course surveys from students. To use the surveys, we obtained institutional ethics approval. These analytic sessions were conducted through skype, phone, and e-mail interactions.
**Data analysis**

This analysis took the form of reading syllabi and other documents looking for elements of relationality. Each of us identified our action and thinking revealed in these documents. We then engaged in conversations about shaping relational work in our online courses. Finally, we separately reviewed the text and artefact data, identifying how we attended to relationship in the artefacts, how we discussed relationship in our interactions, and what assumptions we held about building relationships. We then considered the knowledge, actions, and assumptions we held and enacted in our attempts to develop relationships in online environments collectively. For the second author, this focused on the design of assignments and the flow of course work and constant interchange about whether the course structure would lead to the relational structures desired. Once we identified what our practices revealed, we returned to our data linking our themes and patterns to data. In this process, we sought disconfirming evidence and negative cases. In our analysis, we noted ways the syllabi set up relational work. We also attended to comments from the surveys that spoke to the evidence of the relational or its absence. We identified and tracked emerging themes and patterns and connected the themes to evidence from documents or the lack of evidence. As findings emerged, we shared our interpretation and our evidence with colleagues who teach online courses and also seek to develop deeper relationships.

**Findings**

As we reflected on what we discovered from analyzing syllabi and anonymously administered student evaluations, we came to see how we shaped our teaching in relation to Schwab's (1978) curriculum commonplaces of teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu. Given our interest in curriculum, the Schwabian commonplaces orient our work. When we consider the curriculum commonplaces we see how our work as teachers is shaped by these aspects. In our teaching, there is always a learner, teacher, a subject matter and a community (milieu). Even though our influence is somewhat mitigated by distance, we consider the community to be present in online contexts as well. We saw that just as designing, enacting and reflecting on face-to-face interactions the commonplaces guided our thinking in these settings. We noticed that as we considered each commonplace in both design and enactment of the course, we used the analysis to focus and refocus on whether we were developing teacher to student and student with student relationships that would promote learning to teach. Since relationship is fundamental and imperative for learning it is through ethical relationships that we establish trust. Given that students are not completely in our physical presence, we continuously attended to the relational work of teaching from a distance.

In what follows, we use the commonplaces to examine our findings. We focus on the tensions that emerged in this work. As we reflected on “how do we think of the relational in an environment where we might never meet the other face to face?” We attended to the role of the commonplaces in our work and articulate how the three tensions played out.

**Teacher**

As the teacher, we are responsible for creating a learning environment where students trust us enough to learn and feel motivated to engage. In design and enactment, we feel obligated to provide relevant and adequate content. We are used to adjusting in the moment to them as humans with emotional needs, and intellectual and content needs. Since we do not have faces and body movement from which we construct in the moment responses, we have to seek new ways to track their response attending to disdain and resistance.

**Learner**

We have beliefs about their motivation and their need for relationship. We are aware of vast variability around who can work in the ways needed. Given the distance and the need for them to respond emotionally and intellectually, we are sensitive to the variability in connection to students.
and the impact that might have on learning. They can know us by reputation, ours or other online teachers, or their feeling about the program or learning. All of this needs to be thought of as we design the syllabus, because the syllabus is the vehicle for communicating us as being trustworthy and ethical. We are less certain how much trust we can have in them as learners. We have beliefs about the potential impact of what there are learning. We know what they learn with us may be limited because of the routes and mechanisms of communication between us. We focus on giving and receiving consistent feedback so that students know we are engaged in their work. We know the feedback is time sensitive since they need it to further shape their work.

Subject matter

We have an obligation to engage the students in learning the content, but we have fewer informal ways of judging progress. We may have more of each individual's voice about learning the content but miss the nuanced feelings that comes with presence. We may or may not have support for their being more capable knowers for each other. In a face-to-face class where all students are teachers and learners, we can orchestrate that more than we can in online situations.

Milieu

When considering milieu, we recognized that we are not in the physical presence of students. We do not get a continuous read from body language or ongoing nuances brought by being in the same place. There is an additional formality and distance and even if we are skyping, both can hold themselves distance sets constraints. The syllabus lays out the course and communicates our beliefs. It also sets the path through the course which is more set than in face-to-face courses.

Considering tensions in online work

Given our reference to Schwab, three aspects occupy us as we design courses and are present in syllabi and activities. We name them as tensions because they present as concepts to attend to, and surfaced in consideration of syllabi and student responses. These tensions shaped an understanding of the second part of the research puzzle: What learning contexts support or interrupt relational aspects of online course work?

Tension one: Relationships

Our fundamental concern with relationship permeates our documents. We want to communicate ourselves as ethical and trustworthy so students can engage. The relationship must be motivating but communicate us as competent and worth learning from and carries our presence.

I have been talking to myself with no one listening the entire term. I also found evaluations completely arbitrary. Feedback was positive but lacked specificity, and targeted detail to help improve. Regardless of the effort expended each week, my progress (grades) were the same. The mark is of less import to me than the learning standards I am failing to meet. (course evaluation, winter, 2017)

Relationships are hard to negotiate with students in face-to-face classrooms given the limited time of interaction over a term. Body language and student in-the-moment response give clues to which instructors can respond. In online courses, these nuances are easily missed. Here the student did not feel heard and participation in a negative discussion thread experience left the student silenced. In an online course this is even more difficult with limited interaction, since the instructor did not view the interaction through the same lens s/he did not intervene. The relationship needs to go both ways, instructor to student and student to instructor.
In an earlier class a student made the following comment,

*Though the class was online, you were always “present” through your weekly check-in emails to us. I felt your end-of-week summaries/updates provided a good continuity for the course. This is a great teaching practice that I have incorporated into my own online course. The readings (esp. Warrior Women) were excellent, and well-chosen, and I think the reading responses are a good way for us to synthesize what we know.* (Course evaluation, fall, 2016)

This reveals students arrive at different understandings which might be mediated differently in face-to-face contexts. The first evaluation comment in this section underscores a breakdown in relationship. The second entry highlights it. In teaching, there is always a relational tension perhaps magnified in online settings.

**Tension two: A technical approach to ascertaining learning**

Learning the subject matter is the reason for curriculum design. Monitoring student progress is important and in online contexts this is done through textual interface. There is seldom an opportunity to augment student work with face-to-face conversations. Feedback is important, in that it provides direction, affirms understanding, and sets direction.

*This class was a good learning opportunity. [The instructor] is a very genuine and kind instructor with effective feedback. Although, this class would be much better offered face-to-face.* (course evaluation, April, 2017)

We have to be concerned with partitioning the content in ways we that will optimize their learning. Assignments and readings need to build on each other, movement to an end point of understanding is shaped by the course syllabus furthered by feedback. The syllabus has to be true to the content, engaging, and likely to promote learning.

*I was* provided in-depth valuable feedback on all assignments in an extremely timely manner. Expectations were clear and reasonable and the course was well-organized. (course evaluation, April, 2017)

In online instruction, we are teaching individuals collectively in a new kind of one-on-one way while we also want to link them to each other. In an online course, much of which is less fluid and more structured to facilitate the work of the class. The technical is an ever present concern and was an ongoing consideration in our data. All must be set as a course is set up: Sequence, due dates (online submission and response), digital interaction (discussion threads with post and responses), group work specifications and requirements (causing tension for students, and more than usual email communications), specific information about assignments, etc. We must carefully consider the path through. We did not find online teaching to lighten our teaching work, beyond face-to-face classes, it required new levels of vigilance and organization.

*Perhaps this class was added to a heavy teaching load? Despite the prof not having time to read online posts, if he’s [sic] have set up a discussion board for the students to use to post assignments, then others could have read the ideas of others. It wouldn’t have to be for marks. It could have been optional. There was no sharing beyond a two-week partner activity. I would have appreciated reading the works of others. I feel students would have posted regardless of the assessment.* (course evaluation, December, 2017)

This evaluation comment arose from a student with whom Shaun had worked in two other online classes. The other courses had online discussion post requirements. It was an add-on (extra course) to a heavy teaching load eliminating the need to monitor discussion threads was Shaun’s response—evidently it caused a breakdown in relationality for this student.
Not only must we attend technically in setting up work, but interactional tools provided by
the university for online teaching must be working smoothly. There is also an ongoing tension
for instructors related to students who are taking an online course for the first time. Online
environments are difficult for some students to negotiate, but they must be helped by the instructor
in order to support learning. The design of the courses must be fundamentally pedagogical
(Allman, Pinnegar, & Leary, in press), meaning they must be designed or adjusted so that they
lead to your instructional and learning purpose being met.

[The instructor] was very efficient as an online instructor and was very knowledgeable in
the content. Assignments were always assessed and graded promptly. I appreciate that [the
instructor] put a word limit on the weekly discussions in the group threads. It made reading
and responding much more manageable.

(course evaluation, April, 2017)

Balance of workload is important as there was an expectation of weekly work. This was part
of the design to facilitate ongoing commitment and learning for the students; it also entailed a
weekly commitment from the instructor in order to respond and support the work of the students.
In this way, the work of the instructor takes on an ethical dimension related to the students.

Tension three: The role of ethics

We have a three-way constraint. Given the context we as the teachers must be true to ourselves
as knowers of the content we teach, of preparing teachers, and of the learning. We are concerned
with students and what we know about their needs to both learn and be successful, and to their
students. Murphy, Pinnegar, & Pinnegar (2011) wrote,

In order to have ethical relationships with our students we need to have thick relationships
with them. University constraints, such as the large class size, fragmentation of teacher
education curriculum, and the typical sixteen-week length of the semester, often act against
our ability to create thick relationships. (p. 103)

In this research, we also came to understand that online environments can interrupt the
development of thick relationships which can engender ethical ones. We found we had to work
towards the establishment of relational spaces through email and detailed response to assignments.
What follows is one example of how this was considered by a student,

[The instructor] was very considerate and understanding towards personal issues that got
in the way of assignments—this was appreciated. The feedback provided on assignments was
very valuable. The comments we [sic] thoughtful, helped clarify concepts and encouraged
self-reflection. Thank you so much for this course and the time you put into giving feedback!!!
(course evaluation, April, 2017)

Concluding thoughts

Taking up the relational is always complex work in university teaching, particularly when
the time spent with students is bounded by the typical 39 hours of interaction. This is further
compounded when the interaction takes place in an online environment. We found that it is
in our assignment structures and interactions in emails and discussion boards that we had the
most contact with students. We found that we held assumptions about relationship building
which emerged through gesture and expression that are not easily captured or enacted in online
environments. Exploring our assumptions, pushed us to alter our interactions with students and
develop new strategies that guided our interaction. We also discovered that our assignments asked
students to consider the relational and attended to Schwab’s (1978) commonplaces of teacher,
learner, subject matter, and milieu. The attention to the commonplaces situated this work in a
curricular understanding with a focus on the relational. It was interesting to note that in some of
our classes the titles or course descriptions contained the word relationship already orienting the students to consider the ways the relational is taken up in the work of teaching. We also noted the ways we talked about the relational in our communications with each other and the students.

In his work on rural space, which we consider for our work in an online space, Halfacree (2006) suggested, “[s]pace does not somehow ‘just exist’ waiting passively to be discovered and mapped, but is something created in a whole series of forms and a whole series of scales of individuals” (p. 44). We took up this definition of space because we understood, from our work, that the online space was constructed through a series of forms and interactions among people, the students and ourselves. In seeking to understand the ways this was shaped, we concluded that the creation of the relational space in an online teaching environment is an intentional act. It is an example of Pimatisiwin, the Anishinabe word for walking together in good ways (Young, 2005).

References


Using self-study of teacher education practice methodology to navigate e-learning course development

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E-learning includes online learning, information technology (IT), information and communication technology (ICT), blended learning, mobile learning (m-learning) and is essentially defined as the use of technology to support learning and teaching while connected to the Internet (Moule, Ward, & Lockyer, 2011; Cochran, 2015). According to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), teaching preparation involving e-learning is widespread (AACTE, 2013). However, most teacher educators are not trained in the practices of e-learning (Mishra, Koehler, & Zhao, 2007). Policy and professional development efforts focus on remediating this fact. Such remediation, though necessary, often positions faculty members as objects of the e-learning movement rather than as influencing agents in it.

As experienced self-study researchers, we have utilized Self-Study of Teacher Education Practice (S-STEP) methodology to study our practice developing e-learning versions of our courses (Cutri & Whiting, 2018). These experiences sparked our curiosity regarding the role that this methodology can have in such work. The research question guiding this study is: How does the research skill set offered by S-STEP methodology facilitate our inquiry into developing and implementing courses in e-learning formats?

This research has the potential to illuminate how teacher educators engaged in S-STEP can assume a self-directed, pro-active role grounded in their practice when transitioning to e-learning formats. Such an empowered role shifts the focus away from teacher educators’ deficits regarding e-learning skills and tools. The focus can then be on utilizing the research and practice skills that teacher educators possess that can enrich their transition to e-learning formats.

Self-study and digital practice

Hamilton and Pinnegar explore what they term “the digital turn” in relation to S-STEP (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2017). They state, “S-STEP methodology situates technology as an
opening rather than a constricting tool to explore practice” (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2017, p. 14). This digital turn in S-STEP methodology has largely been considered positive with technology serving both as a tool and a resource in studying teacher education practice (Loughran, 2017; Dacey, Abrams, Strom, & Mills, 2017).

Teacher educators not educated in developing or teaching in e-learning formats can face challenges and even crises of practice and identity (Freidus & Kruger, 2017). We argue that three specific characteristics of self-study methodology can greatly benefit and serve mainstream teacher educators in such positions (Cutri & Whiting, 2018). First, self-study methodology encourages researchers to be willing to explore living contradictions and risks (Whitehead, 1989). Leaving one’s traditional practice format (face-to-face teaching) is risky and can leave a teacher educator facing many tensions and even feeling that they are contradicting some of their pedagogical commitments. Second, self-study methodology demands that researchers explore their own identities and practice and reframe them based on the findings of their self-studies of their practice (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998). Teacher education in an e-learning format often forces teacher educators to carve out new identities and ways of being with their students. Third, self-study methodology requires researchers to see their practice as the subject of ongoing examination aimed at improving that practice (LaBoskey, 2004). In the field of instructional design, design and implementation are seen as an iterative process in which failure and revision are both expected and appreciated as opportunities for learning (Jellison, 2006).

General teacher educators not educated in e-learning, but being asked to develop and implement such formats, could benefit from adopting these research skills of self-study methodology as they embark on efforts to retool as teacher educators in the realms of e-learning. We now review literature describing general attributes that best position faculty members to transition their traditional courses to e-learning formats.

**Conceptual concerns of teacher educator e-readiness**

Emergent empirical studies reveal conceptual concerns surrounding the trend of faculty who are not formally educated in e-learning being tasked with developing e-learning formats of their courses. The tenants of S-STEP address these conceptual concerns in productive ways.

Transitioning from a face-to-face teaching format to an e-learning format involves many affective aspects (Golden & Brown, 2016). S-STEP methodology utilizes multiple methods capable of capturing the nuances of the emotional and attitudinal aspects of adopting technology and transforming one’s practice. Many faculty experience a strong desire to return to the known teaching format because they have not yet established a comfortable way of working in the new e-learning environment (Johnson, Ehrlich, Watts-Taffe, & Williams, 2014). S-STEP methodology’s focus on examining, reflecting on, and revising one’s own practice in an effort to improve it positions S-STEP researchers to better tolerate discomfort associated with new practices. Additionally, S-STEP researchers are accustomed to assuming the role of authors of change in their practice and evaluators of it. Faculty often face discontinuities between who they are as face-to-face instructors and who they are as e-learning instructors (San Jose & Kelleher, 2009). S-STEP methodology requires researchers to identify tensions and even contradictions in who they think they are and how they show up in their practice. S-STEP methodology promotes a willingness to embrace tensions and contradictions and encourages analytic skills to unpack them.

E-learning involves shifting power dynamics. Research describes the power shifts that occur as faculty move away from teacher directed instruction in favor of constructivist approaches to e-learning (Reid, 2012; Redmond, 2015). Sockman and Sharma (2008) describe professors’ emotional resistance to such pedagogical and implicit power shifts as being a result of faculty’s distaste for feeling like novices again. They suggest that teacher educators assume a humble stance toward e-learning and acknowledge that pedagogically there are many ways to achieving the same curricular goals. Such humility echoes self-study methodology’s improvement of practice aims.

Researchers document the large organization shifts required to pre-plan content and delivery of e-learning versus a more spontaneous approach available when teaching face-to-face. Researchers
describe changes in timing and nature of faculty’s work stating specifically that with e-learning formats, a significant part of the role of a faculty member is completed before the students ever enter the course (Reed, 2012; Gay, 2016). The S-STEP research skill of considering one’s practice as the subject of on-going inquiry aimed toward improvement can facilitate attention to the organizational issues involved in e-learning.

We assert that the research skill set offered by S-STEP methodology can help faculty members to weather the storm of possible frustration, anxiety, withdrawal, nervousness, and fatigue documented in the literature when developing and implementing e-learning versions of teacher education courses.

Context

At the time of this study, Erin had a total of three years and Ramona a total of five years of self-taught, hodgepodge, and cursory experience with e-learning in teacher education. Our ventures into e-learning started six years ago when administrators requested that Ramona transition her multicultural education course to a blended learning format consisting of asynchronous electronic sessions online and face-to-face class sessions. Erin transitioned her multicultural education course to a blended format one year after Ramona, and two years ago, Ramona was tasked with transitioning the blended course into an entirely online course.

As experienced S-STEP researchers, we approached each of these transitions in the format of our teaching as a subject of ongoing examination. Throughout this time, we have met regularly to inquire into our e-learning efforts and how to engage our students intellectually and emotionally with the multicultural education content (Cutri, Whiting, & Pinnegar, 2015; Cutri & Whiting, 2015; Cutri & Whiting, 2018).

Method

We desired to improve our experience transitioning our practice to e-learning by taking ownership of it instead of positioning ourselves as passive recipients of e-learning initiatives. Our self-initiated, focused, and improvement-aimed self-study (LaBoskey, 2004) included qualitative data from three sources:

1. Course design documents from online and blended design-iterations of the course
2. Personal notes and memos explicating the design decisions informing the design-iterations of the e-learning formats of our course
3. Critical friend interviews

We built trustworthiness (LaBoskey, 2004; Mena & Russell, 2017) throughout our analysis of the data by interactively negotiating interpretation and meaning, relating our assertions for understanding back to the literature, and making our analysis steps transparent.

Our first phase of data analysis was a textual analysis re-examining our literature review on Self-Study and Digital Practice. We identified three prominent characteristics of self-study methodology. We then turned these three characteristics into a-priori analytic codes: 1) ability to identify contradictions between pedagogical commitments and e-learning and ability to risk negotiating such contradictions; 2) ability to forge new identity and ways of being with students and teaching grounded in data gathered during each design iteration of e-learning format; and 3) ability to consider e-learning design failure and revision as the expected outcomes of practice that lead to improvement. Ramona, the first author, used these a-priori analytic codes to analyze each of the three data sources. Erin then coded the three data sources independently in the same manner. Her coding was compared to Ramona’s and a high level of consistency was found.

During the second phase of our analysis, we created a matrix to prompt consideration of how our self-study research skills helped us tackle the challenges of transitioning our courses to e-learning format. In the first column we listed the three S-STEP research skills used as a-priori codes. In the second column we listed the conceptual concerns in e-learning identified in our literature review. We then placed coded data from Phase I into the corresponding row of the
matrix that aligned with the a-priori code it was assigned. (Please see Table 1 and note that, due to space constraints, we only provide a sample of the coded data placement.)

### Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Skill of S-STEP Methodology A-Priori Analytic Codes</th>
<th>Conceptual Concerns in E-Learning</th>
<th>Sample Coded Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Ability to identify contradictions between pedagogical commitments and e-learning and ability to risk negotiating such contradictions | • Sockman and Sharma (2008) speak of faculty’s emotional resistance.  
• Redmond (2015) call for faculty to have intellectual courage. | • “Online learning materials and discussions are sexy, but it is not just a matter of putting stuff online. Teacher educators must attend to the zone of proximal development issue. What is the appropriate format for online materials and discussions so that teacher candidates can use information as a common jumping off place and so they can extend their knowledge gained during electronic sessions to face-to-face ones?”  
• “In my earlier preparations of this course, I unsuccessfully tried to have online discussions around topics related to the sessions of the course...However, after 3 semesters of watching students interact in these groups, I think that the most important purpose has been to create a space for students to talk about what they are seeing and dealing with together and to support each other in this emotional learning.” |
| Ability to forge new identity and ways of being with students and teaching grounded in data gathered during each design iteration of e-learning format | • Johnson, Ehrlich, Watts-Taffe, and Williams (2014) argue that moving courses online disrupts faculty’s identities.  
• Salmon (2011) documents the need for faculty with characteristics such as empathy, creativity, confidence, and flexibility. | • “I know how to teach in a very detached, intellectual way, but I don’t think it’s as impactful on the students...I have had students come to me and share parts of their lives, like, ‘Wow, I had this happen to me, too,’ or you know, ‘My dad did this,’ you know, and so I’ve had people in private come and share things about their lives because I opened up a space—and that’s what it’s really opening, that’s what really, you know, one of my goals in sharing so much about my own personal life other than it makes my work more meaningful to me—is to open up a space because I think that when you...um...as a person in power, which a professor always is, you know, is willing to be vulnerable and share—my hope is that it creates that space for other people to be vulnerable and share.” |
Next, we looked across rows of the matrix to scrutinize how S-STEP research skills attended to the conceptual concerns in e-learning and how this was manifested in our experiences as documented in the coded data.

In our third analytic step, we determined the strongest data examples for each of the rows on the matrix. We then wrote exemplars (Mishler, 1990) based on these examples to highlight the salient ways that S-STEP research skills enriched our inquiry into developing and implementing our courses in e-learning formats.

### Outcomes

Exemplar number one illuminates the process we used to identify the contradiction between the intentions that we have for students to learn through deep interactions with each other and the e-learning format of the online discussions which did not engage students in meaningful interactions. Early in our work to add online modalities to the course, we recognized that in the asynchronous online discussions students were making cursory comments with instructors in mind, rather than deeply engaging with their fellow students. As self-study researchers, we turned our gaze to how our own practice was contributing to these undesirable results. We were committed to a social interactionist approach, but recognized that the way we had organized the asynchronous online discussion contradicted our goals. We placed our own course and assignment design as the subject of ongoing examination and asked experts in technology integration for help. In so doing, we exposed our own lack of expertise and need for collaboration with others more knowledgeable than ourselves. Through these actions, we demonstrated the type of intellectual
courage that is called for in the e-learning research literature (Redmond, 2015). Then, we collectively considered the experts’ advice in light of our own pedagogical knowledge and content area expertise and made changes in our assignments. This pattern of vulnerability and critically integrating technology experts’ suggestions was born out of our ability to identify contradictions between our pedagogical commitments and e-learning. The ability to identify living contradictions (Whitehead, 1989) and our willingness to risk negotiating such contradictions are both S-STEP research skills.

Exemplar number two illustrates how studying one’s own practice contributes to forging new ways of being with students and teaching. When teaching students face-to-face, Ramona relies heavily on her personality and charisma to engage students emotionally and intellectually in the content. However, when teaching entirely online the vehicles for interacting with students are usually a synchronous video feed or asynchronous online video or text interactions. In weekly conversations with her critical friend Erin, she expressed and explored that a large part of her identity as a teacher educator was compromised by these e-learning format constraints. Such identity disruption is a prevailing issue in e-learning (Johnson, Ehrlich, Watts-Taffe, and Williams, 2014). Ramona turned to end-of-course student evaluations of her teaching to see how students were experiencing her, and these confirmed the disconnect that she was experiencing. Motivated by this data and informed by her critical friend sessions, Ramona explored other ways to express her personality and charisma to her students. Eventually, she required each student to meet individually with her either face-to-face or in a private video conference so that she could get to know them and have them get to know her. In class, Ramona also began to share her own experiences as a multicultural person who was raised in poverty as a means of teaching the multicultural education content. These changes demonstrate Ramona’s use of the S-STEP research skill of systematically exploring one’s own identity and practice using data. This process of using data to study one’s own identity and practice demonstrates potential to attend to the call in e-learning research for faculty to demonstrate characteristics such as empathy, creativity, confidence, and flexibility (Salmon, 2011).

Exemplar number three documents how e-learning design failure can be conceptualized as contributing to improving one’s practice. In Erin’s course, student participation points were embedded in the various assignments making it hard for her to distinguish between knowledge of course concepts and engagement in the content, both of which are important. The e-learning format exasperated this problem. E-learning necessitates careful attention to the level to which students are engaged in the content because they are not always physically with the professor when engaging with it. Erin, a sociologist by training, is not an expert in e-learning assessment issues. However, through systematically reflecting on her course design documents spanning several semesters, Erin recognized the ways in which the current course organization and assessment procedures were not satisfying her desire to be able to formatively assess students’ participation. She next sought help by reading several books about grading philosophy and organization and exploring assessment issues more deeply in research literature. She then made changes in the grading scale and organization of assignments. The S-STEP research skill of considering design failure and revision as part of the process of improving one’s practice sustained Erin through the stress, fears, and concern related to venturing into e-learning and no longer being within one’s area of expertise (Golden, 2016; Dyment, Downing, and Budd, 2013).

The outcomes of this study document how we implemented self-study methodology research skills in order to actively contribute to and improve our e-learning course development and e-learning practice. Our epistemological orientation toward reflectively inquiring into our practice with systematic regularity in order to improve it allowed us to readily tackle the task of identifying contradictions in our practice, forging new identities and ways of being with our students, and using design failures to improve our e-learning practice.
Conclusions

When faced with transitioning their courses online, teacher educators would benefit from learning and utilizing self-study methodology research skills in order to be best positioned to assume a self-directed, pro-active role when transitioning to e-learning formats. Employing self-study research skills can help firmly establish teacher educators’ roles as content area experts using technology to forward pedagogical goals.

Future research should explore how other teacher educators utilize self-study methodology research skills while transitioning their courses to e-learning formats. An additional area of research could include examining similarities between research methodologies commonly used in instructional design research and S-STEP methodology. Such future research efforts could contribute to establishing teacher educators as valuable contributors to the e-learning movement rather than as passive recipients of it.

References


Chapter 21: Using self-study of teacher education practice methodology to navigate e-learning course development


Collage making as a visual inquiry process for supporting practicing teachers’ understandings about literacies

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We are junior, tenure-line faculty at a research-intensive institution in the Southwestern United States. Most of our responsibilities lie with mentoring and advising graduate students who are practicing teachers in local schools. As such, one of our major goals is to bring our research interests in New Literacies (New London Group, 1996) into our work as mentors and advisors. We determined that we would benefit from a multimodal method for supporting our thinking together with our teachers, together with each other, and separately. By multimodal, we mean that we were utilizing multiple modes, including image, print text, or spatial arrangement (Jewitt & Kress, 2003) across our work. Even images themselves are multimodal (Duncum, 2014), specifically taking mode of color and spatiality into account (Jewitt and Kress; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Among the strategies we came to use with our students is collage (combining images, words, and other symbols and icons purposely on a page). The purpose of this study was to examine our uses of collage as a multimodal method of supporting graduate student teachers and to reflect on and improve our practice as teacher educators (LaBosskey, 2004).

In our state, there are large populations of English learners with Hispanic/Latino and/or Native American/American Indian heritage who need intensive language and literacy support. Teachers in our state are among the lowest paid nationwide making turnover an issue. Graduation rates, although they are improving, are low. Thus, it is critical for our state to improve literacy instruction, but given our context, the work is also challenging. Our literacy program is part of an interdisciplinary department that mostly awards graduate degrees and offers some undergraduate service courses. We want our students who are teaching in schools to see a graduate degree as a way to feel sustained and empowered in their work with children. Collage became one avenue of several we tinkered with for doing and reflecting on our work in this context.

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Perspectives

As researchers and former classroom teachers, we subscribe to views of literacies as complex phenomena that involves simultaneous engagement with multiple modes, senses, and materialities. We subscribe to the notion that **literacy** consists of multiple (literacies) that are understood as situated social practices that are shaped within and across different types of social contexts (Gee, 2008; New London Group, 1996; Street, 1995). In our practice and research, we consider the ways in which **multimodality** constitutes drawing on multiple modes beyond print to mediate meaning-making within literacy practices, including but not limited to sound, gesture, speech, image, and so forth (Kress, 2010; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001).

Multimodality is often linked to digital and technological literacy practices, but it does not have to be exclusively so. Working in multiple modalities often requires material considerations. In digital literacies, this might mean hardware and software. These objects mediate literacy practices, identities, and relationships within and across physical and virtual social spaces (Jones & Hafner, 2012). However, there are also traditional technologies associated with multimodality that include pencils and paper, scissors and glue, and other supplies and tools that support the visual arts (Duncum, 2014). We strive to maintain a critical stance in our multimodal literacies teaching and reflection with teachers. We support analytical and strategic uses of digital and other multimodal literacy practices to address inequities, injustices, and circulations of power associated with intersections of difference, including but not limited to language, race, class, gender, and sexuality (Garcia, Segler, & Share, 2013; Hammer & Kellner, 2009).

In considering previous studies, Smagorinsky and O’Donnell-Allen (1998) offered a perspective on multimodal composing as similar to The New London Group’s (1996) concept of design. They asked high school students to compose multimodal body biographies, which included drawn images spatially arranged on paper. The students’ work contributed to a deeper engagement and understanding of an assigned text as they engaged in composing or designing. For us, the study sparked interest in the using aesthetic activities that had edges of design, but also potential for art and the representation of written/oral literacies as visual literacies.

In another study, Smagorisnky (2011) described a high school class project that required art-making (mask-making) as an explicit example of multiple modes (including color, spatiality, etc.) as tools for communication and identity building. The high school students in the study took up this project as an opportunity for meaning-making and developing new ideas as well as “fun” work that was accessible to them. We hoped to invite similar engagement with our collage works, which were produced using both traditional and digital technologies.

We strove to include these ideas in our coursework and advising, despite well-founded concerns about the lack of infrastructure in schools for incorporating a wide range of technologies in classrooms, little to no administrative support, and difficulties establishing emotional and identity spaces to learn how to apply new skills as teachers. Drawing on Holbrook and Zoss (2009), we agreed that for multimodal composition “to be valued in higher education and not simply found in education methods courses, the doing and representation of research have to embrace image, language, sound, and performance.” (p. 5). By exploring our teaching and mentoring practices through multimodal acts of collaging (as teachers and as researchers) we hoped to take up Holbrook and Zoss's challenge.

Methods and strategies

Collage comes from the French verb, **coller**, which means “to glue” (Enslen, 2012). It is the process of using fragments of found images or materials and gluing them to a flat surface to portray phenomena. The concept is not new. For example, over 1,000 years ago Japanese artists used collage to enhance their calligraphic poetry (Schneider, 2013). Collage was also used in folk art in the 1800s by artists such as Mary Delany (Hayden, 1980). However, collage became very popular in twentieth century when artists such as Picasso and Braque used it to make art more accessible and as a way to question the way in which reality could be subverted (Tate, 2018).
While collage has been used both as an aesthetic and intellectually subversive technique, its proposed use in research came more recently. As a response to growing interest in arts-informed research, Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010) proposed collaging as an activity to increase the variety of visual possibilities and enabled the use of new technologies to use visual forms of inquiry. Essentially as one glues items together, the materialities take on each other’s characteristics. While initially collage in art was a method of questioning the boundaries between sculpture and photography, we also saw that makers might metaphorically blur boundaries and see new perspectives (Tate, 2018). We hoped that the visual items produced might help us and our students consider more thoughtfully our individual and collective understandings about literacy work.

As we engaged in self-study as a research design, we followed Samaras’ (2011) articulation of five methodological components of self-study to design our research and ensure trustworthiness.

**Critical collaborative**

We worked collaboratively to provide critical feedback to each other (Loughran & Northfield, 1998). Our purpose was to operate as partners working together on what we had noticed about our work learning from teacher work.

**Personal and situated contexts**

Self-study questions generally arise from a personal inquiry from within the researcher’s context of practice (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). In our case, the study began with the highly contextualized awareness we had as new faculty members in our program.

Mary worked with 4 graduate students at the middle and high school levels. These teachers were all experienced teachers and they were surprised to see Mary coming to their schools. One walked her around, introducing her to colleagues, saying, “I can’t believe she is here. I have never had a professor come visit me at my school.” These teachers vacillated in their enthusiasm about teaching with digital/online/multimodal literacies. In fact, most of them thought they were coming to a degree program to learn to teach with children’s picture books.

Ashley worked with 6 graduate students who were also practicing teachers in the same rural school district; this was the first time they were teaching full time and completing graduate work. Ashley operated as an outsider in that she was new to the state and the teaching environment. However, the teachers expressed a sense of her as an insider as well because she was someone who had taught full time while earning a graduate degree. Given the teaching scripts and evaluative environment of these teachers’ district, teachers were hesitant, even dismissive at times, of examining and engaging literacies broadly. They wondered what was actually possible for them and for their students, given their school environments and perceived needs to teach to scripts and tests.

**Transparent and systematic research processes**

As self-study researchers, we collected a variety of artifacts from practice (Berry & Loughran, 2002; LaBoskey, 2004). Artifacts included collages that students in the program made during our classes, as well as observation notes, emails between us and teachers, field notes from conversations with teachers, lesson plans and course teaching materials, advising documents and final thesis projects from teachers in the program. Using these documents as inspiration, we engaged in our own collage-making where we built visual representations of our impressions of what we were seeing and thinking as we observed teacher work in our program (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2009). These collages and our other data were analyzed as data where we reinterpreted the visual back into the linguistic and then held them together to present our learning.

We used collages in three ways. We assigned collaging to our students in our classes. For example, Ashley brought materials to her cohort class and suggested collage making as a way to explore multiple versions (or designs) of *A Wrinkle in Time*. The teachers were delighted to do this assignment. One in particular was especially grateful, saying “Thanks for letting us do this. I needed to do this today.” The collage process allowed the teachers to synthesize complex texts and literacy scholarship in critical, creative, and personal ways. Framed around the New London Group’s (1996) conceptions of designing and redesigning, which was a topic of study in class that day, students and Ashley engaged with the scholarship and acted as designers.
The assignment also provided space to consider the affordances and drawbacks to multimedia and multimodal texts. Ashley and the teachers discussed how shifts in text medium opened spaces for new voices and new understandings. For instance, they thought about how the film *A Wrinkle in Time* was being directed by Ava DuVerenay. An African American woman herself, she also diversified the cast. We saw texts like *A Wrinkle in Time* being redesigned, then, as a way of taking a critical literacy stance, shifting power and visibility. One teacher had been thinking about her niece, who might see herself in this new version of Meg (the young female protagonist being played by an African American actress). By collaging with photocopies of pages from the 1962 novel, the 2012 graphic novels, and images available from the filming, students rearranged words, change skin colors, and consider the new audiences.

![Figure 1. Collage from Ashley’s class](image)

Collaging was also used as a means to provide feedback about teaching to our students that we observed during practicum assignments. Figure 2 emerged as a response to a classroom observation. It was made with resources at [www.kizoa.com](http://www.kizoa.com), which is an online host for collage-making. The teacher had been reading the work of Paulo Freire (1996) and was interested in how Freirean concepts entered her literacy teaching. During the observation, the students (who were 5 middle leveled children in a self-contained special education classroom) learned about shapes. They practiced the names of shapes; they read a story of a Chinese emperor who encouraged his people to solve a tangram; they looked for shapes in nature, and they made cookies with different shapes.

As Mary watched the class unfold that day, she recalled a quotation from Freire’s work that struck her as she looked through her notes. At first, she was trying to capture everything that was happening in the classroom so that she could report that to the teacher. The teacher would then, in turn, reflect for her own purposes. But as the researcher engaged with the children—as they came to sit with her, as they became distracted, as they laughed and cried and looked at the room, the notion of a classroom as a domain taking shape through actions caught my attention as an important Freirean idea. I wanted to represent the idea of shape as a theme in my feedback to her, but also show her how her topic of shape might lay against Freirean notions of a classroom as a universe taking shape. In my attempt, I generated the collage in Figure 2. The teacher saw individual events in the image I selected but also started a conversation about the day’s lesson as a whole. Instead of just thinking “well, how many things can I do with the kids about shapes?” she became more interested in the question of “how can I shape the class in ways that reflect my beliefs about Freirean pedagogies?”
We also engaged in reflective collaging as colleagues. Eisner (2008) noted that it is not always possible to reduce knowledge or understanding to language and therefore, he advocated for ways in which the aesthetic and visual language can lay alongside written/oral language. However, our interest in improving our practice caused us to feel some urgency in unpacking our knowledge and understanding our feelings as we participated with teachers. Collage served as an activity to create visual representations of our thinking and opened spaces for conversation while we worked. In addition to our conversations, another colleague from the American Indian Education program served as our critical friend, offering her support of what we were doing, but also our learning (Hostetler, Mills, & Hawley, 2014). She asked us questions like, “Why did you put that there?” “What do those colors mean?” and “What patterns do you think are here?” Importantly, she also asked us to account for our thinking about what we were trying to represent. Figures 3 and 4 are examples of collages made by Mary and Ashley.
Improved learning

Self-study researchers make assertions about practice and then examine those assertions throughout the project (Berry & Loughran, 2002; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). These assertions described practice but also shaped practice or action. In our case, we came away with ideas about how to make opportunities working with teachers in these difficult circumstances more meaningful for us and for the teachers who were sharing their classrooms and students with us.

Knowledge generation

Finally, sharing research with others is a key element, inviting critique and review and expanding validation of related work (Bannan-Ritland, 2003; Samaras, 2011). We shared our learning about observing literacies in and with schools to enhance trustworthiness. We shared our learning among ourselves as collaborators as well as with others in our program while new decisions were made about admissions and advisement. This proposal also represents an attempt to share our work.

As we collaged, we learned what we needed to do for specific teachers in our programs. We were also able to be responsive to students in our program and provide feedback using these collages. This communicated that what we think of their practice is less important than what they think since they must defend their work through accountability measures that position them as deficient and to communities that are not always supportive. As we (re)co-authored definitions of teaching excellence and (re)imagined "ideal" educational spaces, we sought active ways to understand the connection between the universe of education and the universe of a classroom. In the process, we considered not just what counts as literacy education (Jewitt, 2008), but what counts as a fully shaped literacy experience.

Outcomes

At the outset of this study, we asked the question: How do we support practicing teachers in taking up more complex views of literacies in our graduate program? We present our findings in two pieces. (1) We support teachers by showing them how to use the juxtaposition of visual and written/oral literacies to map and remap the teaching and learning literacies; and (2) by linking literacies with advocacy for students and for the self as a practitioner of literacies instruction.

Our teachers used collaging to map and remap understandings about literacies and their roles as teachers. Many teachers had literacy programs given to them and the idea that they were going to have to do more than follow a workbook with students was intimidating. Other teachers had technologies like interactive white boards and they thought the videos they found would teach children how to read and they were frustrated with this didn't work. They used collaging as a
way to express feelings, but also generate ideas. For example, one of Mary's teachers devised a way to have her students develop and revise a project with emoji during the semester. Taking a teacher educator perspective, a teacher educator perspective, Ashley reflected on her own collage considering how the process of collaging took on a map/remap quality for her. She accidentally ripped one of things she wanted to put on her collage. That process could have been frustrating, but instead, it felt familiar; ripping and re-mapping was a way to express how she was feeling on a personal level. Her in-class collaging also gave students who were feeling overwhelmed by the dense content of our readings an avenue to wrestle with those feelings and acknowledge that this work was going to be difficult, but that they could do it.

We also saw numerous links to advocacy in our collaging data. One of Mary's students realized that if students did not have the devices she needed, she could find ways to acquire them. She found a teacher grant opportunity and wrote to acquire iPads for every student in her class. Her grant was funded. She then began collaborating with her students to learn together how to use them. Ashley also experienced links between literacy and art as advocacy for technology as teaching tool. In some sense, she realized that what she was doing was really valuable for teachers in the cohort, even though the teachers often came to her after a long day of difficult work. They were tired, and they felt taken advantage of and like they were under heavy judgement. Her support of them led to the realization that they did not have be a perfect teacher all the time, or ever. Their papers could rip; they could rearrange what they were doing; they could draw from many sources--and they could still feel a sense of efficacy that would sustain their learning.

**Significance**

This project illustrates our support of teachers in taking up new understandings about literacies. Our work also offers an emerging juxtaposition of challenging concepts, such as the difference between art and design, visual and written/oral literacy, process and product in creativity and traditional and modern technologies. Befitting a collage, we have new questions about boundaries between these ideas. In what way do these various concepts resemble one another? How are they confounded and confused? Why do these distinctions matter for practice and scholarship? And, how do these relate to teaching and learning literacies? We also learned more about this as we took up collaging as a strategy for our students and for ourselves. For example, Ashley is planning future work using collaging to expand the metaphor around mapping and remapping of knowledge with teachers.

As teacher educators, we have always drawn on our histories and experiences as classroom teachers, but our students from community organizations might benefit from teacher education practices. We are not sure yet how to do this and what roles the collaging and other visual techniques might play. We look forward to examining these questions with reference to visual inquiry and digital literacies in future work.

**References**


Chapter 23: Collage making as a visual inquiry process


Inventing a poetic bricolage: Co-learning about the why of facilitating and enacting transdisciplinary self-study

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From the time of the self-study community’s formation as a Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association, the dispositions of openness and collaboration have been recognized as central to its growth, sustainability, and impact (Barnes, 1998). Self-study scholars have displayed a particular openness to employing varied methods (LaBoskey, 2004) and as Loughran (2004) emphasized, “there is no one way, or correct way, of doing self-study. Rather, how a self-study might be ‘done’ depends on what is sought to be better understood” (p. 15). Professional support, scholarly partnerships, and critical friendships within the community have contributed significantly to discovering new ways to explore inquiries and to being methodologically inventive (Heston, Tidwell, & Fitzgerald, 2008; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2017).

The self-study community as a whole is developing and profiting from playing inside and outside of methods together through dialogue between multiple fields of professional expertise and diverse disciplinary and sociocultural settings (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2015; Samaras et al., 2015). Notably, this dialogue and diversity has contributed to new possibilities for performing the methodological inventiveness that has come to characterize self-study research.

We are teacher educators who have actively contributed to the self-study community while sharing a mutual commitment to cultivating a transdisciplinary expansion and enactment of self-study methodology. We have each collaborated with colleagues in our home countries to explore our practice in facilitating and enacting transdisciplinary self-study, often in groups of up to about 40 (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2015; Samaras et al., 2014). And in that process, we too have played with method in the company of groups of colleagues comprising teacher educators and faculty from other disciplines. Our research has illustrated the positive effects that result when faculty learn and enact self-study methodology in transdisciplinary self-study groups that nurture methodological inventiveness (Harrison, Pithouse-Morgan, Conolly, & Meyiwa, 2012; Smith et al., 2018). A specific strength of this work has been its ability to transcend academic hierarchies of...
discipline and status by uniting early career and senior faculty in a single endeavor.

In the USA, since 2010, Anastasia had been collaborating with colleagues at George Mason University (GMU) to make available self-study research to faculty across colleges and disciplines to re-imagine and make public their self-studies of teaching – to explore pedagogy not merely as a toolbox of teaching but to develop new models of engagement with teaching, learning, and scholarship (see among others, Samaras et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2018). Self-study methodology has served as a powerful portal for faculty to explore their teaching – a methodology that has been shared and adopted with great success in three faculty learning communities. In addition, a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) self-study faculty learning community that crossed science fields and academic status proved similarly successful (Samaras et al., 2017). A vital ingredient for success in each of the groups was collective creativity and supporting intellectual risk. Participants became more comfortable with “not knowing” and gained more tolerance for uncertainty and vulnerability, traits long associated with enhanced capacity for inventiveness.

Since 2011, Kathleen and her partners in the Transformative Education/al Studies (TES) project team in South Africa have networked across several South African universities to foster self-study methodology. The overall purpose of the project is to develop self-reflexive, innovative educational practice that is responsive to the heterogeneous needs and interests of students, and that promotes a socially just re-envisioning of higher education. The project has been underpinned by a conscious effort to learn from and develop each other's research capacity within a safe space (Harrison et al., 2012). As with the GMU groups, TES project activities and publications have been infused with collective creativity, supported by the involvement of participants who are professional artists and designers, and others who are keen to learn through the arts and digital technologies (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2018). The work of the project also illuminates how in South Africa, with the painful legacy of apartheid, self-study research has a noteworthy part to play in individual and communal healing, resilience, and growth (Pithouse-Morgan, Chisanga, Meyiwa, & Timm, 2018).

Intriguing resonances between our different self-study research and facilitation experiences in the USA and South Africa first brought us together in 2012 with the purpose of learning from each other. Building on the foundational work of self-study of teacher education practices, we have come to conceptualize our transdisciplinary, transnational, and transcultural interaction and reciprocal learning through self-study research as polyvocal professional learning (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2015; Samaras & Pithouse-Morgan, 2018). We are drawing on theoretical tenets of sociocultural theory and in particular Bakhtin’s (1984) exploration of polyvocality as a narrative mode in the novels of Dostoevsky. In Bakhtin’s (1984) work, we have distinguished three vital qualities of polyvocality that are significant for self-study in transdisciplinary communities: plurality, interaction and interdependence, and creative activity. This multifaceted conceptualization of polyvocality offers a new and generative dimension to ways of thinking about self-study methodology, and especially about our educational practice and that of others.

Digital technologies, such as email, Skype, and online mood boards (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2017) made available new ways of connecting between the continents in which we live and work. Using a hybrid of methods, we asked each other and ourselves not only how we engaged in facilitating transdisciplinary groups and but also why. That was a key turning point for us because we discovered similar sources of inspiration, confluence, and influence that led us to design and enact an inventive virtual bricolage self-study method (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2017). Kincheloe (2001) described methodological bricolage as “using any methods necessary to gain new perspectives on objects of inquiry” and explained that “as researchers draw together divergent forms of research, they gain the unique insight of multiple perspectives” (p. 687). Additionally, in a review drawing on the foundational scholarship of Lévi-Strauss (1966), Denzin and Lincoln (1999), and Kincheloe (2001), Rogers (2012) explained that when the term bricolage “is used within the domain of qualitative research it denotes methodological practices explicitly based on notions of eclecticism, emergent design, flexibility and plurality” (p. 1). Rogers further explained that “bricoleurs have an aptness for creativity – they know how to artistically combine
theories, techniques, and methods. Furthermore, they are able to create their own methodological tools when needed” (p. 6).

**Objectives**

We are inspired by our international network of self-study colleagues who have expressed the disposition of openness in utilizing and generating various methods and tools to explore their inquiries and re-envision their practice. We too have embraced this openness and flexibility of how self-study research can be enacted through the use of multiple methods and with many voices as we have worked with colleagues from diverse disciplines and contexts (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2018). In particular, we have consistently used poetry as a creative activity to express, explore, and share our work.

For this study, we created a poetic bricolage composed of frequently used words in three of our published research poems as we asked, “Why? Why does our work together exist? And why should anyone care?” (Sinek, 2009). What emerged became an organic abstract of the impetus for our collaborative learning over time. Through inventing a poetic bricolage, we were able to make visible and available how our multiple interests, practices, and methods have come together to support a fluid, dialogic “understanding in flow” (Freeman, 2017, p. 86). We invite readers to experience “the felt space” (Freeman, 2017, p. 73) of our evolving poetic thinking. In so doing, we offer an exemplar of collaborative methodological inventiveness in action that other self-study researchers might use to trigger their own explorations.

**Methods**

In our work together, we have allowed our questions to steer the study, adapting any method(s) that allow/s us to study those questions. But we are not bound by *A method* because self-study does not dictate it (Loughran, 2004). We instead have employed methodological bricolage by using combinations of methods and even inventing new methods, often through choosing to “let things unfold in the absence of a pre-planned method” (Jackson, 2017, p. 670).

Scholars in diverse fields (e.g., Butler-Kisber, 2005; Furman, 2014; Short & Grant, 2016) have explored poetry as a means of heightening self-insight, empathy, and social awareness on the part of professionals such as teachers, social workers, and nurses, as well as offering evocative and affective insights into individual and collective experiences of professional learning. In inventing a poetic bricolage, we began by choosing and drawing together three of the research poems we had created previously as part of our poetic professional learning as a dyad and with other colleagues (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2015; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2017; Samaras et al., 2015).

Next, we inserted the text of the three poems (our data sources) into an online vocabulary visualization tool, Word Sift (http://wordsift.org), which generated a word cloud that made visible to us our 50 most frequently used words (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Word Cloud 1](http://wordsift.org)
The shape of the word cloud reminded us of the Japanese lantern poem\(^1\) format, which mimics the silhouette of a Japanese lantern (Hittle, 2014). So we agreed to each quickly and spontaneously select words from the word cloud to make lantern poems. We anticipated that the constraints of the highly compressed lantern poem form would push us to zoom in and discern the most personally meaningful words in the word cloud. Kathleen made a first lantern poem. Then Anastasia responded with a lantern poem of her own, and so on. In this way, we created a string of four lantern poems (Figure 2) to illuminate our emergent “thinking in space” (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2017, p. 134). The string of lanterns can be read vertically and also horizontally, thus offering multiple entry points and pathways.

<table>
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**Figure 2. Lantern Poem String**

Next we inserted our lantern poems into Word Sift to create a second word cloud, with the aim of making visible the words that resonated most with both of us (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Word Cloud 2**

Then, we selected words from the second word cloud to create a tanka poem\(^2\) (Figure 4). The tanka moves from portraying an image in the first two lines to expressing a response to that image in the final two lines, with the third line marking the shift of perspective (Poets.org, 2004). Through crafting the tanka in this way, we worked to bring together and “convey with emotional impact ideas or patterns present” (Furman & Dill, 2015, p. 46) in the string of lantern poems.

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\(^1\) The Japanese lantern poem form comprises five lines with a pattern of one, two, three, four, and one syllables per line, making a shape reminiscent of a Japanese lantern. The closing line speaks back to the opening line (Hittle, 2014).

\(^2\) The tanka is a traditional Japanese poetic form, which, in English usage, is often arranged in a five lines following a pattern of five, seven, five, seven, and seven syllables (Poets.org, 2004).
Outcomes

Returning to our guiding questions, “Why? Why does our work together exist? And why should anyone care?”, we saw how the organizing structures of the lantern and tanka poems offered us a “container” (Furman & Dill, 2015, p. 47) for a gradual distillation of our multifaceted and complex learning, experienced over time. Playing with words and possibilities in an emergent poetic bricolage allowed us to map our “co-creation of research and meaning” (Furman & Dill, 2015, p. 51). We also realized that each line of the tanka poem could serve as an evocative entry point for further discovery by us and to share with others (Freeman, 2017; Furman & Dill, 2015).

To illustrate these entry points in an interactive way, we explored short dialogue pieces, drawing from previously published work and from recent email conversations that fed into the poetic bricolage process. The dialogue pieces offer an extension and exemplars of Loughran’s (2004) notion of self-study research being unbound by A method. They also demonstrate how the intersection and interdependence of different voices, and over time, allows self-study scholars to deepen their understanding of practice. This goes to the core of what makes self-study distinctively fluid and pluralist and is also connected to the optimism and inventive activity that energizes self-study research – inspired by the belief that future change for the better (no matter how small) is always possible when two or more of us are moved to work together creatively for growth.

Space, interaction

Anastasia: “I read your draft and then slept on it, walked about it, thought about it. You’ll see my ramblings attached.” (June 19, 2017, email correspondence)

Kathleen: “I think rambling is a lovely metaphor for the disposition of a beginner’s mind in self-study, which you and your colleagues highlighted. I will do some rambling of my own and get back to you.” (June 20, 2017, email correspondence)

Anastasia: “I think we’re on to something important, that for self-study scholars, our questions drive the study and then we adapt any method(s) that allow us to study them.” (June 21, 2017, email correspondence)

Kathleen: “I think this goes to the heart of what makes self-study uniquely generative.” (June 23, 2017, email correspondence)

Anastasia: “We always begin with our questions, concepts, issues related to important things like social justice. We have been doing that ourselves, with colleagues, and with students.” (June 26, 2017, email correspondence)
Chapter 23: Inventing a poetic bricolage: Co-learning about the why

Witness, whole heart dialogue

Kathleen: “As I was reading your ‘Twelve Shells’ story, the image of a celestite crystal came to my mind…. My friend had a way of listening to me that made me feel unique and remarkable. Sadly, though, not long after he gave me the crystal, he was killed in an accident. While the celestite crystal evokes a sense of loss, it also represents my friend’s vitality and his avid, wide-ranging curiosity.” (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2017, p. 140)

Anastasia: “The story of your friend moved me and reminded me of the ways people impact and change us and especially as we look back. I have continuously found that the artefact of research pedagogy prompts us to capture some of the nodal moments of our work and life.” (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2017, p. 140)

Wide inventiveness

Anastasia: “What if we do something like we did with the online mood board where we reflect back on how we have been playing with bricolage and various methods with colleagues and how, and let the connections unfold? A bricolage of our already constructed poetry from our projects?” (Email correspondence, June 26, 2017)

Kathleen: “I love the idea of creating a bricolage from our already constructed poetry. We might focus our gaze on how self-study works as a polyvocal methodology – using combinations of methods and inventing new methods – similar to Bakhtin’s special polyvocal artistic thinking.” (Email correspondence, June 26, 2017)

Self, difference, confluence

Kathleen: “When we got together with our co-facilitators to talk about our experiences in South Africa and the USA we were very interested to see what would come out, what would be similar and what would be different.” (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2018, p. 325)

Anastasia: “I’ve been continually enriched by my experiences in moving out of my lens. For example, when I say reflect, maybe for an engineer I need to say design. When I did, an engineer said, “Oh, I get it! I’m the data!” In our language, we just assume everybody is from our world, don’t we? And it really limits our understanding and theirs. That’s been where I’ve been able to really grow and be inspired by transdisciplinary polyvocal experiences.” (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2018, p. 316)

Kathleen: “If I were not working beyond teacher education in the TES self-study community, my teacher education practice would be much poorer, much less interesting. For me, that has been one of the greatest gifts of working within this transdisciplinary project.” (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2018, p. 320)

Growth, inspiration, future

Kathleen: “One of the connections that has been very strong between the work in South Africa and the work at GMU has been our focus on creativity and the arts. For example, with poetry, one the GMU colleagues e-mailed recently to share information on renga poetry, which is a Japanese form of collaborative poetry making. So, immediately, I said to my TES project colleagues, ‘We’ve got a workshop coming up. Let’s do renga poetry!’ And now we’ve written renga poems as part of an arts-informed, participatory analysis of the TES project. It’s because of that dynamic collaboration that we keep learning.” (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2018, p. 325)
Anastasia: “And, for me, as from US, I was so surprised that facilitating self-study in the TES project wasn’t for the same purposes. In South Africa, there is largely the theme of healing and having a safe place. After apartheid, there’s a lot of anger and hurt and pain and those words came out. I thought, ‘Wow! I never thought of self-study research being used in ways that were out of my own context.’ So, in terms of thinking about teaching self-study in different geographic locations, that was really a good experience for me.” (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2018, p. 325)

Implications

We see a reciprocal relationship between the wide inventiveness that has come to characterize the self-study community, and the creative activity of playing inside and outside of methods together at the confluence of our different, yet complementary, self-study research and practice. Our learning has been enriched because of a mutual trust and passion for continuous learning and generating knowledge through creativity and whole heart conversations. Within our transnational exchanges, we worked to document the process of our co-learning and re-learning in relation to self-study research. For us, discovering the why of our work included unearthing our gravitation towards transdisciplinary scholarship, which offers university faculty a wide range of possibilities for co-learning and co-creativity. Our demonstration of polyvocal professional learning through poetic bricolage self-study will be useful to others interested in exploring the promise of plurality, interaction and interdependence, and creative activity in self-study methodology. We encourage self-study scholars to consider ways to further develop and contribute to future work in the how and why of methodological inventiveness and transdisciplinarity.

References


Blending the professional and personal to cultivate authenticity in teacher education through contemplative pedagogy and practices

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Contemplative practice in education offers multiple benefits that serve to strengthen self-awareness, identity, and integrity by providing purpose and meaning in the teaching life. Without attention to the inner landscape, education becomes out of balance with its heavy emphasis on cognitive and external products and outcomes. Palmer (1999) explains the journey of authentic selfhood as stemming from one’s deepest calling, setting the individual on a path to find authentic service in the world. He expounds, “Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am” (p. 8). As educators and researchers, we aspire to model listening to what our life is telling us. Contemplative practices allow us to navigate our interiority, our inner lives, while simultaneously strengthening teaching and learning in the classroom, allowing us to bring our full, authentic selves, to the profession.

Study’s context and aims

With the current emphasis in the U.S. on high-stakes testing and accountability, authenticity is oftentimes subservient to externally imposed agendas. Cranton & Carusetta (2004) define authenticity as “being conscious of self, other, relationships, and context through critical reflection” (p. 288). From this perspective, “authenticity’ is understood as being somehow associated with a sense of empowerment, self-actualization, and individuation, and as such, linked to larger questions of human existence and agency in the world” (Kreber, Klampflitner, McCune, Bayne, & Knottenable, 2007, p. 25).

Palmer (2007) advises teachers at all levels to be less concerned with technique and focus more on “who is the self that teaches?” (p. 7). Staying strongly connected to their interior lives, and centered, grounded, and true to themselves amidst the stressors of the current teaching profession offers faculty and students powerful tools for navigating the complexities of 21st century teaching and learning. As educators pay attention to their inner landscape, they engage in the deep

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contemplative work of identity construction, of uncovering “the self who teaches.” One central element of self is authenticity. As Kreber and her colleagues (2007) write, “Authenticity in teaching involves features such as being genuine; becoming more self-aware; being defined by one’s self rather than by other’s expectations; bringing parts of oneself into interactions with students; and critically reflecting on self, others, relationships and context” (pp. 40-41).

Contemplative practice and pedagogy (e.g., Barbezat & Bush, 2014; Gunnlaugson, Sarath, Scott, & Bai, 2014) offer a potent way for educators to intentionally cultivate authentic identities. Through a range of approaches, such as breath and body awareness, meditation, mindful dialogue, journaling, silence, and the arts, the contemplative mind is opened and activated with the intention of cultivating awareness, concentration, and insight (Hart, 2000). In contemplative education, the process of learning involves “looking not only at the outer data but also opening into our selves” (Hart, 2008), allowing us to integrate our interiority with our exterior identities. This pedagogical approach can be applied in any course and facilitates meaning-making of content (Barbezat & Pingree, 2012).

In this self-study, two experienced, White, female, U.S. teacher educators explore how contemplative pedagogies and practice in their work facilitate construction of authentic identities. We explore these research questions:

- How does integration of contemplative pedagogy and practice in teacher education serve to blend our interior and exterior selves and help us cultivate authenticity?
- What is the relationship between our personal contemplative practices and approaches to contemplative pedagogy and practice in our classrooms, in terms of enacting authentic identities in our interactions with students?

**Methodology**

This chapter reflects self-study methodology (LaBoskey, 2004) by drawing from multiple forms of qualitative data (teacher-researcher journals and artwork, and student-created artifacts) and analysis, including narrative (Kim, 2016) and ethnographic approaches.

Self-study methodology fits naturally with contemplative practice and pedagogy because of their emphasis on first-person inquiry and the way our self-awareness of the present moment (Stern, 2004) is heightened through mindfulness and bodyfulness (Caldwell, 2014). According to Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009), self-study research “is at its heart about studying and changing practice in the moment of practice” (p. 23). They continue,

> Present moments are not just segments of time that we live, but those moments when we are aware and conscious of our experience which is felt as a whole. This insight into the construction of understanding and action in moments of practice brings [self-study] researchers new ideas for exploring worlds of practice. (p. 23)

Stern claimed, “In these [present] moments, change occurs and our lives unfold” (2004, as cited in Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p. 23). These present moments are potential sites for transformation, if we are mindful to notice and learn from them by engaging the self-observer (Weaver & Wilding, 2013).

**Findings: A narrative approach**

*Using authenticity to turn towards difficulty*

Using contemplative practices in my personal life has allowed me to develop the skills and dispositions to express and model authenticity with teacher education students in a professional setting. Through decades of practicing mindfulness meditation and yoga, which has greatly enhanced my ability to notice and stay in the present moment in an embodied way, I have been able to develop aspects of authenticity more deeply and express them in my teaching practice. Because of this connection, I now consider teaching a form of contemplative practice.
This narrative illustrates how contemplative practices have allowed me to express and model authenticity in teaching by helping me maintain equanimity and respond appropriately to emotions—mine and my students’—triggered by personal and classroom events. Analysis reveals that contemplative practices cultivate and allow me to model for students various aspects of authenticity: self-awareness; being genuine and real, including a willingness to turn towards difficulty and express vulnerability; and “critical reflection on self, others, relationship, and context” (Kreber et al., 2007).

In 2015, I had to undergo surgery shortly into the semester and ended up having to take a three-week medical leave to recover enough to return to teaching. Colleagues taught my courses; I stayed in touch with students as much as possible. Awhile after my return, I began to notice negative energy from one of my undergraduate classes: lack of eye contact with me during class, under-the-breath comments that I could not fully hear, students having side conversations while I was trying to talk with the whole class, and just a felt sense in my body and heart that there was some underlying dissatisfaction among them. Some had told me of their frustration with my delayed grading on assignments, but the unease seemed to go beyond this.

I was so exhausted from the surgical recovery that I decided to endure and disconnect from the discomfort and not respond to the perceived negativity on top of the already intense, chronic emotional labor of teaching. This did not feel right, because it is not my style to just ignore something like this. There was a strong dissonance between what I perceive as my “authentic teaching identity”—one who is transparent and courageous—and how I was choosing to behave and respond in the moment.

However, right around that time, one student came to my office to express her dismay and frustration with the negative energy that she, too, had noticed among her peers since my return. She was not necessarily asking me to do something about it, but she wanted to express that it was negatively affecting her experience in the class.

Through tuning in to the present moment in an embodied way, I let myself feel my emotional responses to what this student communicated. Through inquiry grounded in mindfulness and bodyfulness, it became clear to me that I needed to understand more about what was unfolding for and among the students, and respond in an authentic way to the current situation.

I decided to ask students to complete an anonymous survey online, reflecting on and explaining any negative behaviors or attitudes they were themselves feeling, or which they noticed among peers, in relation to the course. This reply captures well the general themes of their comments:

*I have noticed negativity in this class. I do think that part of it is because of you being gone on your medical leave and the grading delay. For some reason, it seems that some students judged you right off the bat and made negative ideas about you in their heads that they cannot get over. Some students were even wondering why we had to take this survey and acting like they were being attacked because of it. I do not know why, but it seems like some students are convinced you are out to get them and always attacking them. The reason for this is really beyond me.*

Reading the responses, I got an embodied sense of what Palmer (2007) meant when he said, “Teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability” (p. 17). Grounding myself in presence, I could feel myself becoming disembodied as I encountered some comments that were outright baffling, painful, and completely foreign to my experiences as a teacher and person. Although my mind wanted to disconnect and distance myself from the pain, I allowed myself a few days to turn towards the discomfort of the negative comments. I let the student voices land on me, let myself feel in my body and heart a whole maelstrom of emotions: surprise, shock, sadness, confusion, curiosity, disappointment, vulnerability, grief, helplessness, frustration, even fear and anger. While mindfully allowing these intense emotions the space to be present, I also deliberately soothed myself with practices of self-compassion and kindness rather than letting myself slide too far into self-judgment, blaming, and “fix it” mode.
As I reflected on their comments and let these emotions work their way through me, I also contacted a sense of deep compassion for the students. I stepped into their shoes and imagined what it would feel like for the professor be gone for three weeks. I understood that underlying some of their comments was a likely feeling of abandonment, and then related confusion and anxiety about their progress towards course standards due to the slow grading of assignments. I could see how that lack of a sense of competence could snowball into other negative feelings and misinterpretations, including frustration and anger.

Through this meditative inquiry process, I eventually came to some clarity regarding how I wanted to respond to the class. We sat in a circle. I took a few deep, centering breaths to calm my fluttering heart and tight chest and throat. I told them of my sense of vulnerability and of my process of turning towards the difficulty, with self-compassion. I invited them to enter the conversation with open hearts and minds. I told them that I wanted them to feel heard, and I wanted to ask some questions to understand better their perspectives.

I framed the whole discussion as a teachable moment about the importance of building a classroom climate, honoring our emotions and those of our students, and social-emotional competence for teachers. Conveniently, these topics all connected well to the readings which had been assigned for that day. Some of the themes I communicated with deep intentions of authenticity included:

- Sadness and confusion at what appeared to be the impact on students of selected actions or words; it was never my intention to cause any ill will or disrespect;
- Sadness because of my love for my students and my care for their well-being and their learning;
- Grief about the loss of connection and trust with them;
- Helplessness about my physical lack of ability to keep up with the workload adequately after surgery.

We proceeded to have a beautiful, heartfelt, genuine conversation. Many of us shed tears. The classroom was vibrating with a sense of realness. In order to re-establish a sense of relationship and trust with students, I met with each of them privately over the next several days to provide holistic feedback on their work and simply connect. I was struck by how many of them made comments such as, “Wow, that was really brave to have that conversation with us. I don’t know if I could have done that. Thank you for modeling that.”

So, although this episode was one of the most challenging in my decades of teaching, contemplative practices empowered me to respond to it with a sense of embodied presence, curiosity, and courage—all of which are part of my authentic self as a teacher and a person.

Promoting aliveness and sustainability through artistic inquiry and contemplative practice

Contemplative practices can be broadly defined as “the ways that human beings, across cultures and across time, have found to concentrate, broaden, and deepen conscious awareness as the gateway to cultivating their full potential and to leading more meaningful and fulfilling lives” (Roth, 2006, p. 1788). Engaging in contemplative practices embraces embodied ways of knowing. It was the French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), who first described embodied knowing as knowledge in the hands, that was not cognitively articulated, but known through the body, or the embodied-mind. Contemplation on the inner dimensions of one’s life has the potential to lead to greater authenticity, as one’s inner and outer worlds, one’s personal and professional identities, become aligned, undivided, coherent (Dorman, 2018, p. 92). As I excavate the impact of contemplative practices and engagement with the artistic inquiry, I am better prepared to employ these practices in my work with pre-service art education teachers.

William Blake, the poet and engraver, had an unending wellspring of inspiration and vision that he described as “firm persuasion,” which is a “feel[ing] that what we do is right for ourselves and good for the world at the exactly same time...” (as cited in Whyte, 2001, p. 4). To see one’s work not as a means of accomplishing a task, but as a process of being and becoming, directs one's
focus inward, connecting to the authentic source of inspiration, passion, and courage of their chosen vocation. Poet and author David Whyte (2001) corroborates, “Life is a creative, intimate and unpredictable conversation if it is nothing else, spoken or unspoken, and our life and work are both the result of the particular way we hold that passionate conversation” (p. 5).

Being committed to contemplative arts-based practices in my own life and in the classroom serves as motivation and accountability for maintaining a “firm persuasion” and passionate conversation that interweaves life and work, and the roles of artist and teacher. Furthermore, it is an opportunity for me to bridge my personal and professional life; I have practiced meditation and creative expression through visual art and poetry for over 25 years. As I excavate the impact of contemplative practices and engagement with the creative process in my own life, I am better prepared to cultivate these practices in pre-service art education teachers.

It is critical that I make time to nurture my creativity and personal expression through art making to satisfy my need for personal growth. My artistic studio practice is motivated by the desire to create and live a creative life, which in turn informs my teaching and scholarship. This is what Adelman (2014) explains as the value of “attunement to self,” or “self-formation,” and the importance of reclaiming one's voice—recollecting a sense of self, of the deeper and authentic self. Understanding my identity, my sense of the “I” who teaches is both essential and critical to the task of preparing pre-service art teachers. Palmer (2007) stated, “we teach who we are,” explaining, the “more familiar we are with our inner terrain, the more surefooted our teaching – and living – becomes” (p. 5). Through contemplation and artistic inquiry such as meditation, Lectio Divina (an ancient Benedictine monastic practice that connects words and imagery), and textile processes such as embroidery and crochet, I aim to understand more deeply what compels me to make and teach art. Likewise, the greater my understanding of artistic inquiry and contemplative practices, both personally and professionally, the greater my ability to offer these tools to pre-service art education teachers.

The emphasis on accountability and standardization in contemporary art education classrooms oftentimes requires a focus on student art production to meet standardized objectives. The requirement to meet outcomes can deaden and mechanize the expressive capacities of visual art. Yet, most pre-service art teachers were artists first who were compelled to create and understood art's transformative power. The need to express and urge to create, as described by the author Pearl Buck, explains the artist's hard-wired and overpowering necessity to create, create, create — so that without the creating of music or poetry or books or buildings or something of meaning, his very breath is cut off from him. He must create, must pour out creation. By some strange, unknown, inward urgency he is not really alive unless he is creating. ([https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/31946-the-truly-creative-mind-in-any-field-is-no-more](https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/31946-the-truly-creative-mind-in-any-field-is-no-more))

Aesthetic forms communicate what we know and invite others to commune with our own understanding and personal transformation. As artists, we become cartographers of our own life. Our works of art become the maps that reveal our inner lives outwardly to others, and the ways in which we embody who we are, and the work we do as art teachers. Being true to one's passion, to create and express, I believe is at the core of teaching visual art authentically.

As in my own life, when the demands of teaching subsume creative engagement with artistic practices, I become mechanical in my teaching, less inspired, and on the cusp of feeling burned out. I see similar outcomes in my students when overwhelm and potential burnout manifests as they juggle employment, academic assignments, clinical experiences, and/or student teaching practicum. In their future careers as art teachers, meeting expectations in the age of accountability could potentially disengage them from the original impulse for becoming art teachers: that of making and expressing through creative and artistic practices. The urgency to create as described by Pearl Buck is at the core of “firm persuasion” in one's work as an artist-teacher, which is to feel that what we do is right for ourselves and good for the world. These future art teachers understand the myriad ways that art transformed and shaped their personal and creative lives. Therefore,
sharing this understanding and nurturing creative and artistic expression in their future students is essential.

Supporting the inner life through contemplative and artistic practices becomes a rich resource for navigating the complexities of the teaching life. These practices take many forms: two minutes of “silence and centering” before the beginning of class to quiet the mind and prepare for learning; mindfulness meditation or guided visualization preceding an art experience; breath and body awareness in conjunction with a variety of art practices, such as mindful crafting (textiles/clay) and mindful drawing, expressive painting, and Lectio Divina. Providing contemplative arts-based practices that can be used in personal or classroom settings offers pre-service teachers space for creativity and access to contemplative awareness. Awareness in this sense is the cultivation of one’s ability to pay attention to internal and external experiences, of thoughts and feelings, in the present moment, without judgment, to access intuition, insight, and creativity (Sarath, 2006).

Daily in class we begin with a mindfulness meditation or artistic practice. However, at times when I “sense” students’ engagement with content is waning, when their desire to learn is buried under personal and academic commitments, and overwhelm seems to be a common word in daily conversations, I deviate from the syllabus and offer short contemplative art-based experiences in the classroom. Whether part of the pre-determined schedule or a deviation from it, integrating a contemplative experience into the classroom changes the atmosphere; anxiety and stress is reduced, calmness is palpable, and there is fulfillment in embodied awareness and art making. Contemplative arts-based experiences in the classroom demonstrate the value of being responsive to students’ needs with intuition and awareness, modeling the importance of connecting with the deeper rhythms of their own lives. As an artist and educator, I demonstrate to students the value and necessity of remaining authentic to the impetus for becoming a teacher, which is the passion and perseverance to create and express. Contemplative practices heighten awareness and offer tools to promote aliveness and sustainability, aligning the inner and outer life, and personal and professional identities.

Conclusion

Contemplative pedagogies and practices offer educators first-person inquiry tools for developing authenticity and demonstrate the value of applying self-study methods within a teaching and learning context. Present moment awareness is the guiding practice alongside mindful dialogue and artistic inquiry that promotes self-awareness, identity, and integrity in the teaching life. Furthermore, by maintaining a balance of the personal and professional, inner life and outer world, emotional and cognitive, we can support sustainability and well-being in ourselves and our students by remaining true to our path of authentic service in the world.

References


Section two

Social justice, diversity and voices

The chapters in this section coalesce around the theme of social justice. The authors give voice to those that are subdued, silenced, or marginalised. Readers gain access to how others grapple with noticing and responding to issues in their teacher education classes that are common to all. We are urged to be bold, to make the familiar strange, and to appreciate diversity for the richness and value that it brings to our work. In our efforts to improve our teaching we uncover truths about our own ways of understanding the world and uncover blind spots and assumptions in our practice.
Pushing the policy boundaries: Special education and more general education working together through self-study

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The two co-authors of the paper have worked at the same institution for nine years, negotiated policy mandates together, planned and designed (and redesigned) teacher education programs, and commiserated over good meals. Until this point, however, we have never talked about our research with one another and have never collaborated on research or writing. In 2016, we decided that perhaps we should collaborate on a chapter exploring self-study and policy, something that Clift (2004) and Loughran (2010) have suggested as an important step forward in the self-study field. Renee's expertise in teacher education centers on literacy and collaborative relationships with schools, districts and universities; Carl's expertise in teacher education centers on special education, particularly developing safe and supportive environments for children with disabilities. Our paper will explore crossing the border between our two fields. It is not an empirical study, in that no data were collected or analyzed. Instead, we focus on what we know of current self-study research related to teacher education policy in the United States, particularly in our home state and how both special educators and general educators might use self-study to know one another better, to work collaboratively to affect policy, and to understand how policy affects them.

Our paper has three, explicit, related purposes:

1. to describe briefly the articles in Studying Teacher Education that mention policy as either a major focus or as an ancillary construct within a study not focused primarily on policy;
2. to explain, in brief, the U.S. policy context that undergirds the research. We focus on the U.S. because that has a direct impact on who we are as teacher educators and because most of the studies we reviewed were based in the United States;
3. to reflect on what we have learned from our work together, as we negotiate policy in our home state and nation, while attempting to maintain and improve the quality of teacher education at our institution.

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Chapter 25: Pushing the policy boundaries: Special education and more general education working together

One implicit goal of our work is to argue for including voices from the field of special education within the self-study community. As we write this, we note ironically that the second author will not be able to attend the S-STEP conference in July and, therefore, will not be able to interact with self-study colleagues. At the end of this paper we will return to the limits we all face in terms of time and financial constraints on crossing scholarly communities.

To prepare this paper, Renee reread all issues of *Studying Teacher Education*, noting any article that mentioned policy as it affected practice. Renee also conducted a key word search using the terms *self-study* and *policy* and reviewed several papers presented to the self-study special interest group at the 2017 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. She also conducted a keyword search in ERIC. Carl searched the last 10 years of the literature in the field of special education for examples of the use of self-study in journals of teacher education and policy studies. We did not search books or book chapters because we wanted to insure all of the relevant literature was peer reviewed.

We identified 24 self-study research articles that are relevant to this paper. Not all are self-studies, because one of our findings is that special educators have not yet engaged with self-study, although we found one article in special education that bordered on self-study without acknowledging the work as such (Weiss, Pellegrino, Regan, Mann, 2015). We each read all of the articles and grouped them into studies concerning national policy, state policy or local (university or department) policy. This grouping is framed by Miriam, Lingard, Rizvi, and Taylor's (1997) discussion of policy as more than public policy, “[Policy typically refers to those] produced in schools by school communities, including administrators, teachers and parents. . . . While there are some differences in policy making at these different levels, they also have much in common in terms of the policy processes involved. (p. 22)” As we read through the articles we noted that, in some cases, interacting with policy mandates produced a range of emotional responses—some of which were quite strong. Again, drawing from Miriam, Lingard, Rizvi, and Taylor, we confirm that often there is nothing rational about policy making and, especially, policy implementation. While policy levels and emotional responses to policy will be discussed in detail in Renee and Carl (in preparation), we also touch on them in this paper.

**Policy levels**

National and state-level policies were discussed by self-study researchers in Australia (2), Great Britain (2), New Zealand (1), Singapore (1), but the remainder of the articles discussed education policies in the United States. One Australian study (Harris, 2010) reported on implementing mandated literacy curriculum. The second study (Doecke, 2004) described the tensions that arose for him while implementing a curriculum that directly countered one’s knowledge of best practice. In Great Britain, there was a report of mandated collaborative arts instruction (Chappell, 2008) and a policy to encourage (demand?) that teacher educators conduct research (Gemmell, Griffiths, & Kibble, 2010). In New Zealand, the study (Major, 2011) discussed implementing a culturally relevant curriculum.

The preponderance of state and national level self-studies occurred in the United States, and referenced Public Law No. 107-110, 115, STAT. 1425, a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, commonly referred to as *No Child Left Behind*. In the United States, services provided in schools to children and youth with disabilities in the governed by extensive regulations created in response to federal laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. While there is a rich literature in the field of special education with regard to the implications of these regulations on policy and practices, the field includes a limited number of qualitative studies and a dearth of examples of self-study methodology (we note that this may be changing, however, as we read the titles of papers that were presented to the American Educational Research Association in April, 2018. There were at least two self-study sessions devoted to special education.)

In most of the reports, the researchers explored being done to as opposed to advocating for, informing, or creating policy. The exceptions most often referred to affecting local polices on
student teaching (Cochran-Smith, Albert, Dimattia, Freeman, Jackson, Mooney, Neisler, Peck & Zollers, 1999; Fayne, 2007; Parker & Volante, 2009; Laboskey & Richert, 2015). One notable exception we found was a self-study of the process of affecting state policy that has not yet been published (Bedell, McGough, & Tinkler, 2017) in which teacher educators successfully advocated for local control of teacher candidates’ portfolios, as opposed to outsourcing candidate evaluations to a for-profit contractor.

**Emotional impact of policy**

The majority of articles we found contained accounts of self-study researchers being negatively, emotionally affected by policies, although there were five exceptions. Negative emotions ranged from very strong, such as (Scherff & Kaplan, 2006; Kornfeld, Grady, Marker & Ruddell, 2007), to moderate (Craig, 2006), to mild (Ro, 2016). More positive studies (Thomas & Munro, 2006; Gemmell, Griffiths, & Kibble, 2010) demonstrated that when teacher educators were able to exert some control over local policy, they benefitted emotionally. Scherff and Kaplan documented the extreme stress Scherff experienced as she moved from a tenure-line university position back into a high school English classroom and, ultimately, back again to the university. Facing the physical and mental stress of standardized testing made her more aware of her responsibility to educate future teachers to be aware of and deal with these pressures. Adapting the teacher education curriculum to state standards (as well as NCATE standards) made Kornfeld, Grady, Marker and Ruddell aware of how disruptive such changes were to students and how, overtime, their own teaching and professional language was moderated by the standards. Craig’s study documented the tension between being a teacher educator and a researcher as she evaluated a locally-based curriculum reform. On the more positive side, Thomas and Munroe documented Thomas’s successful changes in his teaching as he embraced multiple approaches to mathematical problem solving and rich, authentic mathematical tasks. In Scotland, a group of teacher educators (Gemmell, Griffiths, & Kibble, 2010) found that engaging in self-study as a group enabled them to meet local policy demands for conducting research as well as teaching. In summary, policy mandates most often resulted in stress and feelings of helplessness by self-study researchers.

**Teacher education policy in the United States—and in the state of Arizona**

In 1996 a report on the possible future of the teaching profession (funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and Carnegie Corporation of New York) made a strong impact on teacher educators in the United States. *What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future* (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996) was based on three premises:

1. What teachers know and can do is the most important influence on what students learn.
2. Recruiting, preparing, and retaining good teachers is the central strategy for improving our schools.
3. School reform cannot succeed unless it focuses on creating the conditions in which teachers can teach, and teach well.

It called for stronger accountability for student learning and improvements in teacher education (including support for beginning teachers). One of the lead authors of the report was a well-known, well-respected researcher and educator, Linda Darling-Hammond. The chair of the commission that produced the report was Governor James Hunt of North Carolina. In North Carolina, many of the recommendations were implemented; today almost none of those implementations remain. A few other states embraced the report, especially the push toward accountability. Steven Brill (2011) documented the ways in which push became de facto national policy in 2009 when the Barak Obama administration sent a budget request for a program called *Race to the Top* to congress as part of a way to stimulate the U. S. economy. “On February 13, the stimulus package was approved by Congress. It was 1,079 pages. The $100 billion education section was nine pages. The $5 billion Race to the Top Section tucked into those nine education pages was two and a half pages (p. 242).”
States raced to prepare competitive proposals for federal funding for schools in round one. According to Brill, “...no state would even be allowed to apply if it had a law on the books forbidding the linking of student test score to individual teachers (p. 260)” . At least 40 state legislatures passed requisite legislation (which included much, much more than teacher evaluation requirements such as adopting common standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics and expanding charter schools). In our home state (which received 25 million USD in the third round of competition in 2011) schools and districts struggled with implementing the mandated reforms—particularly when there was no professional development and when many of the teachers were in positions for which no standardized test is available.

In special education, at the federal level, advocates are engaged in the annual fight for funding to support implementation of special education regulations. It is noteworthy that federal funding to support states in implementing the flagship US special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, has never approached the level described in the original 1975 legislation. While the federal government was expected to cover up to 40 percent of the excess cost in providing special education services to students with disabilities, the actual federal contribution has never topped 20 percent and have often been as low as 8% to 10% (Aron & Lopest, 2012). The burden on states to comply with regulations and policies with inadequate financial support is expected to continue.

The focus on special education in the US is also changing with regard to expectations of content provided to students with disabilities. In the past, any students with a disability received multi-faceted assessments that were used to create a highly individualized educational plan for that student, with a premium placed on improving academic and social outcomes specific to the student. The federal government is now mandating a shift in approach that involves requiring students with disabilities to meet the same state standards as all other students, referred to as helping the students access the general education curriculum. As a result, all outcomes for students with disabilities must be cross referenced to state standards. In fact, federal legislation requires that 99% of all children identified for special education take the same state standards tests as all other students of their same grade level. This change in focus is placing additional importance on special education teachers’ ability to work with general education teachers to modify curriculum content for students with disabilities. As teacher educators, it is placing additional importance on developing programs in which our special education and general education teachers learn to work collaboratively.

In 2018, we in the United States find ourselves with new president, an uncertain federal education policy (especially for higher education), and a new tax policy. In our home state, the 2017 state legislature gave us several new teacher education/teacher certification policies, all of which eased entry into teaching. We have found that while it might take months (or even years) to develop a national education policy, state-level policies in response to national policy or in response to legislators’ assumptions about teacher education can move very quickly. In Arizona, legislation offering multiple pathways to becoming a teacher, far more liberal than the alternate routes described by Emily Feistritzer in 2005. There are two websites (https://www.americanboard.org/arizona/ ; http://www.azed.gov/educator-certification/category/changes/) that describe the varied ways that one can now become a teacher. Two new paths are likely to have an impact on enrollment in teacher preparation programs and, we believe, on students who need qualified teachers the most. Applicants who have either five years of relevant work experience (as determined by a charter school or a district), or a university degree, or verified teaching experience, possess a valid fingerprint clearance card, and pass a test of subject matter knowledge within two years are eligible to teach. These applicants are labeled Subject Matter Experts (R7-2-610.02). Classroom-based alternatively certified teachers must possess a bachelor's degree, a valid fingerprint clearance card and participate in a charter school or district professional preparation program (R7-2-604.05).

In addition to the above, our university was told that we would need to provide a free education for selected teachers who will commit to teaching in Arizona (https://www.azleg.gov/viewDocument/?docName=http://www.azleg.gov/ars/15/01655.htm). The governor of our state,
in cooperation with our university governing body, has mandated that we do so. The administrator (Renee) has had to work very closely with Carl and two other teacher education colleagues to make this happen—quickly. The first set of Academy students will be graduating in May 2018. Twenty-two more will begin a week later. In the final section of this paper we offer our reflections on the converging impact of our literature review, our work in our university, and the importance of collective, cross-program self-study.

Impact on our work and on our sense of self

As we mentioned earlier, most of the policy related studies we read discussed being affected by policy (national, state and local) as opposed to affecting or setting policy. Our experiences affirm that. We often don’t receive prior warning of regulations emanating from federal, state, or local policy. Even when we do, our efforts to intervene, albeit at the highest levels, are simply blocked. National organizations occasionally provide opportunities to provide for input on federal policy, but these organizations are not always attuned to the varying needs of those of us in the states or have a financial interest in promoting selected policies (Ayers, 2016).

At the state level we sometimes have more input. State and local committees do sometimes offer opportunities to engage in development of policy. Sometimes they commit us after the fact. For example, our state education department leadership applied to participate in a federally funded project to reform teacher and leader preparation programs in special education. After the fact, they asked teacher preparation programs around the state to commit significant faculty and staff time in meetings. When staff reported the overwhelming burdensome nature of these meetings, our College leadership, including Renee, bravely, politely, and effectively protected our faculty and staff by declining future participation. Carl offered to be the sole attendee at these meetings, not because of an altruistic desire to meet the goals of the federal/state project, but because of a fear that the folks who did attend would get carried away and create redundant or burdensome new mandates for teacher education programs. Carl has come to realize that while he can claim a modicum of altruism in this case, it is only in the guise of “protector”.

As we have written this paper the concept of “protecting” has created some positive benefits for our teacher education programs and for the relationships among faculty and administration across teacher preparation programs. While staff in our teacher education programs are often awkwardly and uncomfortably separated by content, theoretical perspectives, and physical location, we find a common touch-point in sheltering each other and battling a mutual foe; policy mandates. In turn, we have begun to foster personal relationships that extend beyond the battle and lead to positive collaborative efforts. Responding to policy mandates has resulted in a cohesiveness internally, across programs, that might not otherwise have evolved.

Beyond dialogues, we believe that self-studies (and other forms of research as well), within and across institutions, can interrogate policy implementation and impact. More importantly, they can provide data to influence local policy and, perhaps, state-level policy. These data might result in more public forms of scholarship—blogs, opinion editorials, etc. We realize, however that learning to conduct such self-studies will evolve over time – just as Carl in writing this paper has begun to evolve. As Carl writes this, he reflects that as a professor in the field of special education, he would not normally write in this style. He also, out of habit, reconsiders the above paragraphs in behavior analytic terms. The “behavior” of engaging in protective actions against policy is reinforced because it allows us to “avoid aversive contingencies”, leading to the likelihood we will engage in protective behavior again. At the same time, though unintentionally, this protective behavior also promotes personal relationships because it provides “access to social interaction” with our cross-program peers; our future collaborations across programs represents our efforts to seek this social reinforcement under stimulus conditions that don’t include policy emergencies. Renee, whose voice has predominated in this paper, is amused as she sees some of her thoughts translated into behavior analytic terms. Learning has occurred, mutual respect has increased.

We conclude with a call to action and suggest that within the Self-Study Special Interest Group we establish a subset of administrators and teacher educator/researchers across nations and
content areas who will assist others in designing policy-oriented self-studies as individuals or in collaborative groups. We don’t want to view our teacher education careers and our commitments to teaching all students and preparing dedicated teachers who are also committed to teaching all students as merely subject to the whims of policy makers—at the national, state or local levels. We feel that with our S-STEP and other teacher education colleagues we can be bold enough to address policy issues from evidence and from aggregated research efforts. We feel that now is the time to do so.

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Willing to walk in the storm: A self-study of a multicultural team searching for a multicultural pedagogy

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1 Sections of this article appear in a larger study to be presented in the forthcoming Handbook of Self-Study.

Working, learning, and teaching in a multicultural environment is complex. Our post-graduate teacher education program started in 2001 and as it grew, the team grew and diversified. New members joined, and a few left, but most who came, stayed. Today we number 15 team members from diverse disciplines, cultures and backgrounds: 7 men, 8 women, 4 Moslem Arabs, 11 Jews. The team’s way of being emphasizes collaboration - in teaching, research, and our daily work life. Collaboration occurs in different groupings ranging from pairs to the entire team.

Each team member both facilitates program workshops and acts as a pedagogical tutor in the field. We teach in primarily multicultural (Jewish and Arab), co-teaching teams that change according to the needs of the program and personal preferences. Most of us teach multiple workshops and are part of more than one internal 'sub-team' thereby creating a network structure of connections between people, ideas, practice, and spaces and opportunities for learning and knowledge creation. As a highly interdependent team with a strong culture, collaboration is not a means to an end – it is part of who we are (Tuval, Barak, & Gidron, 2011).

We are a dialogic team who enjoy talking with each other during scheduled bi-weekly team meetings (documented by almost verbatim protocols), frequent sub-group meetings and many informal discussions. Over the years we have developed a shared mental model, a “third culture” (Adair & Ganai, 2014) but parts of that model are always open for discussion (Mansur et al., 2011).

There can be conflict in any group and Paletz, Miron-Spektor, & Lin (2014) propose a dynamic constructivist model assuming greater likelihood of experienced conflict, direct or observed, in multicultural settings than in culturally homogeneous settings. But conflict does not always bring negative outcomes in its wake. Anyone walking past our room during a team meeting might think we are a group who does not get along with each other on any level. But the key is how we perceive and make sense of the conflict. If conflict is not seen as a threat, it can benefit more complex thought and creative thinking (Paletz et al., 2014). Trust influences allowing conflict without

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perceiving threat and deep trust (or professional intimacy - Fitzgerald, East, Heston, & Miller, 2002) is evident in the team (Friling & Turniansky, 2008), most of whom have worked together for many years.

As a multicultural team of teacher educators teaching a multicultural student body, mainly Jews and Moslem Bedouin Arabs, we see culturally responsive pedagogy in teacher education as crucial (Han et al., 2014). Our relational pedagogy, based on the assumption that creating a place enabling participants to share their worlds and benefit from pluralistic richness, demands sharing experiences, opinions, and perceptions (Turniansky, Tuval, Mansur, Barak, & Gidron, 2009).

Over the program’s history there have been national events involving, or leading to, conflicts between the Jewish and Arab-Bedouin populations and as a team, we often try to talk through issues to clarify our connections to the subject and discuss possibilities of where we want to go with it and how to get there. Every teacher experiences discomfort, or even fear, talking with students about certain issues (Cutri & Whiting, 2015), leading to behaving as if there is a “body in the room” (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004). Team support, trust, and co-teaching help us confront and deal with the discomfort. Living and working in the historical and political environment we do, events outside the college campus cannot be ignored. We must be willing to walk in the storm, not run and take cover from it.

Like many countries, Israel faces daily challenges of cultural and social class diversity. Added to that is the dimension of both our students and ourselves belonging to groups with a long history of ‘intractable conflict’, and the questionable potential of overcoming it (Bar-Tal, Oren, & Nets-Zehngut, 2014; Bekerman & Zembylas, 2010). These challenges call for rethinking the question of how to promote learning that attends to the inequalities and hierarchies shaping our lives and educates teachers to become agents of change.

Aims

Our collaborative self-study (Tuval et al., 2011) explores our interactions as a team seeking to improve our pedagogy as intercultural teacher educators who must move between cultures (MacPherson, 2010) seeking cooperation rather than division or divisiveness (Portera, 2008). Therefore, we must first acknowledge our own cultural identities and life experiences (Griggs & Tidwell, 2015).

This study aims to help us better understand how our experiences as part of a multicultural team can help inform our pedagogy. Through examining and learning from the team’s multicultural dialogue we hope to gain a better understanding of how, as teacher educators, we can further our students’ multicultural dialogue and understanding of the ‘other’.

Method

The team’s research path started about three years after the program’s birth. Thus, began a tradition of most of the team, but rarely all, collaboratively researching our practice. For those of us involved, practice and researching our practice became so entwined that often, defining when one stops and the other starts is difficult. Our open-ended approach, less a distinct methodology than a mindset (Waterhouse, 2011) is based on a rhizomatic conceptualization (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; Larsson & Dahlin, 2012; Semetsky, 2008). The territory is undefined, and like our networked team, any part can connect to any other part. The boundaries between data and interpretation are indistinct and “data collection, analysis and interpretation happened simultaneously” (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 180). But when specific questions arise, we may purposefully collect certain data or return to our complex set of existing data to see what we can learn.

This portion of our collaborative self-study examined general views about working in a multicultural team and two multicultural events we identified as critical incidents because of their perceived significance to our internal team interactions and our pedagogy. “Critical incidents should question the way things normally operate” (Tripp, 1993, p. 28).
The study is based on interviews of team members about working in a multicultural environment and protocols of meetings and other documents generated around Holocaust Remembrance Day (annual event) and the confrontation in Umm al-Hiran, an unrecognized Bedouin village (discrete event). We collaboratively read and discussed these documents both as singular texts and as interconnected nodes, leading to uncovering multiple layers of interpretation and different voices comprising our experiences.

**Outcomes**

*The multicultural team*

Having a multicultural team can greatly aid being a multicultural teacher. We are constantly learning from each other and expanding our cultural knowledge and awareness, but it is not always easy to accept the other’s opinions. For example, a disagreement arose between Adi (Jewish) and Basam (Arab) who taught a workshop on inclusion and integration.

Last year there were Bedouin students who objected, on religious grounds, to hearing a homosexual’s lecture on his school experiences. Basam also thought it was provocative because it’s a conservative society and inappropriate to bring someone like that. We argued because I thought it was distorting the truth if we don’t bring him. But in the end, I agreed to compromise because I felt I take the reins too much and he holds himself back. I let him decide who would come to talk and in the end, it didn’t happen at all. (Adi)

In this instance, Adi felt the need to move aside during a culturally related conflict because she felt more dominant than he was when making decisions, especially as she got the impression that her decision was less culturally sensitive than her co-teacher expected.

However, we do not want to fall into the trap of assuming the issue of Arabs and Jews is usually behind something said, done or felt within team interactions. From what we were told, and from our own experience, it is often purely a matter of personalities. All the team members interviewed (11/15) expressed the view that the personal, not the ‘cultural’ part of the multicultural team, is the focus of their co-teaching interactions. Adi described her work with Imad (Arab) that started long before they became part of the team.

I’ve worked with Imad 20 years or more and the issue of Jewish/Arab isn’t relevant. We work great together. Apparently ‘mixed’ working demands a longish learning and adaptation process.

After years of collaborative work with the team, Imad also feels that cultural differences are not central:

I’ve been co-teaching for years with Jewish colleagues. I feel I fit in well. I make my voice heard and there’s mutual respect.

These reactions might result from the fact that for the team, multiculturalism is taken for granted and therefore, attention is focused in other directions. However, focusing on the multicultural team as a whole, Alon (Jewish) talked about its advantages but reminds us that there may be cultural differences we forget. He pointed out the Jewish members should change their behavior a little to make room for possibly unheard voices.

A mixed Jewish-Arab team is interesting and fruitful. You always have to see other perspectives, to think about the taken-for-granted. It’s something different … Arabs and Jews have different lifestyles, different emphases. It’s not bad, it’s different … Our team in general is pretty

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2 All discussions, interviews and protocols presented here were translated from the original Hebrew.
inclusive and there’s an atmosphere of acceptance but sometimes we [Jewish members] have to be quiet, something difficult for us, to make room for the Arabs because their discussion style is different. In our meetings it is very obvious they’re less spontaneous and we [Jews] don’t always stop.

While these team interviews focus on cultural differences, the next two events reflect the historical intractable conflict between the Arab people and the Jewish people.

Remembering the past: Holocaust Remembrance Day

Holocaust Remembrance Day, a national memorial day in Israel, opens with a televised state ceremony at sundown and flags lowered to half-mast. The following day, ceremonies are held at educational institutions, military bases and other organizations. Sunset to sunset, places of public entertainment are closed by law, Israeli television airs Holocaust-related shows and the radio plays quiet songs. At 10:00am, sirens sound throughout the country for two minutes and most Jewish Israelis (but not solely them) stop what they are doing, including motorists who stop their cars and stand beside them in silence until the siren ends.

The April 2015 team meeting agenda included the question “What should we do about Holocaust Remembrance Day”.

An analysis of the discussion shows it moved between the realms of public and personal, political and educational, cognitive and emotional. On the educational side, some members shared how they use the time around Holocaust Remembrance Day to discuss issues such as how young children perceive death or the meaning and importance of ceremonies. However, the emotional side was where the meeting began. The discussion opened with a short dialogue between several Jewish members:

Tamar: I don’t think Holocaust Remembrance Day should be problematic.
Rafi: The Arabs see the Nakba (1948 Palestinian exodus) as their holocaust. They see themselves as second class citizens...
Sigal: It’s a complicated, loaded subject. It’s something very fundamental to the Jewish people, very important. However, there are groups here that see it differently. I’d like to see a mutual educational process where we can feel each other. It’s easy for me - I’m in control, or in Rafi’s terms, a first-class citizen.

The most poignant moment came after this exchange when Basam, an Arab member, shared a very personal experience:

It’s hard for me to express what I feel. Sometimes the Jewish people connect cognition to emotion and ask us to identify with them. It’s hard for me to identify with this government and demolishing houses [without building permits in unrecognized villages]. When I was in the airport I was with [the Jewish group he toured with in Europe] and it was great, but we [Basam and his wife] were pulled out for a security search. The guards who did it aren’t the problem, the government is. They have orders to humiliate, to separate... I’ll stand during the siren out of respect for all of you but there’s no identification... Inside I’m very conflicted.

Avi, another Jewish member, seized the opportunity to talk about “the body in the room”:

There’s an opportunity here for a discussion we don’t have. We don’t have to come to an agreement. I’m not saying to require [attendance] or identify with the ceremony [at the college] but with the problem of Holocaust Remembrance Day as a metaphor for the problems we have here and now [in the country]. I think we can talk about it.

In the end, no decisions were made and very little of the discussion was devoted to finding answers to the formal agenda item. Most prominent was the willingness of team members to bring
up sensitive subjects, to speak their minds - evidence of intergroup trust.

*Living the present: The Jewish-Arab conflict*

January, 2017: Two dead - a Bedouin teacher and a Jewish police office. That was the tragic outcome of a severe confrontation between Bedouin Arabs and police forces, stemming from the demolition of homes in the Bedouin village of Umm al-Hiran.

The conflict was covered extensively in the media and the voices of the police officers who participated were heard. Feelings on all sides were running high with rampant rumors and accusations. Some of our Bedouin students and team members live in or near the same community, and many know the family that lost their father.

On the personal side, many of our Bedouin students have been in situations where their homes, or those of someone in their extended family, were destroyed. Some of the Jewish students have husbands or family members in law enforcement, including some who participated in the operation. Several of the deceased Bedouin teacher’s children study at the college and most of the team knows his wife who chairs one of the teacher education programs there.

It happened on a Wednesday in the early morning hours and the shock waves were felt in our classrooms on Thursday - the day only our first-year students are present.

The following Sunday, the Program Chair sent out an invitation to the team to participate in a meeting on Tuesday morning (the day the entire program studies) to plan something for later that afternoon. Most of the team participated and different voices were heard discussing how and in which class to do it: voices certain it was possible and necessary to discuss the situation with the students and voices worried about their ability to lead that discussion. As a result, we exploited a regular class in which the entire program community participated (in six groups) to let students and staff relate to the events as they experienced them. These meetings were co-lead by two-three team members including, where possible, an Arab and a Jewish member.

Afterwards, the team met to discuss the discussions. As usual, members were candid about their feelings and reactions. Although we have always known our students represent different sides of the Israeli population, the present situation was polarizing and emphasized the stark realization that there was a deeper divide between certain groups of students than we previously thought and we do not totally understand it. One Bedouin team member spoke about the difficulty he had facing a situation he had not encountered before:

*The question came up in the group: What is there to talk about? ..... and then they started talking. But this is the first time I heard something like that. I knew that there was radicalization, but I did not imagine it was so extreme.*

In certain groups the encounter was heated, with derogatory epithets, expressions of anger, and the feeling that each side barely listened to the other. Sigal, a Jewish team member, emphasized what was going on:

“My experience was of two worlds that spoke in different languages [left-wing/right-wing]. Two realities. These are people I sat with yesterday when we discussed very emotional subjects in research and everything was in the same language. Because in the essential things there is something very strong that separates us - I don’t understand the other side either.”

The team meeting was laced with feelings of disappointment and a touch of helplessness.

The analysis of the meeting protocol confirms that not everyone was comfortable talking about the subject with the students. A small number were physically present but did not participate in the discussion - leaving it all up to their co-leader. This withdrawal, while possible when co-teaching, is a rare occurrence and usually happens after prior discussion with the co-teacher. For a few newer members, this was the first time they had to deal with a situation like this and their discomfort was caused by uncertainty about their ability to deal with it successfully.
Insights and challenges

As educators we tell our students they enter the classroom and other professional situations and interactions, as whole people and therefore they must understand themselves and their life experiences, and how they influence their perceptions. The same holds true for us (Griggs & Tidwell, 2015). We must acknowledge our own cultural identities and realize we make choices to see or not to see cultural differences and their effects.

This self-study has led us to reaffirm some insights and challenges for our pedagogy and discover some new ones. Our political reality constantly confronts us with expressions of the Arab-Jewish conflict and challenges us to think and rethink our practice. For example:

- **Trust** is always necessary for openness and risk-taking and essential in groups with inherent conflict.  
  *Challenge:* Finding ways to help trust develop within groups of students who have no common past and no expectations for a common future

- **Professional and personal identity** influence each other and are connected to creating meanings within a cultural context (Mansur, 2016). Therefore, retaining our workshop on cultural identity is crucial.  
  *Challenge:* Helping our students become more empathetic to those unlike themselves, and hopefully, more willing to take an active stand to make all citizens equal citizens

- Our Arab colleagues and students wrestle with **complex identity issues** of simultaneously being Israeli citizens by law but identifying more with the Palestine people. Many feel like unequal citizens within the Jewish nation, alongside certain doubts concerning modern vs. traditional life.  
  *Challenge:* Making our diverse group of Jewish students more aware of this problem

- Our program is a place of **temporary refuge** in the storm. Most team members call the team their second family and some students call the program “the bubble”. Here we are safer, away from the issues surrounding us - at least for the moment.  
  *Challenge:* Facing our responsibility to deal with ‘the body in the middle of the room’ (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004), by learning how to strengthen the bubble to make it less sensitive to outside influences while simultaneously expanding its influence on the outside environment.

Although our situation is specific to our particular location and circumstances, our insights and challenges can be looked at more generally. Cultural identity (in its widest meaning) is a crucial part of the way we see ourselves and others and understand and react to people, events and situations. However, it is not always straightforward. Exploring and addressing it is crucial for personal and professional development but is dependent on trust between the participants. Trust is difficult to build and easy to destroy. As teacher educators, we walk the fine line between the costs and benefits of encouraging authenticity and a connection to our surroundings, and building a temporary, semi-insulated learning environment.

Unfortunately, our stormy situation is unlikely to end soon. We must continue relying on each other, supporting each other, searching for better ways to do what we are doing, and examining if we are doing what we should be doing.

References


Teacher educators engaged in the self-study of teacher education practices are reflective about many aspects of practice. At the same time, most have probably given little thought to heterosexual privilege or the experiences of those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). (Kitchen, 2014, p. 127)

We are six doctoral students, a graduate assistant, and a professor at a public university in the Northeastern United States who explored theory, research, and practice on gender and sexuality in teacher education. Responding to our own personal need to examine these issues as well as a recognition of Kitchen’s above statement, our co/autoethnographic self-study focused on our co-constructed experiences in a doctoral elective course. We attempted to understand what happened when we, as teacher educators, had an opportunity to examine how to prepare and support teachers in adopting frameworks that challenge heteronormativity in schools and embrace LGBTQ youth. Together we problematized normative teacher education and how it excludes meaningful gender and sexuality investigation in the curriculum.

Theoretical framework

We came to this co/autoethnographic self-study with our own personal and professional motivations as teacher educators. We were aware of the impact that institutions have on how gender and sexuality are normalized through “disciplining, regulating, and producing differences in ways that are intelligible with the dominant or hegemonic culture” (Carlson & Meyer, 2014, p. 1). We acknowledged that gender and sexuality are presented in binary opposition like man-woman or straight–gay, and that normalized identity markers are often privileged over others. We saw these normalized constructions in overt and hidden ways within our school communities.
and they often restrained how we perceived ourselves, our students, and our colleagues (Butler, 1990; Rich, 1993).

We looked to intersectional queer theory as a critical lens to help us problematize our own experiences of gender and sexuality as individuals, teachers, school leaders, and ultimately teacher educators. First and foremost, intersectional queer theory disrupts any notions of heteronormativity which posits that “traditional gender roles are normal, while other orientations and representations of gender identity are abnormal” (Kitchen, 2014, p. 129). Recognizing that gender and sexuality are social and historical constructions, they are seen as “open to reconstruction and different performances” and can be “contested and subverted” (Carlson & Meyer, 2014, p. 2). Combining queer theory with intersectionality reminded us that it is not enough to focus on the intersection of gender and sexuality. Race, class, dis/ability, religion, and other identity markers also influence gender and sexuality.

Objectives

Our collaborative self-study was driven by the following questions:

- What did we discover when we used co/autoethnography to examine how our gender and sexuality as individuals, teachers, school leaders, and teacher educators were influenced by heteronormativity in institutions?
- How did we use our own narratives to push boundaries and cross heteronormative borders?

Methods

We are at varying stages of our careers in the context of K-12 schools (high school teachers and two school administrators) and teacher education in a range of content areas including mathematics, English, French, Arabic, and music. Our intersectional identities span ethnicity, class, religion, gender, and sexuality. We came to this self-study with diverse experiences of examining gender and sexuality.

We believed that self-study was appropriate for our work because its goal is to “provoke, challenge, and illuminate” one’s understanding of self in its multiple forms and contexts (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 20). Specifically, we used co/autoethnography (Coia & Taylor, 2009; Taylor & Coia, 2009) because it invited us to examine autobiographical narratives within the social contexts of schools and universities. We focused on our identities as fluid, rich, and complex, attempting to reflect in honest, audacious, and holistic ways to embrace our whole selves (Coia & Taylor, 2013). We embraced the notion that “we are always insider/outsiders. . . Thus, while no one can completely understand another, we do not completely understand ourselves. Our understandings of ourselves and others can, however, be enhanced by composing our co/autoethnographies together” (Taylor & Coia, 2009, p. 176). Intending to blend personal and professional experience with theory and practice, we selected self-study because it “focuses on the nexus between public and private, theory and practice, research and pedagogy, self-and-other” (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 818). We attempted to produce narratives that were honest and authentic, but also pushed boundaries and cross borders.

We used our reflections produced from our class as our data. Each week, we wrote our process logs based on our responses to readings, shared them via Canvas, an online platform, and then met in person as a class to discuss our perceptions and push deeper into analysis. We took field notes during our class sessions to keep a record of the conversations. We also each designed an inquiry project that allowed us to examine a burning question and create and implement actions to address gender and sexuality in our various contexts. These projects, as well as our reflections about our process, were also included as data. At the end of the course, we developed six summative reflective questions that helped us to articulate the course experience as a whole.
Our data analysis was recursive, collaborative, reflective, and participatory. Primarily we analyzed the data deductively by means of constant comparison as they were collected. Together we looked for emerging patterns across the narratives of multiple group members. In addition to these traditional ways of demonstrating trustworthiness, we also paid close attention to the ways we crafted the co/autoethnographic findings, hoping to be perceived as credible, authentic, and relatable to the readers, criteria identified by Richardson (2000). We hoped that the narratives in our findings would resonate with readers and would encourage them to re-examine their own stories of gender and sexuality in K-12 settings and teacher education.

Outcomes

Although perhaps a disruption of the traditional ways in which outcomes are presented, below we share a collective co/autoethnography, composed of segments of our narratives, that features our individual voices as well as the collective patterns that emerged across our reflections. Over the course of the semester, as we negotiated the curriculum by mapping out the questions we had on gender and sexuality in teacher education, selecting readings for the course, and examining the current research, we were struck by how much of our selves we brought to the discussion. We found that in order to disrupt heteronormativity in schools, we first had to push the boundaries of our own identities. Once we had situated ourselves, we were able to consider how to queer the curriculum in our K-12 classrooms and how to disrupt the gender norms and assumptions in our schools. Finally, we realized that pushing binary boundaries and queering schools involved transforming ourselves to act as allies and advocates, create safe spaces for our students and colleagues, and ultimately disrupt and queer the narratives.

Pushing the boundaries of our identities

Chedia: Disrupting heteronormativity is like crossing borders from an Arab-Muslim culture to a Western culture. It is a process of self-questioning, of interrogating the variously constructed borders of identities. I think of walls, those proposed and those already built, erected on borders, to separate peoples and countries, as if the two sides are radically different from one another and their differences are irreconcilable. But if you’ve ever walked or driven across a border of a state or a country, the landscape is continuous. It’s the borders, the walls, and the gates we build which create divisions and uphold differences as absolute. I think of sexual identity like the continuum of that landscape. Some live on one side, some live on the other; some live close to the borders, some live far away; some crisscross the borders and some cling to them. Heteronormativity attempts to efface that continuum by constructing walls around the self, and so for me this process involves disrupting these borders that define us and work to maintain as stable what, in fact, is far more fluid. I have begun to acknowledge the complex, fluid, and at times conflicted nature of my own identity as it flows between my native culture and my adoptive one, and to interrogate what I otherwise often presume to be the stability of my being.

Roger: This course was like riding a rickety raft through an ocean storm. At times, I was lofted up over the tops of the waves where I could see the light beyond the storm, and see safe harbor. At other times, I was plunged down between the waves, almost under the waves, where I felt uncertain, insecure, alone, in the darkness. As my first in-depth examination and application of queer theory, I realized that I had not considered the mechanics of LGBTQ discrimination before, nor the nomenclature and its implications. To realize that the binary heteronormative model of gender and gender identity is, and always has been, a misconception is as significant as learning that there is no tooth fairy. It was transformative.
Chapter 27: Using self-study to push binary boundaries and borders

Pushing boundaries through K-12 curriculum

Laura: How do you push boundaries in a high school mathematics class? Where does heteronormativity appear in the curriculum? It seemed the best way to explore this would be through a boundary pushing project within a class where there was curricular flexibility. I wanted to find a way to gently but overtly challenge heteronormativity in society. Students were asked to find groups that are not well-represented in the US Census. This raised such controversial topics as the absence of undocumented immigrants, people with disabilities, people with non-binary gender identity, as well as how people of particular races and religions are left out. After a discussion-based introduction to the project of Critiquing the U.S. Census, I guided (as minimally as possible) the students in their small groups to research the oppressed populations for whom they chose to advocate. I took opportunities where they arose to highlight instances of oppression and to question students’ motives for championing their cause. The project crossed the borders of a typical math class, into a socio-political realm and even perhaps an ethical one. Students in my class responded enthusiastically to the project and engaged with sincerity, a quality that was important for boundary-crossing. I believe this may have been encouraged through my own sincere approach to them and my transparency about my motivation for the project. I also attempted to give them as much ownership as I could conceive of doing by allowing them time to explore and discover which group interested them. I listened to their opinions and perspectives, and made it clear there was no one right answer they needed to strive toward. Lastly, I allowed them to develop their own evaluation criteria, so their investment in the project was akin to partnership with me as their teacher. I also asked them to push boundaries in thinking about their own identity and privilege.

Kelly: One of my goals as an educator has been to disrupt the norms of our culture, to challenge my students to question what they view as normal and right and good. After my first year teaching Language and Composition at a competitive and affluent high school, I had the opportunity to rewrite the curriculum using a thematic approach. I chose themes connected to identity and power that I felt were timely, controversial, and thought-provoking. In particular, I developed a unit on gender and sexuality which occurs in the middle of the year (it takes time to build our classroom community, and I want my students to feel comfortable, unjudged, safe, and free to share stories). After reading short personal essays, memoirs, lectures, and biographies from various experiences focused on gender and sexuality, students create their own personal narratives positioning their current views of gender. In this assignment, I hope to cast the traditional writing rules and boundaries aside and offer them space to tell their stories in their own ways, even if that sort of freedom is sometimes scary. Most students have been so trained in writing in a distant academic style that the prospect of speaking in their own voices causes them some hesitation and fear. But that’s okay. Crossing boundaries and challenging yourself often includes some amount of fear and uncertainty. For my project, I analyzed the student narratives I have collected over the past two years with a critical eye on dominant themes and ideas. I wondered what I would understand about my students’ views of gender and themselves and what their language would reveal. Interestingly, reading 40 different gender narratives was similar to constructing a mosaic. Individually the narratives have their own shape, color, clarity, and identity. Each piece can be viewed and understood on its own. But together, they can also tell a compelling story. Much of teaching is analogous to art and creation. There are many choices to be made that require a careful eye and an attention to aestheticism. In constructing this project, I had the opportunity to create.
Pushing borders through administrative leadership

Necole: Mirroring the infancy of disrupting heteronormativity in elementary schools in the field of education, doing this work as a principal in a rather conservative district proved challenging. Despite protective laws and Board of Education policies, in my school community many parents do not wish to view their children as sexual, in any way. I routinely have conversations with parents concerned with their child’s “difference” in the realm of gender norms. To do this work, therefore, I have remained in a state of praxis throughout, vacillating between literature and practice in an effort to elucidate what was needed structurally (district and schoolwide) and instructionally, and to create a learning environment that challenges gender norms and assumptions. Beyond my own school, I have also communicated with high school students who once attended my school. They reflected on how impactful it would have been to them to have greater support during that time in their lives. They described a sense of “otherness” and feelings of confusion regarding their identities from a very young age. Their comments have reinforced my belief that this work at the elementary level is remarkably important and worth challenging comfort zones to do so.

Jayne: As a heterosexual school leader and teacher educator, I wondered whether it was any of my business to investigate how one’s gender or sexual orientation impacts learning. During class discussions this fall, many classmates seemed comfortable discussing their gender and sexuality. We openly discussed preferred pronouns and shared personal stories as LGBTQ administrators or allies. Yet, I struggled to make inroads as to how to investigate LGBTQ students’ experiences within school structures, specifically within curricula. This has felt especially difficult as an administrator who is also a mom of a student who identifies as “questioning” and one who must seemingly separate these personas due to the school’s silence on the topic or its “institutional resistance” (Smith, 2015, p. 223). Furthermore, such training was not provided to me in my own principal-preparation training, which is seemingly a predilection of many leadership-preparation programs (Marshall & Hernandez, 2012). For my project, I sought to flip the script regarding the acceptance of LGBTQ students in my school using a proactive solution to the many cases of harassment, intimidation, and bullying that have erupted because of a student’s sexual orientation or gender identity. I started by examining bullying statistics in my school and found that 20% of all HIB victims were targeted because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. My readings inspired me to investigate whether a middle school health curriculum contained language that reflected “a general societal ambivalence toward gender identification and sexuality” (Vavrus, 2009). Using GLSEN’s recommendations, the health teachers and I analyzed the written health curriculum. After our discussions, we realized that many of the topics covered in health were not inclusive, creating a very awkward classroom experience for students who identified as LGBTQ.

Pushing boundaries: Transforming selves

Necole: “Once you see something, you cannot unsee it.” Engaging in this praxis has heightened my awareness of the language that I use with students, teachers, and parents. Countless times, I have caught myself saying or doing something painfully heteronormative. My tolerance for other people’s heteronormative statements and actions has decreased too. I am pushing boundaries by actively addressing heteronormative interactions with other school community members in a manner that is compassionate yet clear and geared toward disrupting the narrative. This is less of a change, per se, but rather a broadening of my instructional choices to include those involving my interactions with school community members.
Jayne: As a school administrator, I have learned to become an ally, speaking up when others remain silent. I also approach my conversations with parents from the perspective of a parent who walks the talk. I have gained valuable experience through class discussions with colleagues who may have experienced parent resistance within their schools. I am learning how to work with parents who may be resistant about LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum by sharing that the change is necessary for the safety and security of all students within the school.

Laura: I have always been a peacemaker at heart, in my family, amongst my friends, even in my classrooms. I am uncomfortable with tensions and so I try to make everything smooth. As I have grown, I have learned that smoothing by ignoring is not smoothing at all. Smoothing by thoughtful consideration of all points of view is sound. However, it is out of my comfort zone to look for the rumpled that need smoothing. I know now that I need to be more willing to get out of my comfort zone, listen to the messages that abound and disrupt the rumple.

Kelly: As an educator, reflecting on my choices helps me improve my practice. But rarely do I ever delve this deep into my students’ writing. In doing so, I came to a better understanding of how my students feel about prescribed gender roles and the pressures from society, peers, and family to uphold those normative gender roles. I learned that I’m queering the curriculum more than I’ve given myself credit for in the past. But the work is far from done. With the critical eye this course has provided me, I see further opportunity to queer the curriculum and to better address the intersections of race, gender, and class.

Roger: As I explored the issues of gender and sexuality in schools, and started thinking seriously about how to disrupt the perceived heteronormative culture at my school, I was forced to reflect on my own biases. As a person and a teacher, I have learned to try not to be prideful and judgmental. I initially believed that I had no faculty allies and no one was as dedicated as I was in wanting to disrupt the heteronormative status quo. At my Catholic school, I raised the question of how teachers and administrators felt towards members of the LGBTQ community and how they would feel to have an LGBTQ student in their school or classroom. Perhaps most importantly, my questionnaire asked if they felt that LGBTQ students could have a place of equality within the Catholic Church and within Catholic education. No one was talking about this. I asked the question.

Chedia: Through this study, I have come to realize that my students’ identities are equally complex and in formation, and require a safe learning community where everyone is empowered to speak and have their voices heard, an environment in which vulnerability—about one’s self and one’s own identity—is embraced, and where the goal is not necessarily self-definition but rather self-recognition. But this is not fully possible without interrogating the self, which can be a disorienting and disruptive endeavor. Any honest interrogation as such is inconceivable if we ask our students to engage in confessional narrative on the subject but resist making ourselves vulnerable as well. As both an individual and an educator, I am revealing my vulnerability in my ongoing struggle to resolve the tension between my heteronormative values and my recognition of the need to disrupt the hegemonic culture that draws its strengths from those values. As such I recognize the unfinishedness of my own being which can only approach a state of finishedness through an honest and open dialogue with my students.
What we have learned

As we gathered and examined the literature and research together, we were struck with the dearth of attention paid to the inclusion of LGBTQ students and curriculum in preservice teacher preparation and inservice teacher development (Gorski, Davis & Rieter, 2013; Taylor, Meyer, Peter, Ristock, Short & Campbell, 2016). With this in mind, we wrote and shared co/autoethnographic narratives in order to provide a means to “out” our own experiences of gender and sexuality in teacher education and push boundaries. This meant telling our stories for the first time or reconstructing and performing our stories differently. These difficult emotional conversations allowed us to be vulnerable as we began to examine our own biases, blind spots, and fears. Co-constructing our community of learners offered us the sort of support necessary for the risk involved in beginning to design and implement actions to challenge normativity in institutions. We were encouraged, however scary, to cross borders of self as person, as professional, and as teacher educator and together we created a sense of collective action and possibility which we hope will continue to grow. Challenging oppressive institutional norms requires courage and a clarity of purpose but our study confirmed that this could be addressed across boundaries, in any discipline or within any k-12 and higher education settings.

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Chapter 27: Using self-study to push binary boundaries and borders


Crossing from university course to school and back: A self-study of two teacher educators in contexts of integrated learning

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This paper focuses on an interweaving self-study of the authors in relation to our last six years of teaching School Integrated Teacher Education (SITE) courses. SITE courses incorporate both school and university experiences. The SITE model is designed to allow teacher candidates (TC), through continued participation in a school culture, to come to understand the role of teacher as they gradually take responsibility for teaching episodes within a lesson. Courses are designed so that TCs continually reflect on their shared experiences from a school context through systematic observation, active participation and joint reflection on practice. This paper builds on the SITE approach developed in elementary teacher education program (Hopper, 2015), to a secondary teacher education initiative called Transformative University of Victoria (TRUVic) (Sanford, Hopper, & Starr, 2015). In the TRUVIC model a cluster of teacher education (TE) courses in one term commit to developing their course curriculum around engagement in a high school. Specifically, students in a cohort engage one day a week in the same school for 12 weeks with a seminar course taught in the school by teachers from the school as teacher educators. University instructors and schoolteachers collaboratively integrate course activities and assignments in relation to the school experience.

We examine in this paper how these integrated models of TE have redefined us as teacher educators. Such interactions create a dynamic space where cognition is distributed in relation to events and people so that knowledge is socially constructed through collaborative efforts. Specifically, as noted by Barab and Plucker (2002) distributed cognition refers to people achieving shared objectives within cultural surroundings using the tools/artifacts provided by the culture. For TC and teacher educator alike these spaces create an adaptive and reflective aptitude in relation to their emerging learning in relation to a school culture.

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Objectives

A key premise of this paper is that TE programs need to better understand the conditions that enable learning to become a teacher. We have come to the conclusion that we need to consider a situated and a relational approach to knowing that is an alternative to more mechanistic explanations. Such a perspective frames human learning and the cognitive processes it entails as distributed in the world and our interactions in that world (Lysaker & Furuness, 2011). Weaved in our accounts are links to theoretical frameworks from cognitive rationalist, constructivist and complexivist views. These frameworks have been developed further in previously published papers, referenced in this paper, that we have used to help us understand the learning processes in integrated courses.

Self-study research requires methods that are feasible for practicing teacher educators to perform in their day-to-day professional situations. As described by Vanasse and Kelchtermans, (2015) we draw on our reflections in relation to data that emerges in class such as TC digital portfolios, personal narratives, meeting notes and evidence documented in past studies of the SITE/TRUVic courses. In this paper we present our reflective accounts of events and insights from critical friends (including past students) who have been involved in the courses. A significant motivation in this self-study is to “walk the talk” (Loughran, 2007), to better align theory and practice and embody theory that we have advocated in our courses.

In this account, our intent is to evoke a sense of our reality as teacher educators, a sense of transferability of the findings to other teacher educators. As advocated by Loughran, (2007) we make claims to truth based on the criterion of trustworthiness and related notions such as integrity, credibility and authenticity. Trustworthiness relates to how teacher educators can relate to and use the concepts, methods and inferences of a practice being theorised, creating a form of validating of knowledge (Vanasse & Kelchtermans, 2015). The rigour in our self-study account is invested in previous publications that offer sources of data that help to verify our accounts (Hopper & Sanford, 2008; Hopper, 2010; 2013; 2015; Sanford, et al, 2015).

We explore our school-integrated experiences asking, “How have our assumptions about teaching teachers to learn how to teach evolved over time?” Steps in the analysis involved: (1) review past articles and TC artifacts; (2) reflecting on the changes and the impact it had on us and our TCs; (3) sharing insights with critical friends; and (4) noting the shifts in our assumptions about teaching teachers how to learn how to teach.

The next section offers two complementary experiences with integrated-courses weaved together. The focus is on Kathy’s experience in relation to her development of the TRUVic courses presented in italic with parallel connections presented in normal text made to Tim’s account of his shifting practice/assumptions published in Hopper (2015).

Collaborative roots of SITE

Kathy reflects:

As I consider TRUVic from a self-study perspective TRUVic I am reminded of where I started. I wanted to engage TCs in meaningful learning to become teachers, who are reflective, intentional, and informed. Through reflective recursive introspection, I have continually shifted my practices, my understanding, and my responses. However, I would not have been able to come to new understandings and practices without ongoing dialogue and informal conversations with critical friends – school teachers, university teaching colleagues, research collaborators, my co-author, and the TCs themselves – with whom I have challenged my own beliefs, learned to listen more carefully, and tried to adapt my practices so that I can connect with TCs and teachers in the field.

Tim reflects that the key idea within this relocating is the need to belong to something that generates an additional set of identities both for the TCs and the teacher educator; different from the instructor/student interactions promoted at the university.
In 2012 talking with colleagues my own reflections on my past teaching experiences -- 40+ years -- revealed that I have, since the beginning of my career, had multiple opportunities to belong to a professional community of learners and to value that belonging. If a community was not readily available, I would seek one out – through professional development conferences, graduate programs, and informal networks. I love new ideas and have tried to continually implement these ideas in my own teaching. These ideas were seen in ways in which I taught, in texts I introduced to my classes, and in my course outlines and planning. I enjoyed trying things out, shifting my practices, sharing with colleagues in a space we co-created together. However, I came to be aware that my enthusiasm for new approaches was not always shared with my colleagues, particularly at university. It was easier to work in isolation within one's own class.

As noted by Hopper (2015, p. 260) the notions of being an instructor of students creates “rationalist and empiricist point of view, [where] individuals construct their own understanding by acquiring knowledge of a fixed external world.” As such teaching is then about representing the world in such a way that learners can internalize the knowledge as constructed by the instructor. However the world of teaching is not fixed, but dynamic offering different opportunities for different learners. To understand teaching in this way the real world of being a teacher in a school has to become the frame for TCs’ learning, it becomes cognitively distributed in the realities of the school.

**Catalytic moments**

Kathy notes that in this desire for repositioning she experienced two catalytic moments.

One catalytic movement was a conversation with a colleague in a local high school – we were discussing how we could better prepare TCs for the complex role of ‘teacher’, and imagining ways to work better together. With the help of the school principal, we began to plan a new approach. The second was during the same year, back in my English Curriculum course, working with future English teachers, and as I was talking with them I realized that in the next hour they would move on to another class where someone else would tell them something – perhaps complementary, perhaps contradictory – and I had no idea what that something was. And this occurred for these TCs regularly throughout their program. By myself, I was not very effective, I realized; the TCs were left to themselves to make sense of different information and messages, of conflicting pedagogical approaches, to determine the best way forward. I needed to find out more about the learning-to-teach experience from their perspectives, to be more collaborative with my peers on campus and to involve them in the schools more quickly.

Similarly, in Hopper (2015) Tim notes that teaching in blocks promotes fragmented learning that does not reflect how we learn. He noted there is need for TC to experience learning as a continuous process of engagement across related experiences rather than in the fixed blocks of short units so often modeled in university courses. This then develops a more constructivist view of learning, emerging and socially framed in relation to adaptive, co-evolving learners where a “coherence view of reality, shifts the learner to actively construing and modifying their own ‘knowings’ in order to create viable subjective knowledge to engage with other construing beings to make sense of an inter-subjective world” (p. 260).

In order to make any significant change to aspects of the program offered on campus I realized some changes was needed – timetable shifts, recruiting/hiring colleagues who were interested in collaborating, and school-based partners needed to have a vested interest in the TE program. The following year, then, after much planning, re-planning, repositioning and adjusting (always working with colleagues), I adopted a more integrated approach to my English Curriculum course. I worked with 15 TCs, all of whom were planning on becoming
English teachers. The other 60 students in the program carried on in the traditional way. The school-integration became a cornerstone aspect of the program and quickly everyone in the program was asking why they couldn’t also take part in this experience. The TRUVic (Transforming UVic) TE program was then launched.

As soon as one PE course became integrated in a local school, the TCs in the other PE courses were asking why they were not getting the “real” experience. As all the PE courses shifted to the school the TCs developed confidence in their teacher identity and in particular in their ability to teach PE by working with children in “little PE lessons” as one TC commented (Hopper, 2015, p. 38).

TRUVic: Structural changes

The TRUVic program was designed to address challenges associated with the separation between school and university cultures. In the first term of a four-term program (16 months), TCs in interdisciplinary cohorts engage one day a week in a local school where they are able to observe, engage with adolescents and teachers, question existing practices, and have practices modeled for them by a range of practitioners. Additionally, this observational day is bookended (7:30 – 8:30 a.m. and 3:30 – 5:30 p.m.) by a university seminar course taught by a university lecturer who is also an active teacher in the school.

Drawing on indigenous teaching/learning principles

In addition to the seminar course and weekly school-based observations, the TCs are also engaged in classes related to disciplinary and cross-disciplinary pedagogy, learning theories, and educational technology. The instructors work collaboratively to interweave knowledge of each of the courses together in supportive and reinforcing ways, modeling effective pedagogies and critical engagement, continually drawing from the school-based experiences to inform their campus-based courses. Finally, the program derives its focus for professional learning from Indigenous principles learned from Indigenous scholar Lorna Williams (Sanford et al., 2012), including,

- The importance of focusing on the learning of our colleagues before our own learning,
- Consideration of how our work will benefit the next seven generations to come; our class work will influence future generations of students and teachers
- Finding our passion and then investing this passion in our work to energize the community and inspire the learning of others

Learning as an event

Working with school-based teachers in TRUVic offers access to a rich examination of the school context otherwise absent from early experiences in TE programs. Further, the bookended seminar structure enables relationship building with teachers who can answer the TCs questions, providing insights, and at times model strong educational practice. Throughout the ten school visits in the first term, robust relationships are formed between TCs and teachers, enabling authentic mentorship and future practicum opportunities during the remainder of their program. In the interdisciplinary first term TCs identify and develop an inquiry project, delving into an aspect of education of personal and professional interest. Throughout the term they read research, hone their inquiry question, observe, and engage with teachers and students to develop a final project presented at the Gallery Walk at the end of the term. This event is a consolidation of their professional learning throughout the term, shared in a public forum where inquiry projects, in posters or interactive displays, are shared with peers and invited guests, including school educators and administrators, superintendents, Ministry of Education personnel, faculty members, and other colleagues and friends.

These structural changes allowed key shifts in the instructor practice. As Kathy comments below:
Over the six years of immersion in this program, I have shaped assignment, resources, and activities repeatedly. I practice ‘circle’ in my classes, honouring an Indigenous way of learning, valuing all voices in the class and providing opportunities for meaningful sharing. I have recognized the importance of enabling the TCs to feel ownership of their own learning and work – which they can develop through choice of topics in discussion forums, inquiry projects, and unit plans. They are encouraged to get to know everyone and work with a wide variety of people – of varied backgrounds and disciplinary areas – in order to widen their scope of understanding. Key to the shift in my practices has been adopting a ‘contract grading’ approach rather than instructor-assigned grades, where TCs are expected to attain a B+ standing in all the work they do. If they do not meet a professional standard, I provide feedback to enable them to improve their work. If they wish to attain a higher grade, they ‘contract’ to develop further work in an area related to the course and their own interests, work they are required to share with their peers. In this way, collaborative work is authentic and legitimate; competition is removed and all are encouraged to share their ideas, support each other, and develop to the best of their abilities. I have instituted meetings with the TCs to talk about their work, rather than relying on written comments alone, so that we can have a sharing dialogue about their intents and goals and a space for me to give feedback so they can further develop their work. One of the reasons for revising their work relates to the Indigenous learning principle related to responsibility for future generations – their assignments are shared with future TCs as models of good pedagogy.

These same indigenous principles, shift in grading and public display of learning were apparent in Hopper (2015). As he comments,

The indigenous teaching and learning principles along with the extension assignments created the conditions in the course for learning to emerge for the students from interactions in schools and between each other. The notion of collective learning really made sense to the students (p. 268).

Tim further notes, “From a complexity perspective this approach to assessment makes sense and gives value to the physical world that is brought forth” through TCs interactions in the course and by choice in the school. This allowed a restructuring of TCs thinking and abilities to adapt course content to the needs of children in the school. This “…created a space for students to think like teachers and work as a teacher in their own passions” (p. 268).

**Evolving the TRUVic model**

In the second year of the project the 70 students in the program were divided into two cohorts, one with humanities/arts TCs, and the other with social science/science/math TCs.

The first learning for me was the power of cohorts – done for pragmatic reasons initially, but feedback from the TCs informed me that cohorts were one of the most powerful aspects of the program. From the beginning of the program, they felt they had colleagues they could trust and rely upon during challenging times, which is what kept them moving forward and taking risks. After two years, and feedback from our partner schools that it would be good to ‘mix up’ the disciplines and have more heterogeneous groupings in the cohorts, and to enable more of the teachers to interact with the group, we shifted them. At that point I also decided to shift the course I taught, and moved to teaching multi-literacies to all of the students – including math, science, social studies, art, computer science…this meant I had to move outside my own comfort zone to work with different type of students, not only those that loved language arts like me.
I had to begin relearning, in order to engage meaningfully with students who had different backgrounds and interests to me, different ways of seeing the world and thinking about knowledge and having different undergraduate experiences. Through informal conversations, seeing their responses/reactions, and end of term feedback interviews, I developed a better sense of the different needs, interests, values and expectations of the TCs, trying to develop a broader more open-ended activities and assignments in my course.

This cohort model also existed in the Tim's courses but a reason was needed for TCs to act together to meet challenges related to their forming teaching identities. As Hopper (2015) notes, a critical development...was the commitment in the second term for groups of TCs to teach four lessons of a creative dance unit to a class of children in the school...to adapt music pieces to themes that matched topics being addressed by teachers in their classrooms (see also Hopper, 2010).

Work with the teacher in the school made the SITE experience more authentic and drew the TCs together to overcome their fears and worries, to adapt what they were learning at the university to the realities of a class of students. This created a genuine attempt to bridge the gap between theory (taught at university) and practice (realities of schools). In a similar way Kathy reflects:

After many years of reflection on ways to ‘bridge’ the theory/practice divide, I realized that we need new language and new conceptions to enable theory to inform practice while at the same time practice informing theory. I have come to see the spaces that are created when TCs move from campus to schools and back as the third/alternative space in which practical and theoretical ideas co-mingle and over time to create new ideas. Rather than trying to address as many concepts as possible in a term, I realized that fewer activities with more time to delve deeply would be more beneficial to meaningful learning and engagement allowing them to forge new relationships with their peers, with teachers, and with students. I also became more flexible with ‘due dates’, enabling TCs to find their own pace in their learning while still ensuring that they were completing reflective and pedagogical tasks.

**School/University: Time, relationships and nurturing professional confidence**

Maintaining positive and healthy relationships with schools takes time, both in preparation before the term, ongoing visits and conversations during the term, and post-term reflection. The time it takes to develop relationships and reflexive practice could be seen as taking away from other work (such as writing and researching); however, we have instead chosen to see this work as a form of research. The learning that happens, for instructors and TCs, when they have opportunities to interact in less formal spaces is exciting and enriching, enabling the teacher educators to shape their courses in ways that are more meaningful and useful to the TCs and grounds future classes in the reality of school. Kathy reflects,

I have also come to realize through my reflections, that the amount of time spent in integrated programs is very demanding and exhausting, particularly when working with TCs who are often resistant, anxious, and fearful of working in schools. It is also very draining for the TCs, and for them to show up inspired every week when there are many demands on their time and their energy is amazing – which causes me to realize the depth of their commitment and passion.

Similarly, Hopper (2015, p. 269) notes that time commitment for some TCs has been voiced as a complaint about workload, however others revel in the choice and opportunity. He notes that,
...comments on workload showed a shift from content workload I remember back in 2006 to one of navigating choices. The key now is to help TCs make right choices about what they are ready to learn, as choice is not a common experience for students. One strategy suggested by a colleague is to reach out to connect more with other courses in the program so that assignments can work across courses and be developed within an ePortfolio.

This connection across courses is key element that makes the TRVic experience most effective. Students experience coherence across courses based on the commitment to learn in relation to the school experience, they grow as teachers in relation to course content becoming colleagues rather than as students competing for grades. Kathy notes:

*Each year I work in the program brings opportunities to develop new colleagues – I am now working with graduates of the TE program from each of the six years.*

However, no program is best suited to everyone’s needs and some take more time than others to develop their professional identities.

*TCs don’t always recognize what they have learned until they are practicing teachers themselves, and because they still live in a university culture of competition and hierarchies, they can be very judgmental of themselves and others. I have realized the importance of developing confidence in each of the TCs so they have a foundation to build upon, and also to provide them with challenging experiences so they can take risks, face their fears, and feel the sense of accomplishment and success from working with a youth or supporting a colleague. Every one of the TCs brings talents, strengths, and passions to their work, and through relationality with others in the course they can come to recognize and share their talents.*

This focus on the learning of peers is also reflected as key to professional identity by TCs in Hopper (2015). As one TC states “I came to recognize just how important it is to focus on the learning of your peers – a huge part of personal growth comes from working with others and doing what you can to support their learning” (p. 270).

**Conclusion**

It is our belief that we need to transform TE so that new teachers can understand and thrive in the complexity of today’s schools. For us, it has been getting in the middle of the action where cognition is distributed with people who are achieving shared objectives within cultural surroundings using the tools/artifacts provided by the culture. For decades we have attempted to bridge the theory/practice divide, a chasm so wide that TE programs seem to continually struggle to be seen as significant to the preparation of new teachers.

What has emerged for us is that we have long grappled with the objectivist, control mechanism of TE described by Ramiah (2014) as a neo-liberal ideology of competing, working individually and striving for personal advancement even at the cost of others. We have learned to counter this with contract grading, cohort planning, ePortfolios and adapting indigenous learning principles into our courses. That struggle has also forced us to examine and consider the centrality of relationships in the process of becoming a teacher. By doing this we strengthened our commitments to embrace, to help articulate, the complex and messy world of teaching that awaits prospective teachers in ways that are personally and professionally meaningful. As noted in Sanford et al., (2015) in theorizing a relational pedagogy for TE we have learned as part of our practice to focus on (1) contextual variables such as institutional time-tables and student populations that demand flexibility and adaptability in programming, and (2) letting go of being the teacher at the center by fostering partnerships between schools and universities where student and practicing teachers can thrive in ever-changing integrative environments.
Chapter 28: Crossing from university course to school and back

References


Developing a STEAM curriculum of place for teacher candidates: Integrating environmental field studies and Indigenous knowledge systems

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The purpose of our research is to investigate how teacher candidates’ experiences in STEAM field studies with community partners can inform an integrated practicum semester based on a curriculum of place (Chambers, 2008). Many contributions to education have been made through non-Indigenous perspectives of place. Place-based education (Emekauwa, 2004; Gruenewald, 2003; Penetito, 2009; Relph, 1992; Sobel, 2004; Watetchow & Brown, 2011) is an approach to teaching that is grounded in the context of community and environment (Raffan, 1993; Theobald & Curtiss, 2000) and seeks to help not only students but also communities through employing students, school staff, educators, scientists and other interested community members in solving community problems (Denise & Harris, 1989). However, emerging research suggests that place-based education is limited because it does not critique colonial legacies in theoretical frameworks of place (Calderon, 2014). Indeed, many Indigenous scholars are replacing the term place with land and argue that land-based pedagogies promote the decolonization of education (Ballantyne, 2014; Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox, & Coulthard, 2014) by recognizing the intimate relationship that Indigenous peoples have with the land. One challenge with land-based pedagogies is the role non-Indigenous peoples have in this approach to the decolonization of education. Our research, in a Western Canadian context, explores this tension as we come to a deeper and shared understanding of our co-responsibility within Treaty 7 relationships. Learning from place emphasizes a relationship with the land (Blood & Chambers, 2006), something deeply respected in Indigenous communities and something absent from much of place-based education. Our project seeks to close this gap by considering varying perspectives of place as it informs STEAM teacher education pedagogy.

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Context of the study

Drawing on a curriculum of place as a theoretical framework contributes to the objectives of this project in redefining our conceptualization of place in STEAM teacher education and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems and place-based education. Integral in our work is a sense of dwelling-in-place, a stance dependent on listening as a “highly reflective and revelatory mode of communication that can open one to the mysteries of unity between the physical and spiritual, to the relationships between natural and human forms, and to the intimate links between places and persons” (Carbaugh, 1999, p. 250). It is these intimate links between places and persons that many researchers acknowledge (Blood, Chambers, Donald, Hasebe-Ludt, & Big Head, 2012; Cajete, 2000; Chambers, 2006, 2008; Kisling, 2012; Kulnieks, Longboat, & Young, 2013; Little Bear, 2000). In the Blackfoot context, balance and harmony with the environment are recognized as part of the knowledge system. Bastien (2004) writes, “Ontological responsibilities of Siksikai’titsapi are the beginning of affirming and reconstructing ways of knowing. These fundamental responsibilities must be renewed by coming to know the natural alliances” (p. 4). She suggests that Indigenous knowledge is linked to intricate interrelationships within nature. The environment is understood as “the source from which all life originates and from which all knowledge is born” (p. 39).

A curriculum of place recognizes the intimate relationship that Indigenous people have with the land and emphasizes relational ways of knowing. Chambers (2008) presents four dimensions of a curriculum of place as part of a conversation about how this theoretical stance might impact education: a different sense of time, enskilment, an education of attention, and wayfinding.

She suggests that “a curriculum of place is no longer optional” (p. 125). Our inquiry is to build knowledge and understanding from Indigenous, disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and cross-sector perspectives of a curriculum of place as it relates to educational programs. Our methodology has been co-designed within existing partnerships to honour and reflect Indigenous knowledge systems and designed so we can “grow into knowledge through engagement in hand-on activities learning side-by-side with masters of the crafts” (p. 120).

Through a social-constructivist lens, in-school seminars, integrated weekly within a 5-week practicum, each involving cohorts of 8-12 teacher candidates from partner schools, are facilitated by teacher educators to develop a sense of community (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and support teacher candidates to reflect upon their teaching and develop responsive educational practices and adaptive expertise (Beck & Kosnik, 2006; Loughran, 2002). Prior to the 5-week practicum, teacher candidates participate in STEAM courses that include daylong field studies and a 3-day intensive experiential STEAM program at a remote ranch in the mountain territory of Treaty 7 focused on environmental science land-based pedagogies. While at the mountain ranch, they also lead, in small cohorts of 4-5 teacher candidates, a daylong place-based inquiry science project with cohorts of Grade 4 students from a partner school.

STEAM is an educational approach to learning that uses Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Mathematics as access points for guiding teacher candidate inquiry, dialogue, and critical thinking. The end results are teacher candidates who take thoughtful risks, engage in place-based experiential learning, persist in problem-solving, embrace collaboration, and develop a growth mindset (Education Closet, 2017).

Methods

Drawing on the research involving self-study as a methodology for studying professional practice settings (Pinnegar, 1998), program improvement (Kosnick et al., 2006), and teacher education (Kitchen & Russell, 2012) and based on principles of self-study design (Dinkelman, 2003; LaBoskey, 2004), this research was self-initiated, focused on inquiry into our practice, collaborative, aimed at improvement of our practice, and using multiple and primarily qualitative means of inquiry.
Researchers have identified the need to decolonize research methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012) and offer insight into appropriate methods, protocols, and ethical responsibilities for Indigenous research (Wilson, 2007). Kovach (2009) presents a methodological approach that centers on a tribal epistemology. Her non-linear description of its characteristics include researcher preparation, decolonizing and ethics, gathering knowledge, making meaning, and giving back (p. 45). We drew on this research framework and culturally relational research methods (Donald, Glanfield, & Sterenberg, 2012), and Blackfoot concepts of aoksisawaato’p (visiting/renewal of relations), aokakiosit (be wisely aware; pay attention), and aatsimaak’ssin (responsibility to balance giving/taking reciprocity) to inform our methods of community dialogues and sharing circles.

We have designed a STEAM semester for our teacher education program that utilizes Shulman’s (2006) concept of signature pedagogies and Kuh’s (2008) high impact practices (HIPs). Our STEAM semester focuses on the following transformative pedagogical approaches:

1. **Cross-curricular course integration**: Teacher candidates learn through “hands-on” experience and assessment feedback how to integrate the outcomes from Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Mathematics in their lesson and unit planning.

2. **Cohort placements and in-school seminars**: There is a 5 week practicum during this semester and our teacher candidates are placed in cohorts of 4-6 at each school. The cohort placements support weekly in-school seminars, which are co-facilitated by mentor teachers and school administrators.

3. **Community partnerships**: Teacher candidates plan and support learning at various community sites including the Ann and Sandy Cross Conservation Area, Calgary Open Minds, Tim Horton Children’s Ranch, and Telus Spark.

4. **Faculty practicum supervision in schools**: All full-time faculty members involved in the STEAM semester supervise the practicum in schools. Full-time faculty are ideally positioned to build partnerships with schools, to intervene in challenging situations, and to bring awareness of the program vision and structure.

5. **Peer mentorship**: Teacher candidates are encouraged to provide peer mentorship to each other during the STEAM courses and practicum experience.

6. **Inquiry**: Teacher candidates engage in a semester long inquiry project in partnership with their mentor teacher.

7. **Reflective journals**: Teacher candidates write journal reflections throughout the semester in order to connect the theory of their courses with the practice of their practicum experience.

8. **Professional learning plan (e-portfolio)**: Teacher candidates use a digital learning plan to document their growth and development throughout the semester with respect to the B.Ed. programs core competencies; planning, facilitation, assessment, environment, and professional responsibilities.

9. **Indigenous ways of knowing**: Place-based experiential learning opportunities with our First Nations partners (e.g., Stoney Nakoda Reserve)

In this self-study, we investigated the possibilities for deliberate place-based pedagogical interventions.

**Data sources**

The participants in this study included the two authors, a Blackfoot Elder (who acted as our critical friend), three student research assistants and sixty-three teacher candidates. Together, we piloted integrated 7-week intensive STEAM courses in coordination with candidates’ practicum experiences and field studies and inquiry projects. As researchers, we engaged in bi-monthly...
collaborative research conversations, exchanged numerous emails, and kept research notes about our experiences. Mid-way through the course we interviewed 9 teacher candidates and at the conclusion of the year, we interviewed 11 teacher candidates. We collected artifacts of their learning through course assignments. Multiple data sources provided trustworthiness as experiences were explicitly documented and analyzed by the researchers in various forms and sites. Data was first coded individually across these sites according to emerging themes that related to our research focus on the process of designing and implementing of a curriculum of place (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We then reviewed our analysis, collaboratively adjusted the codes, and wrote findings together.

Outcomes

The results are preliminary as they represent the Pilot Phase 1 of the project (2016-17) and also initial data from the implementation of a revised STEAM semester this past fall (2017) in which we share emerging results of Phase 2. Here, we include both the 2016-17 and 2017-18 results that inform the current phase of the study.

Place as pedagogy

During the planning stages of the STEAM field studies, Gladys reflected on her own experiences of place and how her view of mathematics has shifted because of it:

I have grappled with integrating my notions of place and mathematics education for many years. Elsewhere, I have shared my encounter with Chaos theory as I “imagined tree branches, coastlines, and blood vessels as fractals and was fascinated by the harmonious arrangement of order and disorder occurring in natural contexts. This view of mathematics was relational: I was relating to the beauty, elegance, and imagery of mathematics” (Glanfield, Sterenberg, & Donald, in press). In this study, I wanted to investigate how ‘place’ impacted how I taught a STEAM-focused, community and field-based course. I wonder how my experiences of the land and home can be brought forth in teaching mathematics.

When I led the pond study, many of the teacher candidates told me that they did not like bugs. I asked them to frame the study in the context of being teachers and invited them to think about how they could engage children in learning about the environment. This quickly dampened the screams of distaste and prompted a mindset of curiosity. For many of the teacher candidates, this was the first time they had been in the mountains and the first time they had examined creatures that lived in the pond. I brought them together intermittently for reflection on their learning and prompted them to make connections between this field study and the mathematics program of studies. They were able to make links but I wonder if they would have viewed the experience through a mathematical lens if I hadn’t prompted them to do this. (Gladys’s Reflection)

As educators, we were struck by the increase in engagement level demonstrated by our teacher candidates. Not only were they excited and passionate to discuss and engage in the studies, they brought a heightened level of professional conduct and expectations that required us, as facilitators to “raise our game”. In our research conversations, we spoke often of how we felt like “true” facilitators, as we would consistently be mediating the educational needs of our students (as defined by our course requirements) with the opportunities arising through community engagement and environmental field studies and data collection. The problem posing pedagogies, seminars and field studies were challenging as we attempted to disrupt western forms of epistemologies (Freire, 1970; Gruenewald, 2003; Kincheloe, 2001, 2005) and include various Indigenous ways of knowing (Cajete, 1999, 2000; Grande, 2004; Penetito, 2009) while respecting the competing interests, needs and worldviews of the participants (teacher candidates, mentor teachers, school administrators,
...the engagement impacted me in the sense that I will remember that activity (tree studies)...I want my kids to remember what they're learning so that later on down the road they're going to be able to recall these meaningful experiences and be able to say 'Hey, I know something about this because I remember' and they have something come back, and then inquiry breaks open all over again. So I guess for me what I really like as a teacher is it [STEAM field studies] opens my mind to the idea of experiential learning...because the engagement and the activities are what you're going to remember. Whereas sitting around and taking notes from a textbook I'm not going to remember. (Participant 4)

Integration through place

The interconnectedness and the understanding of the relation of things, which is a key component to both Indigenous ways of knowing and place-based education, became a fundamental component of our STEAM program design. As many teacher education programs focus on top-down lessons, single-discipline course design that fragment subject matter, the holistic component of learning, in which learners organize information globally and derive meaning from the relational aspects of the concepts, was promoted through an integration of practical subject matter:

We developed this STEAM model based on the multidisciplinary element often espoused through Indigenous ways of knowing; the notion of interconnectedness is essential. It promotes a relational aspect to knowledge. Based on my experiences, and teachings from many of my Indigenous colleagues, Aboriginal knowledge systems align with experiential and place-based pedagogies that are grounded in the principle of integration; people are able to learn more effectively when they are able see things in relation to other things. My biggest struggle, when trying to assist my students in seeing these connections (i.e Integration-Aboriginal knowledge systems-Place-Based pedagogies) is how to be authentic and respectful, especially when I am unable to facilitate an Indigenous voice in the field (i.e conflict in schedule, lack of funding, etc..). (Kevin's Reflection)

The challenge of integrating place-based learning and a curriculum of place was expressed in Gladys's writing as well:

Modeling my curiosity and the connections I am making to place seemed to make an impact in the immediate context but I wondered about the long-term impact of this on the teacher candidates. When we returned to campus, I asked them to consider my question, 'Was this worth it?' Overwhelmingly, they identified the sense of community that formed through the immersive experience as being a primary benefit. This speaks to the relational part of learning that is so important. However, they did not articulate any connections to learning mathematics beyond the general representative comment, “There’s something different about learning in nature”. I continue to question how I can be more intentional in facilitating an experience within a curriculum of place. And, I wonder why I am preoccupied with their mathematical understanding when I want them to experience an integrated STEAM approach. (Gladys's Reflection)

Despite the dissonance that we were experiencing, some of our students seemed to understand the importance of integration, as shown by this representative quote:

It's easier to do cross curricular work, kids are so engaged and it's real learning and it can even inspire them for their future careers or even get them involved in other areas. So it's not just that you sit and do your math, it's you do math as you're doing water quality testing and you're

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doing all these different components... like writing and recording down your observations, that can be Language Arts, right? and Social Studies we learnt about the history of the place. I feel like everything just goes together well. (Participant 2)

Resistance

We often ran into resistance by teacher candidates, colleagues and other participants, as this is often not a conventional or comfortable approach to teaching and learning. We even questioned our own commitment to this process based on the academic, professional and personal demands of our time, as shown by Gladys's writing:

I've just returned from teaching a 3-day intensive experiential STEAM program at a remote ranch in the mountains. I've taken time away from my family, haven't slept well, and am now doing laundry because of a possible bed bug infestation. Is this worth it? What have my students experienced in this place-based curriculum of mathematics? (Gladys's Reflection)

Many of the students felt the experience in the field was too demanding and long (i.e. 2 nights-3 days). The lack of Wi-Fi and choice of food became issues with some students. As educators, passionate about place-based pedagogies and an integrated STEAM model, we discussed the value of experience and resiliency.

Varela (1999) provides a progressive description of the relation of experience in conscious thought. He claims that experiential and place-based structures are relational to conceptual understanding and rational thought: “The point is not that experience strictly determines conceptual structures and modes of thought: it is rather, that experience both makes possible and constraints conceptual understanding across a multitude of cognitive domains” (p. 16). This speaks to the learner as being privy to various forms of knowledge, and also exposed to various types of learning styles; the power of difference. Varela’s (1999) enactivist ontology states that our identities are not pre-formed, and we often learn best when we empty ourselves of all that has been learned, towards what he calls the “virtual self” or “selfless self”.

I struggle in how to respond to those students who complain about the 3 days at the camp, the lack of Wi-Fi and the quality of food. The majority acknowledge that they enjoy the field studies, benefit from the time with the students on the inquiry project and also the community that is built but there is often an unwillingness or lack of self-awareness that forces them to revert back to their own comfort zones. I still remember reading Ted Aoki’s writings of a Japanese Canadian, who stressed the need for those key times to learn as those “moments of tension”, when we are no longer experts of those microworlds and we become beginners who search for ways to understand what is foreign (through deliberation and analysis) so that we may feel comfortable and at ease with the task at hand. This speaks to me through experiential and place-based learning, by the inclusion of adversity and resilience into curricular delivery and content. (Kevin’s Reflection)

Our partners are helping us respond to resistance and think more deeply about embedding and sustaining a curriculum of place.

Reconsidering place

We both feel that our attempts to enact a curriculum of place that recognizes the intimate relationship that Indigenous people have with the land and emphasizes relational ways of knowing were impactful. However, we were disappointed that our students seemed to experience a place-based curriculum that was not linked explicitly to Indigenous ways of knowing.
A gap that is emerging is that most students are not making the link between Indigenous ways of knowing place and the importance of land-based pedagogies as something they, as a non-Indigenous educator, can incorporate into their teaching and learning. It is a perception of the “other” that seems to create dissonance. How can I help promote a culture of knowledge creation for these students? One that allows them to incorporate varying perspectives of place, including an Indigenous curriculum of place. (Kevin’s Reflection)

In our reconsideration of a curriculum of place, we draw on Chambers (2008) description of dwelling:

In a curriculum of place the activities in which we engage children are the very activities they need to dwell in this place, to be nourished by the place and to nourish it. In a curriculum of place, young people or novices grow into knowledge through engagement in hand-on activities learning side-by-side with masters of the crafts. This knowledge enables people to find their way in that place where they dwell and this knowledge and these skills endow them with identity. (p. 120)

In the next year of teaching, we intend to begin the STEAM semester in ceremony, learning closely with one of our partners teaching in a reserve school located in close proximity to the remote ranch. We wonder how we can be nourished by the place and how we can nourish it. We anticipate that we will engage in stories of the land and that our design of field studies will invite students to dwell in the place and to experience all dimensions of the place, as we look to shifts in identity needed to authentically experience a curriculum of place.

References


Chapter 29: Kevin O’Connor and Gladys Sterenberg


Kevin O’Connor and Gladys Sterenberg

Trapped in the needs paradigm

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This paper is a result of a collaboration across three researchers: the first author is a leader of the support system at the Waterfront school (pseudonym used) whose practice is the focus of this study, and the second and third authors engaged in the role as critical friends. Inclusion is the national policy that has the most effect on my practice as the leader of the support system for inclusive practice in a compulsory school serving all the children (ages 6-16) in the local community (approximately 500 pupils). As the leader of support I supervise special education teachers, classroom assistants, and social educators (educators who focus on social needs of learners). Another aspect of my role is to help classroom teachers with effective practices for learners with special needs, and to coordinate the delivery of special education. Inclusive practice is grounded in the ideologies of social justice, democracy, human rights and full participation of all (Ainscow, 2005; Florian, 2008; Guðjónsdóttir & Karlsdóttir, 2009; Jónsson, 2011). Inclusion is seen as an ongoing process focusing on increased performance, working against inequality, and increasing people’s sense of belonging in school and society (Booth, 2010).

My reasons for doing self-study of my practice were that I felt the functionality of inclusive practices in my school was lacking, as could be seen in the “overreliance on paraprofessionals” (Giangreco, Broer, & Suter, 2011, p. 23), in the call for pull-out programs, in the lack of innovative solutions for pupils with emotional/behavioural problems, and in the daily discourse of labelling pupils according to their assessed deficits. However, my main reason for concern was that teachers often regarded pupils with special needs as guests in their classrooms, as these pupils have allocated support and the support system “owns” them.

This self-study research, conducted over the past five years, focuses on my leadership role within an inclusion model of education and examines how my practice can help to support inclusion for the pupils, their families, and the teachers who engage with these pupils (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2004, 2006; Florian, 2014). This self-study was the central focus of this multi-layered
research that included feedback and insights from others in order to inform my understanding of my practice within the context of inclusion.

The purpose of this self-study was twofold: a) to understand my role in improving leadership and collaboration for inclusion, and b) to develop the support service in Waterfront School so that it reinforces inclusive practice. My self-study research was driven by the following over-arching question and sub-question:

- How can I as a coordinator for support services improve the practice of support services in an inclusive school?
- What can I do to make the organisation of support more inclusive?

**Methods**

This self-study research is grounded in the “development of living, situational knowledge” (Reason, 2006, p. 197). Traditionally, self-study has been connected mostly with teacher education practices (LaBoskey, 2004; Tidwell, Heston, & Fitzgerald, 2009). However, I found Samaras’ (2010) explanation of self-study as “personal situated inquiry” (p. 72) suited my purpose well in tackling issues and complexities situated within my practice. Elements such as focusing on experience in practice and not aiming for placing judgment on others through the research process are significant factors that characterise the self-study tradition (LaBoskey, 2004). The personal in self-study means that my voice is an important valued source of knowledge in my professional setting as the goal is to increase understanding of practice and my role as a practitioner and to bring about transformation of practice (Guðjónsdóttir, 2011; Guðjónsson, 2011).

In this self-study protocol, I am the central participant who worked with my two critical friends, getting feedback and insights into the data gathering and data analysis process. Subsidiary participants (school staff and administrators, a select group of pupils, and a group of mothers) provided information on the context of my practice that informed my self-study process. My research procedures were intentionally designed to be both structured and open-ended.

This is a study in and of my practice that was divided into three distinct phases: reconnaissance phase, enactment phase, and reflective phase. Grounding my understanding of the context of my own practice is critical in self-study research (Wilcox, Watson, & Paterson, 2004). Therefore, during the reconnaissance phase I conducted focus group interviews as well as individual interviews to capture how teachers, administrators, study counsellors, and social educators perceived inclusive practices in the school, as well as their ideas about how the support system could be improved. To summarize that initial step, during the reconnaissance phase both focus group and individual interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed through a grounded theory method (Berg, 2007). Based on this analysis, I created an action plan that I implemented in the next cycle of the research, the enactment phase.

In the enactment phase, the organisation of the support service was transformed according to analysis of the data from the reconnaissance phase and I recorded the process in a self-reflective research journal. Furthermore, I engaged with parents, pupils and teacher assistants in order to gather their viewpoints on inclusive practices in the school and how that could be improved from their standpoint. The analysis of this phase gave an insight into how the coordination of the support system was developed, what the main challenges were, and how collaboration between general educators and the support staff in the school was transformed.

During the reflective phase my reflection on practice involved an active and “personal process of thinking, refining, reframing and developing actions” (Loughran & Northfield, 1998). This phase involved thinking about and reflecting upon data from interviews in the reconnaissance phase, from journal entries in the enactment phase, and from discussions with the critical friends about the data and data analysis. Interconnections across these sources became the basis for my written reflections. These reflections were used in the final data discussions.
Findings

The data analysis from the reconnaissance phase revealed four major themes that influenced my organization of the enactment phase: perceptions of inclusion, coordination of support, deployment of people, and collaboration across different entities. My enactment phase then focused on three major areas: improving the support system, improving collaboration, and improving my own leadership role. The following discussion reflects the interconnections across the reconnaissance and enactment data analysis.

The data in the study have given me a new perspective on the support system within the school. I had always believed that the school needs a strong support system - not in the way that the education of children with special needs is the sole responsibility of the special needs experts, but rather that the support system and the classroom or subject teachers, building on each other strengths, would share the responsibility. However, I found that the lack of confidence teachers expressed towards working with pupils with special needs is grounded in the fact that we have a strong support system, that takes care of pupils’ perceived needs and in doing so assumes also the responsibility for their education.

This theme of needing more knowledge or of low self-esteem towards teaching a diverse group of pupils has more sides to it.

Nina: …nevertheless this [teaching diverse group of pupils] is my job and I should be prepared to deal with this. I shouldn’t be able to just claim I haven’t got the knowledge, that I don’t know anything about autistic children or something, because it is really my job to teach everyone. No matter if they are dealing with some disability. (Interview 5, p. 1).

Nina, a 6th grade classroom teacher, is here dealing with the feeling of guilt towards teaching disabled pupils, expressing worries that she does not possess the knowledge to work with them like she would like to. The teachers seemed to be grappling with the responsibilities they have teaching a class with a diverse pupil population, feeling that they are “pushing away the tasks that we should really be attending to” (Interview 5, p. 1). This notion was confirmed by Sara, a special education teacher, who said that “the teachers are insecure… they are well qualified, but they think this [teaching disabled pupils] is more complicated than it is” (Interview 9, p. 2). The administrators further explained: “the teachers feel they can handle this if the child has ‘only’ got learning difficulties. But if it has a diagnosis or some disability then this is out of their scope of practice” (Interview 4, p. 2). The challenges here are focused on who is responsible for the education of pupils with special needs, for planning teaching, and executing those plans.

Responding to diversity and developing inclusive practice depends on the prevailing thinking about disability and difference in schools. I found that the discourse of difference centres around integration and assimilating pupils into the school structure, that pupils need to be diagnosed to be able to be supported in their education.

The discourse of diagnosis is a dominant structural issue in the school. Since the school gets funding for the tailored support based on the number of pupils with diagnosis, the school administration has stated that children cannot get tailored support unless they have a diagnosis. This leads the teachers to press parents to agree to a psychologist diagnosis in the hope that they will get more support into their classrooms and even that the responsibility of educating a pupil that has complex needs is assumed by or shared with those that know more about pupils with disability. (Self-reflective research journal, Feb. 3, 2013)

Diagnosis can be said to constitute an important conception of how normality and deviance from the norm are constructed (Hamre, 2016). Signý, a 9th grade pupil at the lower secondary level, whose brother is disabled, pointed out how the presence of a diagnosed disability affects the way a person is treated differently.
Sometimes you just have to be able to do things on your own, because when you get home there is no one to help. I find this is the case with my brother because he always has someone next to him [in school] and there he needs help with really easy tasks but [at home] I just tell him to read it again. He reads it again and can solve it himself. … I think it is not good that sometimes when someone has special support the teachers and everyone start to have lower expectations for that person. (Interview w. pupils #2)

The danger of support is that pupils, who “belong” to the support system, are subjected to lower expectations and become dependent on the support they receive. This is supported by the words of Alma, a teacher assistant who stated: “some of the pupils are rather dependent on the support. Kalli does nothing on his own, he waits for the support person to come fetch him when he has to go from one room to the next” (Interview #12, p. 3). This can be described as learned helplessness, where the pupils have become dependent on support and believe they are unable to perform actions because they have gotten used to having an adult supervision, which confirms their dependency.

Another angle on the effects of support was presented by Kristín, a 6th grade pupil, who thought it was unfair or unjust that some are more entitled to support than others.

Her view was that everyone should get the support they need, as she explained with her drawing (Figure 1): “I can have my hand raised for the longest time, but one pupil gets all the help and attention” (Interview w. pupils #5).

The ideas for changing this practice involved an important call for a change in the dialogue in the school as Sif, a social educator, argued: “we shouldn't keep labelling pupils by their disability and give the support person an ownership of the pupil – ‘your Joe is here’” (interview 3, p. 5). Here she is addressing two issues: the issue of referring to pupils by their disability and of connecting the pupils to the support person and not to the class or classroom teacher that they belong to.

This call has connections to another theme that Sif came up with as she stated:
“I just think that when you interview me for a job, that you don’t just say: ‘You are hired here to work with Jónas and you are staying together for the next five years’. Rather you should say: ‘You are hired into the school as a social educator, special needs teacher or a teacher and that’s it’. One is just supposed to know one’s role…” (Interview 3, p. 10).

Sif was speaking directly to me as she addresses the way that I have hired support persons to the school, which could be contributing to the fact that people make an ownership connection between the support person and a pupil who is supported. The comment Sif made is valid because most often social educators are hired to the school to work with specific pupils, which is not the case with special education teachers or teacher assistants because they are hired to work in the school on a broader basis.

The golden thread that runs through my data is the discourse of how pupils need to be supported, and even protected, to be able to take part in the regular classroom. Traces of this discourse of deficit that entails regarding disabled pupils as too difficult to accommodate in the regular school system can be seen in the way I, in my practice, assigned support to pupils, not to classrooms or teachers, and in the way teachers, support staff and even parents understand the support system.

Findings from this study cast a light on the factors constraining or facilitating the restructuring of the support service as inclusive practice in a school. The findings show that even though I was committed to improving the practices of support, there were influences and barriers to those improvements that made the whole process complex. Breaking away from the discourses of disability, charity and pathology that dictate the practice of support, thereby changing my own and others mind set, proved to be the greatest challenge.

Discussion

My self-study of practice has brought me from one place to another in the sense of my understanding of inclusive practice and how to coordinate support in an inclusive school. I faced challenges in my inquiry into how to develop special education support as inclusive practice. This was sometimes a chaotic undertaking, sometimes frustrating and sometimes successful, but through it all it was a learning journey.

Analysis of my self-reflective research journal entries depicted moments of distress where my insecurity can be seen in my concern over chaos and uncertainty in my practice. While I considered myself a strong proponent of inclusive practice, data analysis unfolded both expected and unexpected stances within my language and actions. The practice I was coordinating was focused on assimilation, on normalising pupils to assist them with belonging and to be participants in education. It can be said that I, as most of the people I was working with, was trapped in the ‘needs’ paradigm, viewing pupils’ difficulties in school as needing repairs and compensation, which is a practice that leads to low expectations and learned helplessness of the pupil.

The needs paradigm, as a discourse of deficit, positions disabled pupils as too difficult to accommodate in the regular school system and can be evidenced in the way I assigned support to pupils, not to classrooms or teachers. This discourse relates to the medical discourse of diagnosing and providing therapy to function and be normalized, that ignores pupils’ strengths, resources and humanity (Hamre, 2016; Rieser, 2011). Through the reflective phase I could see that my thoughts and actions in the reconnaissance and enactment phases were coloured by these discourses without me being aware of it. As a consequence, my attempts to develop inclusive practice were somewhat underdeveloped.

This self-study has given me an insight into how we need to transform practices and pedagogies by focusing on the resources, competences and funds of knowledge pupils bring to school, thereby moving away from focusing on pupils’ needs (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Rodriguez, 2007). Planning education and organising learning situations that respond to pupils is then based on the knowledge that teachers have about their pupils, in the collaboration between school practitioners and in strong leadership for inclusion.
Diversity implies that the “myth of the normal child” (Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011, p. 2124) needs to be dismantled. This means unravelling the ideologies of difference such as ableism and whiteness (Leonardo, 2009) that position some pupils as normal while others are marginalised and therefore need to be integrated into the traditional educational model that was not created with them in mind in the first place (Florian & Spratt, 2013; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). Hence, when creating a learning environment that encompasses different cultural and linguistic practice, where a variety of ability is a valid form of participation and medium for learning, it is important to take a critical and reflective stance toward the myth of the normal child. In so doing, an understanding of the term ‘diversity’ must be expanded beyond disability or ethnic difference to focus on the value of differences in gender, socio-economic status, cultural group, abilities, learning styles and interests (Ainscow et al., 2004). Thus, inclusive practice is distinct in the ways the school system responds to diversity, how decisions about support and resources are made and how specialist knowledge is employed (Florian, 2010).

Through this self-study, I have gained a unique insight into practices in my school, and an understanding of the complexities involved in improving practice towards inclusion. Through questioning the practice of support and inclusion, and the politics and policies behind such practice, I have searched for ways to improve myself as a practitioner as well as the practice of support. I have reframed my conception of practice with the assistance of my research participants in the Waterfront school, and through communication and dialogue with critical friends and the literature.

I have come to recognise that inclusion cannot be achieved by transferring special education thinking and practice onto the mainstream setting; rather the school system must be transformed so that everyone has a place in it. I no longer see special needs education as a separate entity within the school that needs to be strong to ‘save’ pupils from learning difficulties, where a diagnosis is important for providing knowledge about pupil’s disability to conform to the norm. Rather, I think about school as a place where difference is accounted for as fundamental to human development which means that practices are aimed at creating rich learning environments for all pupils through differentiation, focusing on what is to be taught rather than who is to learn it. The learners and their families are at the centre of every policy, every curricular and pedagogical decision, and are given space for an authentic role in decision making about their school and classroom, about their ways of learning and how they want to be supported. Notions of ability as non-changeable are rejected, and thus pupils are grouped, not by their perceived ability, but based on the task at hand to support everyone’s learning.

For me, as a researcher, the strength of the self-study methodology is that it builds on spiral thinking and on a flexible, iterative process which enables me to use the data I am gathering to build on my understanding and to inform and to shape my thinking. Through this flexibility, I have been able to use what I have learned to transform my thoughts and beliefs about inclusive education, about the practice of support, and about schooling in general.

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Professional identities and pedagogical practices: A self-study on the “becomings” of a teacher educator and teachers

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The topic of identity, and more specifically teacher identity, has been a productive construct for teacher educators and education researchers to gain insight on how context, positionality, and past history informs participation in the scope of activities and endeavors that professionals in the field of education engage in (Britzman, 1992; Olsen, 2008). Identity has been defined as “being recognized as a certain ‘kind of person’” (Gee, 2000, p. 99), and teacher identity considered a professional identity, “how teachers see themselves as teachers based on their interpretations of their continuing interaction with their context” (Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink, & Hofman, 2012, p. 116). For teacher educators, inquiry on one’s professional identity and attending to how students (preservice and inservice teachers) understand their teacher identities can enable a recognition of how to improve one’s professional practice in the teacher education classroom (Coia & Taylor, 2009) and better prepare and develop teachers cognizant of social and equity issues in education (Kitchen, Fitzgerald, & Tidwell, 2016). The purpose of this self-study was to critically examine my pedagogy and professional practice in a graduate course with inservice teachers to gain a greater sense of my own professional identity as a teacher educator, and how, through my work with these students, promote teacher identities committed to educational equity and social justice for all members of the school community.

My work as an urban teacher educator at a liberal arts university in the northeastern United States is informed by my prior experiences as an urban early childhood and elementary teacher. My professional practice is rooted in critical pedagogies that seek to disrupt status quo norms and facilitate students’ socio-critical consciousness to be able to foster inclusive and equitable K12 classrooms (Paris & Alim, 2017). However, despite my commitment to promote classroom contexts and learning experiences conducive towards such an aim, I possessed little insight on the specific ways that my pedagogy contributed to an understanding of professional self (i.e., teacher identity). In the summer of 2017 I commenced this self-study, attentive to the pedagogical unfolding in a course on urban curriculum. Specifically, I sought to identify how, in my role as a

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teacher educator advocating for educational equity and social justice, the course experiences shed light on the emergence of my own professional identity to further my students' understanding of their roles and responsibilities as teachers relevant to equity and social justice. I explored ways I engaged with students, my own meaning-making and reflections of course events, and my students' feedback, commentary, and reflections. This self-study has informed my recognition of aspects of my pedagogy conducive (and not conducive) in promoting a teacher workforce committed to serving as change agents for social justice. In addition, it enabled me to understand how I can better enact a professional self that reflects the equity oriented and social justice values I claim. Given that systems of schooling have historically marginalized students and communities of diverse backgrounds (Sleeter & Carmona, 2017), the time is ripe to investigate how the identity and practices of an urban teacher educator can enable teachers to identify and enact professional identities as equity-minded, social justice educators. This research contributes to self-study literature on the professional identities of teacher educators (Pinnegar & Murphy, 2011; Young & Erickson, 2011) and the professional identities of teachers (Bower & Parson, 2016; Henry, 2016) to identify how teacher education can better support education professional to serve as change agents for social justice.

**Theoretical framework**

The concept of *becoming* proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) theoretically informed this self-study. Deleuze and Guattari offer the concept of becoming as an alternative to linear, developmental ontological models. Becoming attends to processes of multiple socio-discursive-material elements coming into composition, constructing and reconstructing so as to produce the emergence of particular subjectivities or understanding of self, as with identities. From this lens, identities that individuals possess are neither fixed nor static. Rather, the sense of self one possesses and/or how one is recognized as stems from participation with and contributions to a constant flow of activities that are always in flux, always malleable, and always subject to reinterpretation. As a non-normative ontology, becoming attends to how multiple elements interact to promote particular forms of function rather than a focus on labeling, defining, or constraining a “thing” as a particular ontological fixture. Human (and non-human) becomings are, “as a constantly changing assemblage of forces, an epiphenomenon arising from chance confluences of languages, organisms, societies, expectations, laws, and so on” (Stagoll, 2012).

Applying the lens of becoming to teacher identity suggests that how one is recognized as a teacher (by self or others) is always open to change. As a teacher educator, becoming suggests my own professional identity as amorphic, affected by and affecting the context that I teach in through my multiple interactions and engagements. As a self-study researcher, this lens allows me to attend to the affective, social, relational and discursive elements that inform the enactment of my professional self. Furthermore, the enactment of my professional self (my becoming as a teacher educator) does not surface in an isolated vacuum, but via a multiplicity of interactions, engagements, connections, affiliations, and networks. Among the actors within these networks are my students who themselves are engaged in flows of becoming as teachers.

Employing the concept of becoming to the self-study of my teaching practices, my work with my teacher students, the processes of understanding myself as a teacher educator and in turn, my students as educators themselves, shed light on how, through the relationships and pedagogical participation in the course, the role of teacher and teacher educator were manifoldly recast. Becoming served as a productive conceptual tool to illuminate a need to modify my pedagogy to better support teacher identities as change agents for social justice. For the students, it suggested a reconsideration of the ways they enact their identities as teachers.

**Methods**

This qualitative self-study drew from a variety of analytic approaches and data sources to gain insight on my professional identity as a teacher educator and those of my students as teachers.
Among the data sources were a researcher journal I maintained that documented the course along with analytic reflections on the learning experiences, anonymous exit slips from all students for each class session, beginning/middle/end of course surveys, and my class notes/memos. After the course conclusion I invited all ten students in the class to participate in the study. Five agreed to partake, and each individually completed an audio-recorded and transcribed interview. Participants also provided copies of their course assignment (a unit of study).

Given that self-study does not privilege a particular methodology (Lassonde, Galman, & Cosnick, 2009), I drew elements from narrative research, autoethnography, and rhizoanalysis; this enabled a “method with no methodology” (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015), unencumbered by the epistemological constraints of a singular research method and free to draw as necessary from these varied approaches. I began by considering the collected data sources in conjunction with the theoretical construct of becoming, in essence putting philosophy to work (Strom & Martin, 2017) in self-study. The meaning making (or the sculpting of the data) was a recursive process of reading and rereading the discursive data sources, critical reflection of these in relation to the concept of becoming, and attention to how my own affective responses informed analysis (Martin, forthcoming). I coded (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) the exit slips and the surveys, keeping record of the emergent constructions of myself as teacher educator and participants as teachers. I attended to the flows of becoming (ways that I and the participants understood self as teacher/teacher educator) in the journal entries and narratives that surfaced in the interview transcripts. This process supported a consideration of how participation in the course sequence of events reflected the becomings of particular professional selves. I employed rhizomatic mapping (Martin & Kamberelis, 2013) to construct a visual cartography of the connections between my own understanding of self as a teacher educator and the emergent foci in the data sources. I revisited the previously generated codes and read them parallel with the maps. Salient points of convergence surfaced as analytic findings.

In the following I report one of the major findings, suggesting that critical consciousness raising in the teacher education classroom is ultimately not sufficient in the struggle to further educational equity (i.e., equity-oriented teacher identities). To illustrate this finding I report on a critical incident from the course. I discuss this in relation to my experience and one of the participant’s, Loretta, a mid-career secondary language arts teacher in an urban high school. As I learned (and as Loretta’s discourses suggest), identifying forms of resistance to oppression and ways of advancing social justice are as vital for teachers and teacher educators as are opportunities for identifying and analyzing systems of oppression and marginalization.

Outcomes

A primary finding of this study is that my professional identity as a teacher educator and my students’ teacher identities surfaced through processes of inter/intra-actions: with each other, the course materials, conceptualizing the application of the course content to our own pedagogies, reflections on personal/professional background and experiences, and our desired future professional selves. The self-study reaffirmed that I do not possess a static, fixed sense of self as teacher educator nor my students as teachers. Our becomings as teacher/teacher educator were an inter/intra-play, a (re)cognizing of how we enact our roles as educators and how the multiplicity of elements engaged with plaited in the production of an identity and a recognition of professional self.

My work as a teacher educator contributed to (i.e., affected and was affected by) the becomings that unfolded throughout the course. Thinking with and employing the concept of becoming enabled me to recognize that my role (or identity) as a teacher educator who seeks to advance educational equity and social justice must be open to change, towards reconfiguration, towards a new interpretation of how to enact this professional self. Self-study shed light on how my clinging to prior conceptualizations on the enactment of this role did little to facilitate the needed dispositions and qualities requisite of teachers to serve as change agents.
I began the course with the goal of facilitating my students’ critical consciousness about equity issues in education. Course readings, discussion questions, and prompts were designed to enable students to consider how school structures perpetuate particular educational inequities to the detriment of students of color and students of low socioeconomic status. My intent (through learning activities, readings, and group dialogue) was to enable the students in the course to gain insight on these issues and elevate their awareness of the ways school systems operate. Thus, I was seeking to enact a professional identity committed to facilitating my students’ recognition of the imperative to engage with these issues in an effort to promote equity. Yet despite this aim, student feedback (in the form of the surveys and exit slips during the course and in the interviews after course completion) indicated that while this may have promoted their critical consciousness, it also led to feelings of defeat, being overwhelmed, and powerlessness to eradicate educational inequities within their school systems.

For example, during her interview Loretta stated that throughout the course, she found the discussions on critical issues and content to be deeply moving and insightful, yet troubling as well. Loretta indicated a deep value for promoting student learning in her high school language arts courses, believing that if her students were to be able to productively engage in society beyond their schooling years, they would need opportunities to consider challenging and difficult social issues. At the same time, even though she implemented such learning experiences in her own classroom, Loretta expressed the belief that countering, dismantling, or working against oppressive systems was beyond her capacity, perhaps even impossible to surmount. Even though she introduced social and controversial issues in her own classroom to promote her own students’ awareness of the social context they live in (e.g., immigration issues, LGBTQ rights, economic justice), she struggled to identify how (or if), as a teacher, she was contributing to educational equity with any impact.

This was similarly expressed by other students not only during group discussions, but among the other participants in their individual interviews. Reading my students’ exit slips and survey feedback, and reflecting on these, made plain the shortcoming of addressing social justice issues in the teacher education classroom without also addressing varied forms of resistance and efforts or initiatives that can contribute to social change. I learned that a pedagogy focused on the problem without attending to potential solutions may have contributed to a growing awareness of systems of schooling as tools of oppression and marginalization being met with feelings of powerlessness. Inadvertently, such a pedagogy and the inter/intra-actions of the class constructed the role of teacher as incapable (or unable) to diminish educational inequities and social injustices.

I learned it was not enough in my work as a teacher educator to engage students in issues of social justice and critical consciousness. Facilitating classroom conversations that analyze and shed light on how schools privilege some students while marginalizing others did promote critical consciousness among my students. However, constructing my professional identity and limiting my pedagogy with this aim served to hinder my students’ sense of professional identities as capable of enacting change. Such a pedagogy, while productive, is not enough in and of itself. As a teacher educator, I needed to do more (and do something different) to enact (to become) the kind of teacher educator I recognized myself as and wanted to be recognized as.

As a teacher educator I needed to promote learning opportunities to promote my students’ awareness of their abilities to serve as change agents. Such an understanding would enable them to identify actions, steps, and involvement that they could take to support equitable educative experiences for students and to help diminish educational inequities. This self-study highlighted how, during the course, an initially unplanned learning activity contributed to this objective.

One of the dominant points of inquiry in the course focused on how particular bodies of knowledge are sanctioned and included by schools as requisite elements of school curricula, while often the bodies and funds of knowledge from diverse students are glaringly absent (Sleeter & Carmona, 2017). After one group discussion on this topic, many students expressed that they had never considered the politicization of curriculum before; while acknowledging such a reality, many of the students felt unable to counter this facet of schooling within the context of their own classrooms.
The evening after that class session, I journaled and reflected upon the day’s events. I reviewed that day’s exit slips and realized that many students were expressing a sense of defeat and a lack of autonomy in their roles as teachers. Critical consciousness did not translate to a sense of efficacy to enact a professional identity as a change agent. That evening I choose to follow a line of flight, another concept from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) that reflects breaks from status quo or routine courses of action. I decided to not pursue my regularly scheduled lesson and activity for the following day, but instead facilitate an exercise to counter the negative feelings expressed by my students. In order to do this, I planned to draw from the class’s understanding of power and connect this to theoretical constructs of power to expand their sense of how, as teachers, they can enact their power (and their professional identities) to promote social change.

The activity began with a class discussion and brainstorming activity on what power means and how it can be used. Having elicited numerous responses from students, I then facilitated a discussion on other definitions and views of power which many students had not considered. The class divided into small groups and each group was tasked to draw from these definitions of power to identify ways that they, as teachers, could enact their power to support educational equity, even if it was not within their own classroom.

As I joined the groups and participated in their conversations, I heard students discuss a variety of ways to enact their power as teachers. Many stated that they could reach out to local and state representatives, become part of boards of education, join curriculum committees to diversify the content their students are exposed to, and join professional action networks and teacher organizations dedicated to social justice. Engaging in this self-study and thinking with the concept of becoming promoted my own insight that as a teacher educator, I could not narrow my professional identity as attentive solely to what my education students would need to do within their classrooms, spaces wherein they frequently mentioned a lack of autonomy to enact the kinds of practices (and by extension, the kind of identity) that they desired. During her interview, Loretta expressed how this activity and discussion contributed to the realization that enabling change in schooling systems did not need to be confined to her classroom. As a teacher, she could promote equitable systems of schooling through active involvement with community organizations and regional affiliations that share her values.

This pedagogical experience illustrates teacher identity as processes or flows of becoming through the inter/intra-actions between and among the students, myself, and the course content. Conducting the self-study informed my awareness of the need to modify the enactment of my professional self in order to be recognized (and recognize myself) as the kind of teacher educator I desire to be. The experience of brainstorming, collaboration, and identifying how to enact the role of teacher in different contexts with different aims contributed to my students’ reinterpretation of professional self. As professionals in the field of education, we are never any one “thing”, fixed and static. We are never confined by any predetermined discourse on who we are, what we do, and what we can do. Instead, we possess the agentic capacity to respond to the context that we are in, to the world around us, and affect the material circumstances and conditions that surround us in multiple, diverse ways.

**Conclusion**

This self-study highlights how being a teacher educator in the 21st century means supporting teachers to identify and act upon the connections between their work in a multiplicity of contexts beyond the normative constructs and discourses on what it means to be a teacher. The critical incident and the power exercise supported my students to reconstruct their professional identities, diminishing the sense of powerlessness and recognizing areas where they in fact held agency. This incident and the becoming that it contributed to represents a particular becoming at a specific point in time. Ultimately, productive and enabling identities (including teacher identity and teacher educator identity) will emerge and reemerge through flows of becoming.

Many teachers report professional dissatisfaction, feeling a lack of autonomy and agency in their work (e.g., Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015) and an inability to contribute to social and equity
oriented changes (Oakes, Lipton, Anderson, & Stillman, 2013). For many, contributing to such aims undergirded their initial interest in entering the teaching force. This self-study suggests that teacher educators may be able to mitigate such affective dispositions through active participation and engagement with their students to promote becomings that acknowledge and embrace an expansive definition of what it means to be a teacher. Within the course discussed in this paper, this surfaced during the power exercise and discussion. For those teaching preservice teachers, it may be through role play scenarios, case studies, or approximations of practice that attend to how teachers can contribute to equitable educative experiences and advocate for social justice in education while engaged in professional settings that are challenging, regimented, and micromanaged. Future self-studies could attend to how teacher educators implement and enact such experiences in their classrooms. Further, future research could investigate not just preservice/inservice teacher becomings as education professionals, but also the becomings of teacher educators themselves. Such research would provide insight not only on the pedagogy enacted within the teacher education classroom and the emergence of professional self on the part of the students, but also the enactment of professional self on the part of the teacher educator. If we as teacher educators aim to promote professional identities among our students that positively and productively contribute to their school sites and to society as a whole, then we should also consider how our own understanding of professional self, our own becomings, are of service to such aims.

References


Understanding the origins of our pedagogies of teacher education: Crossing borders through “tricky cases”

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In the inaugural issue of our flagship journal, Studying Teacher Education, Loughran (2005) opined that, while there is no one way to conduct self-study research, there is a broadly defined coherence to the nature and purpose of the work. Self-study of teacher education practices is, by and large, considered a methodology that encourages teacher educators to describe, interpret, and analyze the sources and effects of their pedagogies of teacher education. In so doing, self-study researchers are called on to make an ontological commitment (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009) to the work by examining their selves-in-relation to practice, to their teacher education students, to their personal histories, and to their developing identities.

One perennial challenge for any scholar who is new to self-study work is to find ways to situate themselves within self-study methodology and literature given their prior academic knowledge. This challenge is amplified, we believe, for researchers who have trained outside of the Anglophone academy, who might find it difficult to see their academic traditions represented in self-study literature, which is largely (although not exclusively) grounded in the North American and Australian academic traditions. Calls for increasing the diversity of voices within the self-study community have abounded for many years, and much important work has been done in this regard (e.g., Tidwell & Fitzgerald, 2006; Kitchen et al., 2016). We take such calls seriously by attending to the linguistic diversity and different academic training of the authors as we explore the ways in which our academic backgrounds, first languages, and personal histories shape (and have shaped) who we are as teacher educators.

Cécile is an experienced academic who received initial academic training and socialization in France. She is new to self-study methodology but is fully grounded in a theoretical framework, *la didactique du plurilinguisme* (Coste & Simon, 2009; Dabène, 2003) [didactics of plurilingualism – a sociolinguistic and sociodidactic theory that grew up in response to the hegemonic structures facing multiple language learners in France], that has not been taken up in a significant way in Anglophone academies (Moore & Gajo, 2009). Shawn is also an experienced academic. He

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found self-study methodology (LaBoskey, 2004) as a doctoral student in Canada and made it the primary methodological focus of his academic work. Both taught at the same Faculty of Education at a Canadian university for 5 years; one in French and one in English. We are uniquely suited to be critical friends (Schuck & Russell, 2005) due to shared passions for teacher education in scholarship and practice, in part due to our recent work participating in the re-design of a teacher education program, our shared interest in language education policy and practice (Sabatier et al., 2017), and our shared interest in the nature and development of knowledge of teaching – albeit from perspectives developed in different crucibles of experience.

**Self-study of teacher and teacher education practices**

Self-study methodology is “a body of practices, procedures, and guidelines used by those who work in a discipline or engage in an inquiry” (Samaras & Freese, 2006, p. 56). Our mutual commitment to helping teacher candidates name, interpret, and analyze their learning experiences in their teacher education program has been the foundation of what Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) have referred to as the “ontological commitment” of self-study researchers. We are mindful of Bullough and Pinnegar’s (2004) discussion of the “four perplexing clusters of problems for self-study,” which are the problems of definition, ontology, form, and scholarship (p. 340). We see these problems as highlight interrelated; our shared background in continental philosophy shapes our ongoing interest in returning to problems of definition and ontology in particular. Ontology, for example, can be defined in at least four ways according to Hofweber (2014); we find his summation of the challenges of ontology (and thus, presumably, ontological commitment) particularly useful: “Ontology is thus a philosophical discipline that encompasses besides the study of what there is and the study of the general features of what there is also the study of what is involved in settling questions about what there is in general, especially for the philosophically tricky cases.” Self-study methodology offers, in our view, a cornucopia of “tricky cases,” which, in turn forms what Bullock (2009) has referred to as a “basis-for-knowing.”

We define collaborative self-study as methodology, a “basis-for-knowing” (Bullock, 2009) and a space for developing professional knowledge about teaching teachers. One important feature of the kind of self-study work that resonates with both of us is the potential of critical friendship for encouraging the kind of rigorous examination of identity, practice, and pedagogy that we believe is necessary to further our growth as teacher educators. As Samaras et al. (2004) suggested, guidelines for a consideration of life history methods in self-study demand “self-knowing and forming – and reforming, a personal identity,” modelling and testing effective reflection,” and “pushing the boundaries of teaching” (p. 907). Critical friendship, which is both a way of advocating for the success of one another’s work (Costa & Kallick, 1993) while providing a means to “negotiate [our] shared understandings of how [our] students become teachers and how teachers improve” (Schuck & Russell, 2005, p. 119) seems fundamental to both personal history work and collaborative self-study more generally.

**Objectives of the study**

Our current research program explores the intersections between Francophone and Anglophone traditions of reflective practice, reflexivity and, more specifically, currently seeks to contribute to self-study methodological literature by introducing ideas and frameworks from theories of didactic interaction from the French academy. We believe that the best way to re-theorize about self-study in light of other frameworks is to engage in collaborative self-study that is specifically designed to evoke our personal histories in relation to how we approach our practices as teacher educators. In particular, this paper focuses on:

1. Using personal history (Samaras et al., 2004) approaches to self-study in order to understand the conceptual origins of our pedagogies of teacher education and, in so doing, consider how our identities as teacher educators were (continue to be) shaped through interactions with teacher candidates and with colleagues.
2. Interpreting our personal histories to discover how self-study methodology might enhance our understanding of the theoretical frameworks that guide our pedagogical approaches (La didactique du plurilinguisme and Schön’s (1983) views on reflective practice) and, in turn, how these frameworks might enhance our conceptual interpretation of self-study methodology.

Method

Samaras et al. (2004) asserted that a wide variety of qualitative methods tend to be used in personal history self-study while arguing that, generally, personal history self-study is valuable for “self-knowing and forming—and reforming—a professional identity, modeling and testing effective reflection; and, pushing the boundaries of teaching” (p. 913). We see our work as inexorably linked to these three ideas with a particular emphasis on identity at this stage. Our data sources were two-fold: audio recordings of regular meetings between the two authors and journals in which we recorded our thoughts in between meetings. Our usual, but not exclusive, practice was to begin our meeting by responding, in writing to the other person's journal. Our meeting then focused on expanding on these ideas through dialogue, as we both sought additional clarification both about what the other person wrote and about our own initial responses. Subsequent meetings often began with revisiting a key idea that was stimulated by a conversation in the previous meeting, since we both had time to consider our conversations more fully.

The data were analyzed with a view to identify turning points (Bullock & Ritter, 2011); of particular importance were turning points that revealed a new way of thinking about our personal histories and their impact on how we have framed ourselves as teacher educators in reaction to particular problems of practice. One unique feature of our work is that both verbal and written data were created in French and English, as felt appropriate to each author and within each situation. Freely communicating in either language was one of the ways in which we recognized the diversity that exists between our authorship, and we hope that this style might provide some insight into conducting self-study methodology across cultural and linguistic boundaries. Although this chapter is written in English, we feel it is important to recognize the ways in which our choices of language shape and influence how we think.

Outcome 1: Navigating sub-identities; becoming insider-outsiders

Swennen, Jones, and Volman (2010) argued, in part, that becoming a teacher educator requires one to navigate multiple “sub-identities”: school teacher, teacher in higher education, teacher of teachers, and researcher. Our collaborative self-study contributes to this kind of broad teacher education literature by shedding light on how our sub-identities as teachers of teachers and prior academic socialization as researchers in different contexts to the ones in which we now teach have had an impact on our pedagogies of teacher education. Furthermore, our work contributes more specifically to self-study literature: Skerrett (2008), for example, called attention to the challenges of teaching future teachers when one comes from a non-dominant culture. Cécile comes from France, a minority culture in Canada, and is asked to teach future teachers of French – some of whom come from other French-speaking parts of Canada and some of whom speak French as an additional language. Shawn recently began a new position at a university in which he is the only Anglo-Canadian member of the Faculty. The politics of teaching in and teaching about French and English within Canada and in Europe figure heavily into our self-study work – they are indeed “tricky cases.”

Significantly, our first self-study conversation began with a call to understand more clearly what is meant by the term “self” in self-study. Initially, we spoke about the difference between understanding our “professional self” and our “personal self”, and indeed the importance of recognizing multiple selves in relation to our practices and our identity development.

Although both of us taught in the same Faculty of Education and both of us have taught in the K-12 system, we neither completed our teacher education program nor taught within the local
context. This outsider status was, to our surprise, felt by both of us, albeit in different ways. Cécile related a story in which, early in her career at the university, she was asked to introduce herself to a group of teacher candidates. She responded by introducing her professional qualifications and the frameworks in which she worked; as is customary in France. A seconded teacher working within the teacher education program, somewhat dismissively, stated in response: “Yes…but who are you?” Cécile was unused to being asked to define her identity to teacher candidates in this way. She had a definition of identity imposed on her by the discourse community (Gee, 2000) of the faculty—there was clearly an accepted way to talk about who one is as a teacher and it did not match her initial expectations. To be asked a question of “Who are you?,” in that fashion, implied that her response was somehow lacking in substance and that she had thus failed to cross the border from education professor “from abroad” to teacher educator at SFU.

It was not until our collaborative self-study that Cécile realized that this sense of malaise was not due to “Canadian culture” but to the local context, as Shawn clarified his own, similarly problematic experiences. Shawn frequently commented on his lack of insider status due to the fact he was educated and taught in Ontario; the implication from more than a few teachers has been that his expertise was limited having never taught in a local school district. The sense of professional identity crisis culminated in seeking recognition of his Ontario teaching credentials in British Columbia, as a way of proving, in effect, that he had the same right to be in K-12 schools. Similarly, Shawn commented on the much more profound interest that this Faculty seemed to have in non-discipline based holistic approaches and, perhaps as a result, to talking far more openly about identity with teacher and experienced teacher candidates. He remarked that the teacher education program, at the beginning of his time at the Faculty, seemed to him to be fundamentally about developing an identity as a teacher. The lack of focus on content and what might be termed pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986) was something he was unused to from his experiences in Eastern Canada. Whilst in other faculties he had openly critiqued a lack of attention to development of teacher voice, he felt that the current teacher education program had forgotten all other elements of teacher education. Like Cécile, he felt that his formation in education outside of the province had framed him in particular ways in eyes of colleagues and, in particular, he was keenly aware of being perceived as overly formal and unwilling to talk openly about his identity as a teacher educator.

As Cécile noted: “Our teacher education program has its own discourse and a way of doing things; insider or outsider, you have to make a choice. The Faculty Associates [seconded local teachers, with whom we work] make that choice on our behalf; they tell you if you belong or not.” Shawn responded: “It has been pre-decided what topics a professor is ‘qualified’ to talk about…we are outsider-insiders, or insider-outsiders.” Cécile expressed her frustration with the way she has been portrayed to teacher candidates by Faculty Associate colleagues from time to time, recounting a moment just before she was to teach a group of teacher candidates: “I was getting ready to begin my lesson when a teacher candidate said, ‘Tu vas nous illuminer aujourd’hui? [You are going to enlighten us today?]. The origin of this particular framing was clear to me.” Opposing a ‘we’ referring to the teacher candidate community to a ‘you’ referring to Cécile sets up a power dynamic. The outsider status conferred by this teacher candidate on Cécile unveils an inherent complexity in the relationships between teacher candidates and teacher educators where a power is framed in a particular way. In this instance, a delineated boundary has been drawn reproducing an authoritative discourse unquestioned by the teacher education community at the university at large. As Merriam et al. (2001) stated, “Positionality, power, and representation proved to be useful concepts for exploring insider/outsider dynamics” (p. 405).

Years later after the incidents we recounted to one another during our conversations, we realize that we have both navigated new sub-identities in response to institutional identity cultures and prevailing discourses within the program. For example, although Shawn still considers himself much more focused on the pragmatics of learning to teach from disciplinary-based experiences than many colleagues, the discourse communities have encouraged him to articulate some of the ways in which his personal identities have contributed to professional identities. He has written elsewhere (Bullock, 2014) about the vulnerability he felt revealing to teacher candidates the degree
to which his practice of martial arts influenced his pedagogical stance; that vulnerability has since led to multiple academic publications and, significantly, a willingness to engage with the martial arts teaching community as both a martial arts teacher and an education professor, instead of solely as an insider.

**Outcome 2: Foundations and formations**

The second significant outcome in our work is the degree to which our formation as scholars in graduate school continues to shape how we see ourselves as teacher educators and, in many ways, serve as conceptual rudders during the turbulent waters of teacher education. In this work, we focus on the possibilities of *la didactique du plurilinguisme* and reflective practice for understanding our selves-in-practice as teacher educators.

During our first meeting, Cécile was confronted by the fact that, despite being new to self-study, she had an intuitive understanding of many of the issues of the importance of understanding self-in-practice as a result of her formation in *la didactique du plurilinguisme*. The theory exists at the intersection of sociolinguistics and sociodidactics (Dabène, 2003). Its founders were fundamentally interested in multiple language learners and the associated challenges they encountered with the hegemonic structures of the existing educational system. *La didactique du plurilinguisme* helped to free up the positioning of social actors in relation to the modes of domination in society (Blanchet 2007; Dabène, 2003; Galisson, 1989). Its purpose is to question the nature of teaching and learning—that is, what there is, in relation to socialisation and individualisation in “a web of complex and interacting pluralities” (Coste & Simon, 2009). It supports the idea that both education and teacher education can work towards understanding the complexity of issues concerning plurality by a host of embodied experiences, such as life histories and multiple identities. It offers, in our view, a productive, and vastly under-utilized, frame of reference describing, interpreting, and analysing research on teacher education.

Before beginning our first meeting, Cécile's first line in her research journal was “Who am I as a teacher educator?” She thus began from a stance of examining her conceptual foundations of practice as a teacher educator and, in a significant moment, was motivated to create a diagram of a tree to explain the intersections of her research interests and her formation as a scholar. Although it had always been clear to Cécile that she was educated in *la didactique du plurilinguisme*, it was less clear to her how much her scholarly interests in issues of, for example, social justice for minority language learners transversed the boundaries of *la didactique du plurilinguisme*. Her insight was: “The ‘pluri’ in *plurilinguisme* has always called me to take multiple approaches to a given problem . . . in effect, everything has become a plural. For this reason, I understand why I prefer to think of the power of study of multiple selves in self-study, and why I tend to say ‘self-studies’ instead of ‘self-study’ when I speak in English.” By focusing on learners and teachers as actors of social change, *la didactique du plurilinguisme* offers an interesting framework to anchor the study of the Self, or, in our view, Selves in relation to others and to practice. In contexts of diversity, an increasing number of students and teachers speak different languages at home and at school. How do they make sense of these identities? How do we, as teacher educators, take these identities into account in our pedagogy?

Shawn’s experiences thus far in the self-study have encouraged him to analyse carefully the conceptual foundations with which he approaches problems in and experiences with teacher education. The act of re-interpreting Schön (1983), in particular, with Cécile made him wonder about the degree to which he needs to be more explicit about the language he uses to think about his classroom interactions with teacher candidates and, as a result, the way he teaches about thinking about classroom interactions in the K-12 system. Concurrent with Bullock (in press), this new work underscores Shawn’s lifelong, but problematically tacit, interest in and engagement with and from language education. Despite attending to the use of conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1983) as a way of analysing classroom interactions for the bulk of his career, Shawn seems to have heretofore lacked the confidence to strongly situate himself within language education. An exploration of the social implications of *la didactique du plurilinguisme*, which address some of
his longstanding concerns in Anglophone literature and the bilingual nature of this self-study has been, in many ways, the beginning of a re-formation rather than a re-assertion of his initial formation as a doctoral student and new academic.

The plurality of publics: Towards self-studies

Our self-study began as a way to understand the foundational theoretical frameworks on which we have constructed our respective careers and, in so doing, analyse and interpret the ways in which these frameworks shaped (and continue to shape) our pedagogies of teacher education. We also explored the possibilities of boundary-crossing, both linguistically and in a scholarly sense, to understand how we might imagine possibilities for ourselves as teacher educators. Samaras et al. (2004) cautioned that personal history self-study “is a way to put that [teacher educator] identity on the line and risk needing reform and recreate the self while also attempting to transform curricula.” (p. 915). Our collaborative work makes us wonder whether identities of teacher educators should ever be considered in isolation, as the often-emotive nature of our work—particularly whilst sharing personal histories fraught with senses of being outside a narrative—seems ideally suited to work with a critical friend. We remain mindful that “what we publicly reveal about our practice must further the cause of teacher education” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004, p. 340).

In this spirit, we offer the notion of plurality to the self-study community as a major outcome to our consideration of the “tricky cases” encountered in our personal histories. Although we are certainly not the first in the community to speak of pluralities, we do offer the idea of Cécile’s notion of self-studies as a fundamentally revealing characterization of the multiple tensions encountered in our practices. We demonstrated moments where we were called to cross boundaries in difficult situations to create new sub-identities and that self-study can shed multiple understandings on old, deeply held initial scholarly formations. Loughran (2005) once cautioned about the problematic naming of self-study, particularly that notions of self conjure up image of solipsism. Perhaps the singular “study” is subject to the same challenges.

References


S-STEP methodology to study teaching graduate students

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In keeping with the theme of the Castle Conference 2018, this project seeks to apply the S-STEP methodology beyond teacher educator practice to graduate teaching practice in education. The purpose of this study is to apply the S-STEP methodology as both a methodological framework and a theoretical framework to explore how, or if, graduate teacher effectiveness can be assessed through an analysis of student course evaluations. The research question for this study is: Can an analysis of student course evaluations in a Diversity Studies course provide insights for effective graduate student teaching?

I am an instructor in a number of Master of Education programs in Canada. I have been teaching Diversity Studies to graduate students since 2015. All of the students I teach are adult learners. I am a white, cis-gender, with an invisible learning disability (dyslexia), middle class, educated, Christian and English-speaking woman. My social location as a member of a number of privileged social groups affords me a privileged space in a complex web of intersecting identities. My social location also affords me the opportunity to both teach in graduate education and to conduct research on my own teaching practice.

My teaching practice is grounded in a particular epistemology that considers graduate education as relational, dialogical, and situated. My practice of teaching is grounded in three themes of critical theory (Freire, 1970), a) I want to avoid the banking method of education which “transforms students into receiving objects [and] attempts to control thinking and action, leads men and women to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power” (p. 77), b) I want to create a dialogic relationship between students and teachers because I believe that teaching is a mutual learning experience, and c) I want to support students in a problem-posing method of teaching as they move from literal consciousness through interpretive, then critical consciousness of their life worlds, in a manner similar to Freire’s process of conscientization (1970). However, I was worried that my ability to enact these Freirian themes in a course on Diversity issues would be interrupted by my privileged social location.

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This study was a response to the doubts I felt about my ability to teach issues of diversity to a diverse student population while I occupied a privileged social position. I wanted to study how (or if) these feelings of self-doubt were connected to student perceptions of teacher effectiveness. The courses in this study are graduate level courses in M. Ed. Programs at two different institutions. I was both the designer and the instructor of all of the courses. At the end of each course, I received a summary of the quantitative and qualitative data from the student course evaluations. In this study, I applied the S-STEP methodology to analyze the qualitative data to seek insights into the relationship between my social identity, my social location, and student perceptions of teacher effectiveness.

**Theoretical framework**

Self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP) is a sub-discipline under the broader research methodology of self-study with a focus on teacher education. The methodology, however, can be extended outside of teacher education and applied to a conscious examination of graduate student education. According to Loughran (2004), S-STEP is rooted in questions about teaching and teaching practices. I chose S-STEP for this study because the methodology supports an inquiry into teacher effectiveness in the context of graduate education. Kelchtermans and Hamilton (2004) articulate how self-study supports graduate teacher inquiry: “Self-study may be undertaken for many different reasons. One important and complex reason, however, remains the ambition of increasing the quality and depth of one’s understanding of one’s own practice. In other words, self-study becomes a tool for personal professional learning” (p. 790). As well, LaBoskey (2004) acknowledges that S-STEP is a methodology that is directed at change. The S-STEP research process does not solely focus on a deeper understanding of individual pedagogy, but is intended to support the resolution of current problems, providing a way to reframe the pedagogy of graduate teaching, particularly in the institutional context where it is situated.

According to S-STEP researchers Mitchell and Weber (2005), looking inward is crucial to the epistemological development of teacher educators. “Self-study helps examine our everyday language where we are most likely to lay bare our taken-for-granted assumptions, casually or unthinkingly revealing deep differences in the stances and values of our research, and perhaps of ourselves” (Mitchell & Weber, 2005, p. 5). Further, they acknowledge that epistemological development of each teacher educator emerges from rigorous self-study.

S-STEP researchers tend to focus on practices that do not work well. Hence, successes tend to be forgotten in the examination of teaching practice as the focus shifts to problems, challenges, and failures. This highlights the need for S-STEP researchers to be self-confident and vulnerable at the same time (Loughran, 2004). In this study, I wanted to determine if my self-doubt was actually validated by student perceptions of my ability to teach a graduate course on diversity issues. I was not sure if my teaching practices were effective, but I wanted to find out.

**Aims and objectives of the study**

The research problem for this study is grounded in the complexity of teaching diversity in graduate education. I wanted to determine if my teaching practices were effective for a curriculum that examines sensitive content in the area of gender, social class, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, language, literacy, and religion. The purpose of the study is to examine how (or if) my feelings of self-doubt limited my ability to ensure positive student perceptions of teacher effectiveness.

As I try to navigate a meaningful contribution to the scholarship of teaching within graduate education, I turn to the existing gap between the epistemic knowledge of teaching (knowledge that seems objective and timeless) towards the phronetic knowledge of teaching (knowledge that is derived from particular contexts and settings) (Loughran, 2006). S-STEP provides a strong theoretical and methodological framework for an exploration into teacher effectiveness.
Teaching about diversity

The literature on teaching practices in relation to diversity, social justice, and equity encourages an ongoing process of self-analysis, which aligns with the methodology of SSTEP (Brookfield, 2014; Hadley Dunn, Dotson, Ford, and Roberts 2014; Jones, 2012; Smith, Kashubeck-West, Payton, and Adams, 2017). Smith et. al (2017) found a lack of research around issues of white professors teaching about race and racism. Brookfield (2014, 2015, 2016) encourages teachers to work at uncovering their own assumptions and biases to reveal insights into teaching practices that may be linked to social identity and social location. Brookfield (2014) also encourages a metacognitive approach to reflective teaching practice and asks instructors to write their own narratives of racism to share with students. Hadley Dunn et. al (2014) suggest that there needs to be an ongoing dialogue within classrooms, amongst and between professors and future teacher educators. The literature supports a practice of self-study to facilitate teacher effectiveness.

Multicultural imposter syndrome

Smith et. al (2017) in their collaborative self-study of teaching race and racism felt they had to constantly pay attention to their teaching practices in courses with social justice issues because of their white privilege. They use the term ‘multicultural imposter syndrome’ to describe how white professors are on the wrong side of a critical historical perspective when teaching about many social justice constructs, particularly race and racism. Chesler and Young (2007) remind us that social group identity affects how we think and act, as well as how others see us. As such, faculty members who identify with the dominant group may experience teaching differently than faculty members of minority groups. In their study, Chesler and Young sought to determine “how social group identities of faculty are reflected in their pedagogical encounters and practices” (2007, p. 11). Faculty in the Chesler and Young study were pre-selected based on their reputations as thoughtful practitioners within diverse classrooms and interviewed about their subject matter expertise and their perceptions of teacher authority. Findings in this study indicate that race, gender, professorial rank, and age affected the degree to which they were challenged, and that mastery of course content does not ensure that faculty of colour or female faculty receive the same positive perceptions of teacher effectiveness attributed to white, male faculty.

Similarly, Hadley Dunn et. al (2014) explored how student resistance was linked to professor social identity in an attempt to understand and support social justice advocacy in their own teaching practice. They determined that to teach with effectiveness they had to be constantly reflective and prepare themselves for self-analysis. These researchers call for an ongoing dialogue within classrooms, amongst and between professors, and between professors and future educators to help create a collaborative approach to teaching practices. In support of this process, Johnson (2018) claims that the historical constructs around power and privilege place white professors in the center of the problem, and suggests that change can only happen when self-study undertakes a critical analysis of teaching practices that either contribute to, or interrupt, systems of privilege. Johnson also reminds us that it is impossible to separate ourselves as teachers and our social identity from the broader systems of privilege and power.

There is some research that suggests professors who hold systemic privileges can become effective as allies. Ally is a term borrowed from the LGBTQ+ discourse that refers to a typically straight/cisgender person who openly supports members of the LGBTQ+ community. We can ask ourselves: How can we become allies for social groups as a white person, as a university professor, and as a person of power (Johnson, 2011)? McIntosh (1988) reminds us that we will always be white in the system, and as such we will always carry white privilege, yet Johnson (2018) suggests that we show students we are not colour blind, that we see beyond equality, and that we teach students that we are not all equal.
Student course evaluations and teacher effectiveness

Teacher effectiveness is challenging to measure, particularly when most of the feedback comes to teachers through student course evaluations. Jones (2012) acknowledges that student course evaluations are the most accepted method of assessing teaching competency and teacher effectiveness. However, she also acknowledges that student course evaluations are not often used for overall quality improvement of teaching but that they are more often utilized for faculty performance evaluation which can be tied to wages, to promotion and tenure, and to job security. Shaik and Hashmi (2011) investigated how teacher’s academic excellence was an indicator of acceptable teaching through an analysis of student course evaluations. Their findings indicate that there is little congruency between teacher scholarship (qualifications, publications, and conference presentations) and positive student course evaluations. Teaching methods, punctuality, delivery of lecture, fair grading, and content expertise were more likely to be cited as positive indicators of teacher effectiveness. However, both researchers admit that the data from student course evaluations can be analyzed to provide insights into teacher effectiveness.

Chickering and Gamson’s (1987) work on the seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education is foundational to an assessment of teacher effectiveness. The principles are: 1. Encourage contact between students and faculty; 2. Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students; 3. Encourage active learning; 4. Give prompt feedback; 5. Emphasize time on task; 6. Communicate high expectations; and 7. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning. Young (2014) determined that these principles measure specific teaching behaviours but that they are not able to measure student learning. As such, Young developed a set of 7 core items to measure effective teaching: 1. Adapting to student needs; 2. Using meaningful examples; 3. Motivating students to do their best; 4. Effective facilitation; 5. Delivering a valuable course; 6. Effective communication; and 7. Showing concern for student learning. Jones (2012) points out that both Chickering and Gamson and Youngs’ models measure immediacy behaviours and student satisfaction rather than teacher mastery or subject matter expertise. As such, the literature connects teacher immediacy behavior with teacher effectiveness.

Brookfield (2017) states that without student feedback, it is impossible to gain insights into teaching practice and equally impossible to gain insights into reframing or transformation of teaching practice. Loughran (2004) also notes the value of including student data in self-study and saw student’s views as fundamental for teachers to understand their practice. In summary, the literature does not provide a clear path for measuring teacher effectiveness in diversity studies. Rather, the literature suggests that teachers should engage in self-study as an ongoing commitment to teacher effectiveness. The literature also suggests that student course evaluations may provide insights for effective teaching practices.

Methods

S-STEP does not push specific methods for data analysis. Samaras and Freese (2006) cite the importance of allowing S-STEP researchers to select their own methods, allowing for flexibility in addressing particular research questions. The methods for this study were drawn from Brookfield’s (2002) method of critical analysis of teaching practice. Brookfield encourages researchers to look through the lens of students. In this particular study, the data was drawn from the lens of students in the form of student course evaluations. Ethics clearance was granted by the participating institutions, although student course evaluations are considered secondary data.

As graduate students, the students in this study were adult learners. Many students work full time in the field of education, as K-12 teachers or as school administrators. In all cases, the Diversity Studies course is a core required course. Students in the study were both domestic students and international students. The data was collected from six sets of student course evaluations over a period of 12 months. There were 69 participants in the study: A total of 116 qualitative comments were analyzed. I applied inductive thematic analysis as proposed by Creswell (2005) to draw themes out from the qualitative data from the student course evaluation qualitative data.
In the first level of analysis, open coding, the data was organized for analysis, read and reread with note taking in the margins (Creswell, 2005). Once the data was organized, the open coding process was completed to segment the data into categories. In the open coding stage, 13 categories emerged: critical thinking, connection to the learning outcomes, knowledge and mastery, teaching methods, comfort, sharing experiences, timely feedback, active in the course, clear communication, teacher excellence, course scheduling and workload.

In level two analyses, an axial coding process of the level one analysis reduced the data beyond content analysis to look for relationships between the data sets, the research question, and the literature. Axial coding is the examination of codes for overlap and redundancy in order to collapse the codes into themes, themes being broader categories used to form major ideas in the database (Creswell, 2005). The categories were collapsed into six themes: promoting critical thinking, teacher subject matter expertise, teaching practices and methods, teacher interaction with students, student safety, and comfort and teacher popularity.

Selective coding is the final phase of the inductive thematic analysis process. The selective coding process narrows the raw data into specific segments of data organized by themes to address the research question. In this phase, the major themes that emerged from level one and level two analyses were linked and related to the research question: Can an S STEP analysis of student course evaluations in a Diversity Studies course provide insights for effective teaching of graduate students? The three themes that emerged in the final phase of the analysis were: Teaching Practices/Pedagogy, Teacher Responsiveness, and Student Comfort and Safety.

**Teacher effectiveness in diversity studies**

The findings in this study are consistent with the literature, but also provide new insights into teaching diversity studies courses in graduate education. First, the emergent themes of teaching practices/pedagogy and teacher responsiveness align with both Chickering and Gamson’s (1987) seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education and Young’s (2006) seven core items to measure teacher effectiveness in higher education. The inference is that these practices and items can be extended to measure teacher effectiveness in teaching graduate students. The analysis revealed similarities between the research and the qualitative data (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Shaik & Hashmi, 2011; Young, 2006). Some examples include:

- Communication: availability was excellent and required as there were many bumps along the road; weekly video or voice messages, open office hours, video conferencing, phone calls, and emails, clearly communicated ideas and concepts; grading rubrics were clear
- Active learning: teacher used role plays, case studies and field trips; use of technology like Moodle and Padlet; instructor didn’t teach us like empty vessels, encouraged active participation
- Give prompt feedback: instructor gave us timely feedback on our posts and assignments, clear detailed and helpful feedback, feedback was always constructive and helpful
- Respect diverse talents and ways of learning: teacher did not use the soapbox method; I suggest to combine more perspectives from different cultures; could tackle more issues around race; teacher included herself in the discussion.

The emergent themes of teaching practices and teacher responsiveness were most often cited as positive indicators of teacher effectiveness and this is congruent with the literature.

The third theme of student safety and comfort emerged as a theme not often cited in the literature. This may be particular to a course on diversity studies. Some students commented that they felt uncomfortable with the content of the course, particularly with discussions of power and privilege, of race and racism, and of gender and sexual orientation. Some examples of comments that were pulled from this theme are:

- the content of this course is sensitive for some international students; the power and privilege exist in reality, but it does not have to be highlighted in class; this messes me
up then I become an oppressed student; in this course the topics were too sensitive, everyone did not want to talk about it; this course is not suitable for international students, maybe only for domestic students; it is useless to learn about power and privilege to me.

Multicultural imposter syndrome

I began this study with feelings of self-doubt in regards to my ability to teach a graduate level Diversity Studies course from my own social location as a member of a number of privileged groups. S-STEP guided this exploration in both a theoretical way (an emphasis on engaging in self-analysis to answer questions about teaching practices) and a methodological way (a rigorous and authentic methodology to explore a specific research question). As a result of this study, I have shifted my graduate teaching practice in three distinct ways. First, I have integrated a variety of instructional techniques that shift the focus from teacher to student. One example is that students work collaboratively to create group presentations on course readings, assigned videos, and course materials. This way, their voice is heard over mine. To avoid rote learning methods, I integrate ‘mini-lectures’ of less than 10 minutes to foreground a theory, a theorist, or a point of critical analysis. A mini-lecture might also outline a process for critical analysis, but the actual analysis is the students’ responsibility. As suggested by Brookfield (2017), I collect anonymous formative feedback after every class meeting. Authenticity requires that I also act on that feedback during the next class meeting. This way, students can be confident that I am listening to them and that I am making pedagogical changes to meet their learning needs. Second, I have created several strategies to improve teacher presence. I hold an open office hour before every class, I connect with students in videoconferences or by phone. Finally, I am more sensitive student safety and comfort in the classroom. I share my social identity and social location, and I share narratives of how I have confronted and reconciled my position of privilege and power. I make positionality central to pedagogy.

These revised teaching practices emerge from the analysis in this study. I set out on this self-study to determine if an analysis of student course evaluations could provide insights on teacher effectiveness. This self-study has incited a formalized practice of critical reflection on teaching practice. Critical reflection has helped me to settle my feelings of Multicultural Imposter Syndrome. I go forward with a renewed sensitivity to teaching graduate students in Diversity Studies.

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The professor abroad: Crossing the pedagogical border

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In October 2016, I was finally teaching my first class of the fall semester, one designed to focus on pedagogical approaches to literature but, as I had learned only days before, one that also needed to teach essay writing skills. Roughly 25 students were there; without a course roster, I had no way of knowing who was actually present or registered for the course. We were gathered in a high-ceilinged classroom with rows of seats and bench-like desks bolted to the floor; long windows over hissing radiators filled one wall and a large desk on a raised dais, blackboard behind, delineated the front of the room. I was a world away from my usual university teaching. Literally.

Context of the aims and objectives

In the 2016-2017 academic year, I was a Fulbright Scholar to Babeș-Bolyai University, located in the Transylvanian region of Romania. I served as a visiting professor there, teaching courses in pedagogy, literature and American culture to undergraduate students in the Faculty of Letters. My teaching experiences ranged from fantastic to farcical to frustrating; while I could not have anticipated all of the challenges I encountered as a professor, I wouldn’t trade them for a more sedate experience. Those pedagogical twists and turns were one of the driving forces for my journey abroad.

As an English teacher educator, I believe in the importance of applying the pedagogical principles that I teach my students, whether it be modeling a specific instructional technique for their future teaching (Hogg & Yates, 2013) or working with reflective practice to critically consider actions, beliefs and outcomes in educational contexts (Loughran, 1996; Yost, Sentner & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000). I want my students to challenge themselves, in and out of the classroom, in order to develop as teachers and as people—and I believe that I must do the same. In short, I view my teaching and my students’ learning through a constructivist lens (Richardson, 1997).

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I had the immediate challenge of navigating the Romanian educational system. In Romania, students take multiple content-specific tests in their final year at the secondary level; these test scores determine the university to which they can apply, with better universities requiring higher scores, and admittance dependent on the number of available spots for qualifying students. Subsequently, Babeș-Bolyai University, recognized as one of the best universities in the country, enrolled students with higher test scores. Once admitted, students in the Faculty of Letters followed a prescribed course of study over three years in their major and minor subjects, with little opportunity for variation or elective coursework. Courses typically met weekly for two contact hours; with little administrative coordination, required courses could be scheduled at the same time. Students took up to 30 contact hours a week, often enrolling in 12-15 classes each semester. Course grades were largely determined by scores on final exams, with students given multiple opportunities to sit for a course’s exam, both in the given semester and those subsequent.

The complexity of teaching is a constant in any country, with teachers making multiple decisions on what and how to teach diverse students in order to meet specific outcomes as they navigate different educational and societal issues (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). By living and teaching in a different context and culture, I hoped to gain a different perspective on my own pedagogy and, by extension, a different viewpoint on teacher educators’ construction of pedagogical processes. To consider the implications of my time abroad, I turned to self-study once I returned to the US.

Methods

The guiding question for this self-study was how my experiences abroad might influence my pedagogical thinking and practice after my return. A secondary consideration was what insights my self-study might offer regarding teacher educators’ pedagogical development. Constructivism provided the theoretical grounding, in that making meaning from my experiences supported the creation of new understandings that might guide my actions as a teacher educator (Richardson, 1997).

While abroad, I maintained a personal weblog that documented my experiences, relying on elements of informal reflection: practical theory, flexible structure, communal interaction and personal expression (Shoffner, 2008). This blog was an effort to engage in the meaningful and active consideration required of reflection that can lead to a change of habit or mind (Dewey, 1960; Zeichner & Liston, 2013).

The close relationship between reflection and self-study allows teacher educators to use the former to support the latter in stepping back from an experience, studying it in a deliberative way and gaining “insight into the particular issue under investigation” (Dinkelman, 2003, p. 9). Self-study, however, goes beyond reflection by interrogating collected data, considering different perspectives and collaborating with others in order to publicly scrutinize conclusions (Elliott-Johns, 2014).

The main data for this self-study consisted of the 53 entries to the blog posted between September 2016 and June 2017. Using content analysis (Patton, 2002), I looked for repeating elements in the data in order to identify commonalities of pedagogical thinking and/or practice, resulting in the codes of student interactions, instructional expectations and personal beliefs. A reflective summation of the coded data allowed me to “explore and challenge [my] assumptions and beliefs with the purpose of improving [my] understanding” (Edge, Cameron-Standerford & Bergh, p. 63) of these pedagogical elements. I then turned to secondary data, consisting of pedagogical materials developed while in Romania and since my return, to clarify and extend my understanding of the potential impact on my current pedagogy. I also engaged in reflective conversations with a former Fulbright colleague during the study, whose understanding of the Romanian context and role as a critical friend supported my efforts to interrogate my own practice (Schuck & Russell, 2005).
Student interactions

While at Babeș-Bolyai University, I taught four courses over two semesters, three of them at 8am. This was as difficult for the students - *No one wants to be there at 8:00* - as it was for me: *I'm not a morning person, so I wasn't thrilled when I saw my schedule for the semester.* One of the courses consisted of 12 students; the other three ranged from 24 to 38 students.

My first impression of Romanian undergraduates was a comforting one: *students are students, even if they're speaking another language in another country...They sit with their friends; they talk whenever there's a lull (and sometimes when there isn't); they roll their eyes at some things, nudge each other at other things, laugh if you're lucky, stare at you blankly if you're not.* Like most undergraduates, I found them somewhat shy when first approached by a professor but increasingly willing to talk as the semester continued. Often, as we left the classroom, students would walk with me through the hallways or stop me for a few minutes on the sidewalk outside the building, sometimes to continue a class discussion but frequently to ask questions about my experiences in Romania or my views on US culture or politics.

What I found to be the most difficult in my interactions was the willingness of students to be passive recipients when it came to their educational experiences. As my critical friend mused, students’ response to being pushed out of their comfort zone was often to take the path of least resistance, rarely arguing against the professor’s interpretation, challenging a grade on a paper or even asking clarifying questions about an assignment. They were clearly *well-educated, thoughtful, intelligent young people with such interesting perspectives* but I was constantly considering how I could interact with them to better draw them out. Often, that meant addressing student discomfort directly:

> Today was illuminating, as we ended up discussing how difficult discussion can be in the classroom. As I understood them, they are used to "discussion" being "provide the answer the teacher is looking for"...So, here I am, asking them all sorts of open-ended questions, staring at them until they talk, reassuring them that talking is just thinking out loud and wrong answers are perfectly fine. As one student asked, “But how do you know which answer is right for the test if everyone gives different answers in class?”

I also began working individually with students, requiring them to sign up for specific times to meet with me. For one class, we met one-on-one to conference about their essays; for another, we met in small groups to discuss their understanding of an assigned novel; for another; students had the opportunity to discuss my feedback when they picked up papers. The key to these interactions, aside from the opportunity to work more closely with my students, was that they were meeting with me in local coffee shops. By interacting away from the classroom in an informal setting, I hoped to create opportunities for meaningful individual conferencing and collaborative discussion. While I cannot point to these interactions as the exclusive catalyst, I did recognize a difference in classroom dynamics following our meetings, with students more willing to share their opinions and speak up in whole class discussion. As one student reflected at the end of the semester, “I was surprised when we were taught that it is acceptable to allow your students to have their own interpretation of a text and that they should not all agree with the one ‘correct’ interpretation.”

Instructional expectations

While my students were learning to accept different interpretations of a text, I was trying to adapt my instructional expectations in the classroom and hoping the students were willing to *let me flounder a bit as we figure it all out.* I couldn't assume students would understand one of my examples or references – *I spent 20 minutes last night trying to find an illustrative video for an activity that wasn't too dependent on US culture* – nor could I count on them being familiar with *certain pedagogical techniques, either.* Coming from a predominantly lecture-based education system, my more constructivist approach in the classroom was often confusing:
I expect them to offer answers to my questions in class, regardless of whether those answers are right. I have them write in every class, usually in response to the day’s readings. I ask them to work in groups to talk through questions before we cover them as a whole class. I answer their questions with questions and rarely give them “the” answer to anything they ask.

Those students who attended class, though, were willing to jump into the fray of discussion when an idea provoked them and good-naturedly adjust to my instructional differences, despite clear deviations from their expectations, and their obvious efforts to communicate academically in a second (or third or fourth) language.

Attendance was an ongoing issue, however. All of the Fulbright professors were warned that attendance was low on students’ list of priorities; my critical friend reminded me that he frequently had no students attend certain classes during the spring semester because, as his colleague reassured him, it was a sunny day. In the beginning, I was rather sanguine about student attendance: Every professor wants to respond with a “not in my classroom” bravado but we all know there’s not much we can do about it if students choose not to come… and this is coming from the professor with a “don’t even think about it” attendance policy at home. I even admitted late in the fall semester that attendance was not a pedagogical hill worth dying on.

For whatever reason, I was less accepting of missed attendance in the spring semester: I don’t want to offer an outsider’s snobbishness in declaring my way is better than your way. Still, it does seem that more learning takes place when students are actually in class. It seems like this would be something to figure out: why aren’t students attending their classes and how can that be changed. I often discussed this with a Romanian colleague who agreed that it was frustrating, yet we failed to find a solution in our conversations. After the fact, I recognized part of my frustration was likely driven by the lack of course rosters. Because I had no official student enrollment lists, I had no way of knowing which students were actually in which classes: I had 16 students in the YA lit/text interpretation course of the usual 22ish from the 40 that came the first day. What I did not know until the end of the semester was that students had two weeks to drop a required class; while absenteeism was certainly an issue, it would have been easier to navigate with a better understanding of the students actually enrolled in the course.

Plagiarism was also an issue, and one that I faced in every course. During our Fulbright orientation, professors were warned of its frequency but it was still something of a shock to realize the extent. As I noted at the end of the fall semester, I want to bang my head on the table, weeping, when half of my students submit plagiarized papers. The commonality of plagiarism perhaps diluted the importance of its identification to the students; in one class, a student submitted three plagiarized papers of the four required, earning 0s on all three, and sat for the exam with every expectation of passing the class. Only once did a student question my identification of plagiarism in a paper, coming to me after class to politely yet passionately argue I was mistaken.

Personal beliefs

While I enjoyed my time in the classroom, teaching was not easy; it isn’t easy anywhere, just to be clear, but teaching in Romania has its own unique challenges. The discomfort of teaching in a new and different environment meant I was frequently reassessing my personal pedagogical beliefs about teaching and learning:

Education is a difficult enterprise on the best of days and they aren’t all best days...I’m working in a different academic system with a complex educational history. I’m fascinated by how they approach education and why they view learning in certain ways. It isn’t a matter of my way being right and their way being wrong. Agree or disagree, it’s a matter of figuring out what works so that students have the chance to really learn.

As I noted previously, I often struggled to engage students, which required rethinking familiar ways of being in the classroom: I’m a fairly energetic professor…I find myself much more so here…
...big gestures, comical examples, exaggerated responses. Luckily, they seem to get my jokes (most of the time) and either they're laughing with me or at me; either way, they're paying attention, and that's half the battle. But it is tiring. It was also tiring to work around access to assigned readings, flexible attendance, repeated plagiarism and conflicting course scheduling. As I wrote at the end of the spring semester, I've managed the hundred and one pedagogical paper cuts I've endured this year: no heat in the building, no class rosters, no warning of cancelled classes, no reminder of holidays, no clear guidelines on curriculum or assignments. More than once, I realized that I was frustrated by differences in things that I take for granted in the US, especially with education. That is my world, after all, so it - at least - should make sense to me, but it doesn't always fall in line with what I know.

Recognizing my frustration led me to consider how we tend to interpret emotional responses to educational moments as a weakness in the pedagogical armor. While I teach my preservice teachers that we should talk a little more honestly and openly about the aspects of teaching that deal with the emotional and personal – which would be everything, because teaching is an emotional and personal endeavor – I struggled to do so in Romania without seeing my reflective thinking as unacceptable, if not unprofessional.

Admitting my struggles with student interactions and classroom instruction was acknowledgment of an uncomfortable vulnerability for a teacher educator, one that I reflected on at length toward the end of my time abroad:

One of the hardest things about being a teacher educator is knowing that you don't always manage to practice what you teach. You know that students need time to process what you're asking them to do but you're just so frustrated that they are reluctant to talk. You know that students need meaningful feedback on their writing to improve but you're just so tired of grading papers. You know that students are products of their educational environment but you're just so irritated when they don't follow your educational expectations. You know that students aren't motivated by negative reinforcement but you're just so fed up that you lecture them anyway. Teaching is always a mixture of right and wrong, positive and negative, knowledge and guesswork, “That was perfect!” and “Good lord, I hope no one saw that,” “Things went so well today!” and “I have no idea why they allow me in a classroom.” Accepting that constant slide across the continuum of doing it well and doing it not-well is difficult. You can know what you're doing; you can know what you're supposed to do; you can teach others how it should be done; and you can still do it wrong. Each day is different and each student is different, and the differences rarely align in the same pattern on any given day. Experience is helpful as a teacher – at the least, you know enough to recognize the continuum – but it doesn't assure success.

Implications for practice

Louie et al. (2002) recognize “professors have the illusion that we can control everything, and especially the learning, that occurs in the classroom...We experience feelings of failure when students and the learning environment react in ways that we cannot control [believing that] good teachers can control everything” (p. 197). As a professor of English teacher education, not only do I know this to be untrue, I work diligently to disabuse my preservice teachers of such thinking. And yet. In Romania, I struggled to reconcile my feelings of failure in response to circumstances out of my control. In constructing an understanding of teaching that encompassed the circumstances of my learning environment, I was reminded that teacher educators, too, must admit to a learning curve when faced with challenging pedagogical experiences. Like our preservice teachers, we must accept that we will fail, despite the skill and knowledge we may bring to the classroom.

My instruction has benefitted from the “forced flexibility” learned in Romania, however. In adapting to the different challenges I encountered, I sharpened my just-in-time curriculum-designing skills and my ability to think more quickly on my pedagogical feet – for example,
redesigning major assignments multiple times this year in response to unforeseen outside factors, a provoking frustration prior to Romania that now seems a manageable annoyance. More generally, I have gained an appreciation for my pedagogical competency and, in acknowledging that I possess expertise that allows me to successfully face the unexpected, stepped away from the imposter syndrome that shadows so many academics.

As found in a previous self-study (Shoffner, 2014), supporting student engagement, integrating instructional variety and establishing a welcoming learning environment can create positive student-teacher relationships in the classroom. Interactions with my Romanian students reaffirmed the importance of these factors outside the classroom, as well. Talking individually with students, creating options for informal instruction, seeking opportunities to connect: these actions speak to the importance of relational teacher education, which “stresses the need to present one’s authentic self in relationships which are open, non-judgemental and trusting” (Kitchen, 2005, p. 195). Consequently, I have worked to ground my teaching more firmly in the relational this year since “teacher education happens in the relationship between individual teacher educators and their students” (Dinkelman, 2003, p. 13). It is all too easy to focus solely on the educational, given the busy-ness of academic lives, but taking the time to inquire about participation in a campus event or ask “What is everyone reading right now?” creates a more positive learning environment while modeling the relational pedagogy teacher educators stress to their preservice teachers.

**Conclusion**

This study offers an examination of an important concept in teacher education: that of teacher educators reconsidering and reconstructing the taken-for-granted pedagogical practices that guide their approach to teacher preparation. As Crowe and Berry (2007) explain, “teachers need to be able to think creatively about complex situations, consider multiple options, make decisions about best course of action, and understand why they do what they do” (p. 31). Engaging in the reflective practice of self-study encourages teacher educators to make meaning (Loughran, 2002) from diverse experiences in ways that enhance their understandings of teaching and learning while problematizing their practice.

**References**


Why does this distress me? A teacher educator’s response to and reflections on pre-service teachers’ classroom behaviours

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I am a Black female teacher educator at a South African Higher Education Institution (HEI). I mention at the outset that I am not a South African national because issues of gender, race and residence status influenced the way I interpreted the behaviour of students in my classroom. For example, if a White student walked out on me during a lecture, the first thing that would come to mind is that the student was undermining me because I am Black; if it were a male student, it would be because I am a woman. This paper is written by Eunice in the first person; co-author Constance participated as her critical friend.

At the time of this study, I had been teaching at this HEI for seven years; I was hired to teach a content course (Genetics) to pre-service teachers (PSTs). Previously, I had been a high school biology teacher in neighbouring Zimbabwe for 14 years. Riding on my successful experiences as a high school subject specialist, I did not expect to encounter challenges in moving into teacher education. I anticipated I would easily teach the content of genetics, for I had been teaching it for 14 years. As is typical of many HEIs, I did not go through any induction or formal preparation for teaching pre-service teachers (Bullock, 2011; Chetty & Lubben, 2010). I went straight into the lecture room holding a variety of preconceptions about what constituted good biology teaching of pre-service teachers (Nyamupangedengu, 2016).

As a novice teacher educator, I believed that pre-service teachers were mature adults who pay attention and participate fully in class activities. For example, I did not expect the pre-service teachers to arrive late, hold side conversations during lectures, refuse to participate in class activities or leave the classroom before the end of a lecture. When I encountered these inappropriate behaviours, I decided to ignore them if they were not disrupting my lectures. However, the behaviours distressed me considerably and I decided to share my distress with my critical friend Constance Khupe, and the following conversation became the catalyst for considerable reflection and, ultimately, for this paper.

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Constance: Why did you decide to ignore the behaviours that you considered inappropriate?
Eunice: Because I thought the students were deliberately displaying those behaviours to undermine me and therefore reacting to their behaviours would give them the satisfaction they were seeking.

Constance: What made you think that they wanted to undermine you?
Eunice: How else could I explain such behaviours from those who are about to qualify to become teachers? I felt that they were displaying those behaviours to undermine me because I am black, or female or a foreigner?

Constance: Did you talk to them about those behaviours? If not, why?
Eunice: I didn’t feel empowered to confront their inappropriate behaviour; actually, I was afraid of confronting them as no one had ever discussed such issues with me and how they are dealt with at a HEI and I was scared of being humiliated in front of the class in case my assumptions that they were displaying those behaviours just to undermine me were true.

The points that I raised with Constance were pre-conceived assumptions influenced by the issues of race, gender and nationality as experienced in the South African context. In addition, ignorance of the university’s policy on how to deal with such behaviours left me with no point of reference for responding with confidence to such classroom behaviours, thereby inculcating feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. Only in my seventh year as a teacher educator did I embark on a doctoral self-study motivated by my desire to understand the events in my classroom (Nyamupangedengu, 2016). Here we report the new understandings about teaching in a diverse teacher education classroom that I gained from observing, confronting and analysing pre-service teachers’ behaviours in my lectures.

**Theoretical perspectives on teaching and learning in teacher education**

We consider pre-service teacher preparation as seeking to develop a Community of Practice (CoP) where learning is situated and teaching is learning in practice (Lave, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991). According to Lave and Wenger, CoP is defined as a group of people sharing common interests and goals whose aim is to develop knowledge and themselves, both personally and professionally. New members enter a CoP through participation. The new members start as legitimate peripheral participants and gradually move towards the centre as participation continues.

Three components—domain, community and practice—typify Lave and Wenger’s CoP (1991) where domain is defined by a shared interest that brings the group together. Here the domain is teacher education and the shared interest of both pre-service teachers and teacher educators is professional teacher education, with pre-service teachers learning to teach and teacher educators facilitating their learning. The second component, community, refers to those who engage in joint activities and discussions that emanate from shared interest. The community is recognised by the way they help each other, share information, learn together, and build relationships that develop a sense of belonging and mutual commitment. I envisage that the students of genetics and I form such a community. The third component is practice, where members of a community are practitioners who develop a shared repertoire in the form of shared tools, ways of doing, and ways of solving problems. In our case the shared repertoire includes teaching and learning resources, strategies and professional standards. Within a domain, the commonly adopted practices lead to the establishment of values and standards that become the basis for action, communication, problem solving, performance and accountability that members are expected to abide by and uphold.

Here we assume that teacher educators and PSTs form a community of practice in teacher education. Teacher educators are the experts and the PSTs are the apprentices. As they move from first year of their Bachelor of Education programme to qualification, the pre-service teachers
hopefully gain competencies that see them move from the periphery towards the centre. The teacher educator’s role is to build the community and to provide the expert guidance required for apprentices to be able to participate fully in the community. Without induction, however, teacher educators do not always have a point of reference for building a community and providing expert guidance. In addition, as teacher educators, we are not in full control of the conditions we work in. Just like teachers in schools, we make dozens of decisions on a daily basis intended to support students’ learning, but we do not have firm ground to base our decisions on. The decisions that we make can at any given time be challenged, rejected, ignored or questioned. Furthermore, because things like the roles and positions are not fully defined and prescribed, the decisions that we make can be wrong. Although we are viewed as experts in this community of teacher educators, there is a need to embrace vulnerability, which is a key aspect in self-studies. Kelchtermans (2009) defined vulnerability as a concept in self-study which calls for teacher educators to open ourselves to our students and to colleagues, to admit when we do not know and to share and co-learn with them.

**Research design and methods**

Data collected for this paper are structured around the concepts of the discipline of noticing and responding (Mason, 2002) and reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983). While noticing and responding were done by Eunice, the reflective process required a critical friend and was facilitated by Constance. Eunice used the theory about CoP to inform her reflections on the actions she was taking in response to students’ behaviours and to reflect on students’ behaviours in response to her actions. We adapted the questions of Mansfield, Loughran, and Kidman (2016) as follows:

1. What did I do (noticing and responding to the behaviours that pre-service teachers were repeatedly displaying in my classroom)?
2. What did they say (pre-service teachers’ explanations of their behaviour)?
3. What did I learn (Reflections on my actions and students’ responses to my actions and interrogations of experiences and assumptions, dilemmas and tensions in my practice in search for new understandings)?

**Participants**

In this self-study, I was the main participant. Other participants were the third year PSTs registered for my course. The 91 students were diverse in race, class, culture and schooling background.

**Data collection and analysis: What I did**

I used the concept of the discipline of noticing as the first approach in my data collection process. To notice is to perceive or to become aware of a change in one’s environment or situation that is captured by sensitivities which may be emotional, physical or cognitive (Mason, 2002). Noticing is said to have occurred when one responds to the activation of these sensitivities. In this study, the act of noticing was followed by the description in my journal of the behaviour noticed and the sensitivities triggered. Each journal entry was made immediately after the lecture in which the behavior was noticed, and included a description of my reaction to the behavior noticed. Below is one example:

**Students’ behaviour:** Non-participation in discussions during lectures

**Journal entry:** In my lecture on meiosis, after describing the events of prophase, I asked students to describe the same events to those who were sitting next to them to allow for self-assessment of understanding of the concepts. I expected all to participate. When I observed that some were not participating, I immediately felt that they were undermining me. Under ‘normal’ circumstances, despite the disheartening feeling, I would have ignored such behaviour as long as they were not disrupting the lecture, as in my view, pre-service teachers at third year level are mature adults who should know what they want from a lecture. Because I was doing
this study and wanted to understand what happens in my lectures, I did not ignore what I had observed. I went to the students to find out why they were not participating.

**What students said:** On inquiry about their non-participation, one student (Regina) said, “Listening to you is enough for me ma’am and don’t worry because I have understood.” She even offered to describe the processes to me. The other student (Dylan) said he did not do biology in Matric and what I had said was so much that he felt overwhelmed. He would rather go over it on his own than describe it to someone else. (Both Regina and Dylan were white students.)

The entry of students’ behaviours into my journal and explanations of their behaviours were followed by this reflection.

**Journal entry:** Going to find out why the two students were not participating made me to realize that my assumption that students were undermining the teaching and learning process was wrong, pointing to the importance of inquiring or checking students’ behaviour before drawing conclusions. Students had ‘genuine’ reasons for non-participation. What made me think that the students wanted to undermine me?

Data collection occurred over a six-week period during which the Genetics course is scheduled. At the end, I thrice read all the journal entries, identifying student behaviours and inductively coding the descriptions of my thoughts and feelings. To check the trustworthiness of my interpretation of students’ behaviours, I presented my journal entries to three colleagues for their interpretations of students’ behaviours. Their oral comments were transcribed. I used feedback from them to put together critiqued interpretations of students’ behaviours. Table 1 shows the pre-service teachers’ behaviours, my and my colleagues’ perceptions, and the PSTs’ explanations of the behaviours.

**Results**

**Table 1: Behaviours displayed by pre-service teachers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-service teachers’ observed behaviour</th>
<th>How I and my colleagues interpreted the behaviours</th>
<th>PSTs’ explanations of their behaviours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coming late for lectures</td>
<td>They are being irresponsible and disrespectful. They don’t care</td>
<td>Woke up late; traffic jam; lack of transport; lost track of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking out in the middle of the lecture</td>
<td>They are being disrespectful and want to undermine my authority They are bored because they see no value in the lecture</td>
<td>Distressed by the information about genetic diseases Going to submit an assignment Leaving to answer or return a call about a family crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not participating in given activities</td>
<td>Maybe I am not engaging or not reaching out</td>
<td>Fear of giving wrong answers; fear of speaking broken English; I don’t like oral discussions; I am overwhelmed; I would rather think in silence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I presented my journal and Table 1 to Constance for a critical discussion of my observations. Here is one of our discussions.
Constance: My sense is that only a few students display these behaviours which distress you. Why not focus on the majority who cooperate?

Eunice: I have standards. This is a professional degree. I expect the students to uphold those standards, such as punctuality.

Constance: Where are those standards? Is there anywhere they are explicitly stated?

Eunice: The students are in the third year of their preparation to become teachers. They should know those standards and, as future teachers, they should have a sense of the importance of engaging in given activities if the teaching is to be successful. In addition, I view them as mature adults and my thinking is that they are being irresponsible because it is their responsibility to come on time, participate and benefit from the lectures. What makes it worse is that even when they are late because of reasons beyond their control, they don’t seem to be aware that they are disturbing the class when they arrive late, which attracts my attention and that of the other students, thereby disrupting the teaching and learning.

Constance: Your journal entries and Table 1 show that you have started engaging with individual students when they display the behaviours that upset you and you are beginning to see some changes. Did you ever try to address these issues with the class as a whole? I ask this because I feel that you wait to react to their behaviours instead of being proactive and indicating to them right from the beginning what you expect from them and why. I am thinking of this particularly because earlier in your study you told me that there was no induction into your teacher educator role and you learnt your roles and responsibilities through trial and error. Are you not doing the same thing to your students, i.e., not inducting them? What if they actually don’t know these standards?

My critical friend continued the discussion of the various entries about PSTs’ behaviours, challenging my thinking and suggesting ways of responding.

Discussion: What did I learn?

The focus of this study was pre-service teachers’ classroom behaviours. The major action that I undertook during this study was to respond to students’ behaviours during or immediately after the lecture by speaking to the student about the displayed behaviour and finding out why it happened. Although I felt distressed, my approach was always non-judgemental. By responding to students’ behaviours in a non-judgemental manner, the students responded to my actions in a way that helped me to understand what it means to be an expert in a teacher education CoP.

Roles and responsibilities of teacher educators as experts in a teacher education classroom CoP

While implicitly I was viewing my association with pre-service teachers as a CoP, I had not adequately considered my roles and responsibilities as the expert. I had only considered myself as an expert in the scientific practices of the biology CoP. I was initiating the students into the practices of biology, not into the practices of teacher education. In my dealings with the PSTs I had assumed that they would know the professional standards expected of teachers. My discussions with Constance made me aware that, as teacher educators, we should be initiating pre-service teachers into the profession. Our classrooms are CoP spaces in which we, as experts, should guide pre-service teachers into the professional community by developing a shared repertoire of practices that establish values and standards that members grow into and uphold. I learnt that pre-service teachers need to be made aware that the teacher education classroom is a CoP where professional behaviours and standards are expected. Initiating pre-service teachers into the teacher education CoP needs to be embedded in our daily teaching and learning activities, while at the same time acknowledging the tension between students’ diverse lived experiences (perhaps beyond their control) and the demands of a professional community (as in Table 1).
Embracing vulnerability

Before embarking on this study, I was afraid of engaging with pre-service teachers about their behaviours for several reasons, including the fact that I was unaware of any policy that I could base my decisions on. I was also afraid that if I confronted the students about those behaviours, there was a possibility that they could respond in a way that would humiliate or undermine me. This self-study showed that embracing vulnerability enabled me to engage the students without fear, a stance that I see as necessary for us as teacher educators if values and standards are to be established that become the basis for action by all members of a CoP.

The power of noticing and responding rather than noticing and reacting

Noticing enabled me to observe a range of behaviours that the students were displaying repeatedly. As an expert in a CoP, teacher educators must not ignore students' behaviours but work to understand what is behind those behaviours as part of understanding the new initiates in the CoP. Discussing pre-service teachers' behaviours and my emotions with my critical friend helped me to understand why the behaviours were distressing me. The distress was evoked by my deep-seated assumptions of gender, race and nationality as experienced in the South African context, and by my preconceived ideas that are influenced by my own lived experiences. Even as a high school teacher, I have had cases when students would disregard what I wanted them to do as part of the teaching and learning process (which in some cases ended up disrupting the flow of the lesson) and they responded disrespectfully when I confronted them. Before this study, I was unaware of the influence of these assumptions and experiences on my sensitivities to PSTs' behaviours. By noticing students' behaviours (Mason, 2002) and acting on them, it helped not only to correct my assumptions but also to build a functional CoP.

By checking with the students about why they were not participating in class discussion, I learnt that it was a matter of a difference in learning styles. Some students preferred to think about the content and the questions in silence rather than discussing with others. It had nothing to do with wanting attention or wanting to undermine the teaching and learning process, which is what I had assumed. The various adjustments that I made to my teaching after engaging with students in response to their behaviours promoted positive interactions between me and them, such as giving or sending an apology in advance if they had to leave before the lecture ended or if they were going to be late for a lecture. When I reflected on my actions and the positive interactions that resulted from them, I got to understand that being able to notice and to act on teaching situations as the expert in my classroom resulted in the development of a trusting relationship and a shared understanding of expectations necessary for a functional CoP.

Empathy, learner-centeredness and care

While my reason for embarking on this study was to understand why students were behaving in certain ways, my critical friend viewed my intentions differently. She thought that by noticing, checking and responding to students' behaviours instead of confronting them, I was actually reaching out to them, showing them empathy and care.

Constance: The fact that you went to the students despite the layout of the lecture theatre and listened to them and were able to understand their position is a sign of empathy. I also see student centredness. Most of the time we think of student centredness in terms of getting students to be actively involved but there are other levels of student centredness.

After considering Constance's comments, I developed a new insight that being attentive to students' behaviour is one way of getting to know one's students. I then started to pay attention to other aspects about students, such as their performance (i.e., low or high marks). Listening to their comments during lectures and their gestures and facial expressions became opportunities that I started to notice and to act on to reach out to individual students, which in turn allowed me to know them at personal level. I did not get to know all my students but I got to know many of them better. I started to notice a trend where more and more students would come to me for
extra help. It appeared that by getting to know the students, I had opened a safe space for them to communicate and interact with me, an indication that care and empathy are critical values that I needed to embody as an expert for building and shaping a this teacher education classroom CoP.

**Conclusion**

A Community of Practice (in this case a teacher education classroom) is not just about establishing rules and standards of practice; it is also about human interactions and relationships. In addition to the rules and standards, the content and pedagogy, human values such as empathy and care also shape and sustain a CoP. These human aspects can promote development of trust and a shared understanding and interest that will motivate members to engage in joint activities and to help each other, share information, learn together, and build relationships. Practising human values such as empathy and care can lead to the development of a sense of belonging and mutual commitment, which is what a CoP is about.

As teacher educators, we have deep-seated assumptions that we may be unaware of but that certainly influence our teaching and may lead to misinterpretations of students' classroom behaviours. Acting instead of reacting when we notice behaviours can help us to confront our own assumptions about students' actions and help us in developing and establishing a functional community of practice. Finally, when as teacher educators we work in isolation, we can become oblivious to the assumptions embedded in our practices. Constance's role of a critical friend in this self-study showed the important role such a friend can play in challenging perspectives, developing new understandings and strengthening professional practice within the classroom community of practice. Within the methodology of self-study, critical friends help us to embrace critique as opportunity for professional growth, whereas outside of self-study this could be viewed as criticism.

**References**


Classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse demographically across race, culture, and ethnicity nationwide (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). More culturally and linguistically diverse students are making up classrooms across the nation, yet White middle-class and monolingual women make up most of the teacher population in the United States (Nieto, 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Additionally, issues of gender, identity, and sexuality (including LGBTQ youth) demands attention from education practitioners and researchers. With this growing diversity and complexity of students’ lives, it is necessary to prepare teachers in becoming culturally responsive to not only meet the unique needs of historically marginalized youth, but also critically think about mainstream schooling structures and practices that perpetuate social inequalities. All teacher candidates need preparation that places social justice at the forefront to equip them with the tools needed to address issues that may arise surrounding race, class, gender, sexuality, language, and ability in students’ lives (Cochran-Smith et. al., 2016).

In order to develop a social justice orientation for teacher candidates, “teacher educators must first articulate a [collective] vision of teaching and learning...[and] they must use that vision to systematically guide the infusion of multicultural issues throughout the teacher education curriculum” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 21). We see this work first starting with us as teacher educators. “Much like the raced, classed, and gendered identities of students and teachers, the identity of a teacher educator also inevitably anchors and shapes their approaches to racial justice” (Picower & Kohli, 2017, p. 5). Teacher educators must also think about their own privilege and limitations of what they know about the experiences and realities of historically marginalized youth.

Social justice and self-study fit nicely together. According to Terrell and Lindsey (2009), schools and teachers need to have opportunities to critically think about the relation of self to others, especially those who are marginalized. Drawing from Boske (2014), critical reflection “centers on doing and being deliberate” (p. 291) about practices that question how and why presumptions...
based on race, class, gender, and other social identifiers limit the way a pedagogue understands, responds, and feels about students. Moreover, Boske posits that critical self reflection enables pedagogues to make cognizant decisions about how to work in inclusive ways and act “on new ways of knowing” (p.291), rather than acting in discriminatory ways. When social justice practices are examined in this manner, thoughts move from the abstract to the self. For instance, Cochran-Smith and colleagues (1999) researched social justice inquiry through a faculty self-study group and noted that the hallmark of their research was “joint participation as co-learners and co-researchers by those who are differently positioned from one another and who bring different kinds of knowledge and experience to bear on the collective enterprise” (p. 233). Our self-study research embodies this notion.

Through this self-study project, we reflected on our positionalities and how they informed our social justice teaching in our individual courses. We also used our own embodied teaching experiences to make sense of our cross-curricular efforts in centering social justice into our individual courses and streamlining this framework into our teacher preparation program. To provide further information about this framework, in June 2016, the department of teacher education began to revise curriculum holistically to infuse social justice in our courses. Out of these deliberations emerged a “flower,” which represented numerous components we felt needed to be spiraled throughout all of the courses we teach. These components became the flower’s six petals and represent (not in ranking order): culturally responsive teaching, cosmopolitanism/global citizenship, critical theories, relationality, social justice, and moral nature of curriculum decision-making/instructional gatekeeping. Given this curricular revision, we realized that critical self-work is necessary to implement these changes. Thus, our guiding research question for this work became: How do we continue to be critically self-reflective and build upon our own critical lenses, thus expanding the boundaries of our own thinking?

Methodology

We center ourselves in self-study research to tap into the moral, ethical, and political underpinnings regarding educational issues (LaBoskey, 2007). We believe our purpose as teacher-educators is to encourage social justice and issues of equity (Kumashiro, 2001), believing that the “purpose of school moving forward must include confronting social inequities and applying global perspectives” (Batchelor & Sander, 2017, p. 70). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) note that educators are both “knowers” and “agents” for social change. In this study, we reflect on not only our personal growth as teacher-educators regarding issues of social justice, but also how we have reinvented our teaching to serve the greater good of our department, college, and society (Russell, 1998).

Participants included five faculty members within the College of Education, Health, and Society at our university representing teacher education and educational leadership. Historically there has been a division between these two departments and part of our collective work has been bridging that divide. In this way, our collaborative effort has been about pushing boundaries and crossing borders to create a transformative teacher education program that centers justice and equity. As practicing teacher-educators striving toward implementing an inclusive curriculum, we have come together to discuss and deliberate curricular decisions that our colleagues feel might be potentially “uncomfortable” for them (and us) as practitioners, yet recognizing the power that these moments have to help us outgrow ourselves.

We used the following data to inform our study: (1) personal weekly reflection journals on teaching highlighting “nodal moments”; (2) various student reflections and class assignments; (3) curriculum revisions; and (4) transcripts of two participant group conversations held at the end of the Fall 2017 and beginning of Spring 2018 semester. Our weekly journal entries consisted of reflecting on our own teaching and pedagogy as well as how our approach has changed over time. Additionally, student reflections and class assignments were analyzed across numerous undergraduate courses based on strategies, techniques, and reflective moments practiced in our courses.
Data analysis consisted of individually coding our “nodal moments” in our reflections as well as student reflections. We borrow from Tidwell’s (2006) work by defining nodal moments as moment-specific examinations of our teaching where critical events occurred, and used as data, deconstructing what and how we represented the context in which the event occurred. We commented on each other’s journals on Google Docs, and we came together with individual codes seeking larger, umbrella codes that are inclusive of our experiences. Collaboratively, we set up a shared Google Doc space to record reflective moments of our coding. Then, we read our group discussion transcripts with these codes in mind, allowing ourselves to look across and within various data via the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), leading to the co-construction of three themes. Due to space limitations, we specifically focus on one theme, which we present in the next section.

Findings

Through data analysis, we found three themes that resonate across all five reflection journals: (1) the idea that curriculum is a living entity that consistently molds and reshapes based on the experiences that reside within the setting/context; (2) that teaching is personal and vulnerable, where we found ourselves questioning, doubting, and realizing that we can never really separate teaching from ourselves; and (3) how co-teaching and collaboration can empower and invigorate us. For the purpose of this paper, we chose to focus on the second theme: teaching is personal. For us, teaching is something that cannot be separated from the soul, which stirs emotions, self-doubt, and sometimes questions our pedagogical beliefs and intentions. Below, we each describe how teaching for social justice impacted us personally.

Teaching is personal

Brittany:

I am not sure the first time I heard that I needed tough skin, but I always knew this didn’t resonate with me. Tough for who? For what? This was often told to me in moments where my emotions began to get the best of me. During my doctoral program, it was told to me at presentations, on assignments, and there was the first time I was receiving written evaluations from students (which differed quite a bit from what this looked like as an elementary school teacher). Years later as a college professor, I still have these moments of emotionality that elicits a response of “toughness” from someone. You can’t take these personally. You just have to toughen up. However, I have often found myself caught in my own internal struggle of wanting to be perceived as “nice” by my pre-service teachers all the while knowing it is my job to push them in their thinking. In my reflective writing I shared, ‘As I heard at the last critical race conference I attended (June 2, 2017), ‘sometimes doing this work means you often won’t be perceived as the nice one.’ Even though this has nothing to do with “niceness”- niceness is associated with whiteness, and if I am going to disrupt whiteness, inevitability this means I will disrupt niceness too.” The tension of all these feelings: nervousness, fear, sadness, anticipation, excitement, etc. is exactly why I reject the notion of “tough” skin. The tougher the skin, the less feeling I would have. It would eventually become numb. And you can’t be numb when you do social justice work. There will be good days and there will be bad. But, we must work through all of these feelings, because ultimately teaching is personal.

Katherine:

The theme throughout my reflections was one of self-doubt and questioning. I must have asked at least five times in my journal, “Did I handle that right?” I found myself reflecting on discussions that stemmed from readings, questions students had, or even stories students wanted to share and ask for my reaction. However, I continuously doubted my own reactions!

I realize the initial resistance that occurs when speaking about race. There are many students who appreciate and do not question their privileges (or have even been asked to question their privileges before); when our class is restructured around topics that can (and should) be
uncomfortable to check implicit biases and form a deeper self-awareness, I have found that my teaching evaluations take a “hit,” whereas I used to pride myself on getting perfect scores in my evaluations. Now, I realize doing this work takes patience, strength, and a thicker skin to realize that not every student is going to appreciate or like what we discuss, and therefore, their uncomfortability will be taken out on my teaching evaluations. However, I pride myself on being an excellent teacher in my career, so how could I not take their comments and/or reduced scores personally?

Rachel:

Teaching for social justice is a deeply personal and emotional endeavor. I am constantly assessing whether or not I handled a situation “right” and reflecting on my curriculum and pedagogy. This is an exhausting process, but to be a critical educator, it’s absolutely necessary. For example, this past semester I had to deal with a lot of racial turmoil in the classroom. I had a pretty racially diverse classroom in comparison to previous classes and this created special challenges. Most of the students of color were vocal about their positions and experiences on race and racism, while white students were often silent. During the semester I was trying to navigate holding white students accountable, pushing them and giving them support, while at the same time supporting students of color and making sure they were also getting what they needed from the curriculum. It was not easy and I kept thinking I was “failing” all semester long. At the same time I had to keep telling myself that I am doing the best that I can and that this is also a learning process for me as an educator. As I continue to push myself to do better I must also love and value myself.

Ganiva:

“Did I disclose too much?” I constantly walk away from my classes with this question in mind. This question often spurs my reflective journal entries after I teach. As a Latina, working-class, cisgender professor among predominantly white middle-class students, I tend to be the “diversity” person in the classroom. And as a critical pedagogue that employs storytelling as a pedagogical tool, I depend on experiences to produce knowledge and curriculum. But if anyone is going to tell a story that is different from the mainstream, it often has to be me. I tell stories about my upbringing, schooling and teaching experiences. I do this to provide a different angle from which to make sense of sensitive topics like immigration and humanize students from diverse backgrounds. Overtime this takes an emotional toll on me because these are personal stories, and I can’t help but wonder how my students are perceiving me? I’m supposed to be the all-knowing, distant, and rational professor, but disclosing myself disrupts this expectation and can set me up for judgement. However, if I expect my students to question their own worldviews and experience discomfort as a process for learning, then I ought to make myself vulnerable too.

Genesis:

The historical use of differences as a tool to create arbitrary lines of human division, fuels perceptions and experiences I have as an educator of color teaching students who are predominately white. While my goals to support all students are equal, historical narratives that anchored human division stalks me during class. The job becomes more than facilitating the content for my students, it focuses on facilitating the content through a historical narrative that de-legitimizes me as a person of color. So, I overly mined politeness. While I am polite by nature of upbringing and values I hold dear, I also check-in a lot more with my students, stop longer between content to communicate I am open to questions, feedback or comments, linger after class—even inviting students to meet me just to check-in to show I am human. This is magnified at times, by accepting late work that legitimately had no excuse, or allowing students to revise work in the event my directions as a Black person to White students were less than clear. Interestingly, as I constantly monitor myself as a professional, I know these reasons are not possibly the problem. Yet, I err on the side of politeness to help me facilitate content.
Discussion

According to Cochran-Smith et al. (1999), social justice teaching should not be an add-on to teacher education, but rather a “fundamentally different way of doing the daily work of teacher education” (p. 232). We understand that social justice and issues of race, social class, gender, sexuality and ability are messy content. It cannot be done in one or two classes, but rather it must imbue our everyday teaching in every course we teach. Moreover, there’s no neatly pre-packaged curriculum or how-to manual on how to teach for social justice, or how to be a critically reflective educator. Instead, there are overlapping ideas, and each semester, each group of students is going to be different, and it should be. Unfortunately, because of this messiness, the work social justice educators do in their classes sometimes gets discounted. Thus, there are many challenges in centering social justice in our curriculum at a predominantly white institution (PWI).

For instance, it is often “much simpler to talk about social justice than to ‘do’ social justice” (Aveling, 2012, p. 114). There is a lack of critical understanding of curriculum and pedagogy that move beyond the confines of white, western ways of knowing and knowledge production. There is also a pervasive lack of knowledge or disbelief in the struggles that students and faculty who are othered in some way face at a PWI. This lack of understanding, awareness and acceptance reinforces isolating conditions for those of us who push back against hegemonic norms through teaching and scholarship.

In addition to the challenges of preparing future educators to teach for social justice in their classrooms, there are many college professors haven’t been prepared to teach about social justice. Cochran-Smith et al. (1999) argues that there must be concerted efforts for teacher educators “to develop self-knowledge regarding their own social identities, to confront their own biases, to learn how to respond to the biased comments that may emerge in their classrooms, and to gain familiarity with the risks and dangers of participating in such a discourse” (p. 233). We have each engaged in classroom spaces where students have said downright racist, sexist, and classist comments. While we bring with us a breadth of content knowledge on issues of oppression this information does not necessarily prepare oneself for how to effectively “call out” such comments and redirect them to become educative moments. It is through collaborative self-study that we have been able to learn pedagogical approaches to addressing moments like this. Moreover, there is no how-to guide for responding to such comments, but there certainly are ideas that can be gathered and reflected upon as a collaborative to feel more prepared in such moments. Thus, the “value of collaborative self-study about social justice is determined by the degree of impact not simply on what we say, but on what we believe and what we do” (Cochran-Smith et al., 1999, p. 241). This further solidifies the need for collaboration.

In the past there has been little open collaboration within our institution; however, we are working to change this norm. Thus, our case is an example of what it looks like when teacher educators make an active decision to not only collaborate on teaching, but also to reflect on experiences to learn from one another. While each of us experienced some form of isolation, critique, and vulnerability in our teaching, in coming together to do this research we realized we weren’t alone. We realized that we each felt teaching was personal and there was nothing wrong with us that we felt this way. We were able to both affirm and support one another.

We have also realized through our work together that finding spaces of solidarity can not only unite people for a greater cause, but finding these spaces can also provide hope. Our hope is that this piece gives you inspiration to collaborate with other educators who center social justice in their teaching at your university or school. Working alone is lonely. It is also dangerous to our mental and physical well being when we do not have support and comradeship. If we are going to bring the personal back to teaching, we can begin with our colleagues. Movements outside of the university working towards social justice require a collaboration of people who care about issues of injustice; the same is true for movements within universities. It’s also important to recognize that we need to work to change the structures and policies within the university and not just our classroom curriculum and pedagogy. Some of these structures might include a paradigm shift away from westernized and Eurocentric ideals of individuality and a disconnect between teacher
and student. Instead, let’s advocate for deep, relational ways of knowing and being that allow for teaching to be personal without critique. We cannot do this work alone.

Throughout our collaboration, we noticed that questioning ourselves as educators at a professional and personal level is inseparable. We question ourselves to outgrow ourselves. Doubt pushes us to reflect and reconsider alternative possibilities on how to navigate perspectives and positionalities different from our own. While tedious and emotionally taxing for us at times, it is also a way to build meaningful learning experiences and dialogue with our students. To collaboratively question and critically reflect on our teaching enables us to craft personalized approaches with our students, and we also hold one another accountable for working as social justice educators with a growth mindset. This collaborative growth model should be institutionally validated in higher education because it can lead to a more welcoming and inclusive learning environment for all students.

Conclusion

In this paper, we intended to contribute to wider national efforts for teachers to confront social injustices by modeling our process as teacher educators. Teacher education needs to keep up with the complexities unfolding in classrooms and communities, and this can start with teacher educators. This work can’t be done in isolation - not within single classrooms, nor single institutions. Our project upholds the mission to adopt a “holistic” and “integrated” approach to teacher education through self-study that responds to an ever-changing educational climate.

References


Struggling to let our selves live and thrive: Three women’s collaborative self-study on leadership

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Alicia is Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education and Student Services in a large college. When we began, she was an interim Associate Dean and part of her role included being Director of Teacher Education. This was two positions in one and required constant decisions about what needed attention. She applied for the interim position as a way to try a new role. This self-study began as Alicia and Christina discussed new roles and a desire to understand a perceived disconnect between who we wanted to be as educational leaders and our experiences. Brenda, feeling similar disconnect, joined the group soon after starting her new position. Alicia was asked to serve as interim for two years then learned it would be three years about nine months after starting. A few months into this study the provost made the position official and not interim. She began with questions as she entered the role but not until she and Christina spoke, a year into the position, did they formalize a study.

Brenda is Special Education Director for a mid-sized school district in the southeastern United States. The district population represents both affluent and economically challenged families and is in a racially diverse community. Brenda has been in the position a year and a half and has been actively building relationships and working to understand southern cultural norms. Brenda was brought in as a change agent, with the superintendent wanting to see changes in fiscal accountability, compliance with IDEA regulations and relevant professional development.

Christina is Curriculum Director at a small school district in the midwest. The district has a student population of 2,300 with approximately 145 teaching staff. Christina is halfway through her third year in this position. Prior to her employment, the district used curriculum consulting services, and Christina was the first in-district curriculum director. Her role responsibilities continually changed while she and other administrators defined district needs.
Chapter 37: Struggling to let our selves live and thrive: Three women’s collaborative self-study on leadership

Aim

We collaborated on: How do we as new administrators/leaders grapple with and come to understand our experiences and what they mean for our practices and identities? Palmer (1998) stated, “The most practical thing we can achieve in any kind of work is insight into what is happening inside us as we do it” (p. 3). By understanding our selves better, we hoped to become more equipped to deal with struggles and be better leaders.

Situating the study

We knew the study would be informed by two areas - leadership and women in leadership. We first looked at self-study and leadership. Manke (2004) summarized ways those in educational administrative roles studied themselves and their practice. She found that educational administrators grappled with roles and issues around power, community, social justice and reform. Clift (2015) studied her experience as associate dean, illustrating the pull in numerous directions women in this role may feel. Collins (2016) studied herself as a school leader describing tensions and complexities of this role. We hoped to add to this growing body of literature about teachers and teacher educators who are now administrators.

Defining leadership

“Leadership” is an ambiguous term with many definitions (Volckmann, 2014); however, ambiguity allows leaders to pursue personal definitions and aims for leadership given specific situational contexts. Though much of the research into school administration focuses on observable behaviors of school leaders, our interests were more psychological, centering around felt dissonance. This area of leadership is understudied:

We know little about how school leaders come to interpret, adapt, and transform the problem at hand, how this process of sense-making is shaped by interactions with others who are engaged in the same endeavors, and how school leaders’ sense-making influences their leadership practices. (Sleegers, Wassink, van Veen & Imants, 2009, p. 154)

Influences of current socio-political contexts further emphasize externality of leadership while deemphasizing self-understanding. Ylimaki (2010) contends today’s educational administrators are judged by their ability to affect student achievement data and produce tangible results - byproducts of standardized accountability systems with weighty consequences for poor performance. In this context, leadership becomes managerial (Burch, 2007; Henderson & Gornik, 2007), and its value is set by raising scores, cutting spending, and streamlining processes.

According to Palmer (1998), teaching (and by extension, leading) is more than an exercise in producing results. It is a manifestation of the self, a “projection” of the self onto others and the context, “teaching holds a mirror to the soul” (p. 2). Leaders, Palmer states, must “journey beyond fear and into authentic selfhood, a journey toward respecting otherness and understanding how connected and resourceful we all are” (p. 161). This relationship between a deeper sense of self and more authentic leadership despite a context of accountability was a catalyst for this study.

Women in leadership

Understanding a deeper sense of self began with recognizing possible implications of being women in leadership. Alicia recognized these implications when she articulated that women in educational leadership experience a felt difference, “Our lived experience is telling us that being a woman is different” (Online Meeting 10/18/16).

In keeping with the managerial nature of contemporary educational leadership, the accountability movement is borne from long-standing male guided practices (Henderson & Gornik, 2007; Greene, 1993). Although women are the numerical majority in education, they
have historically not established the norms. As a result, expectations of educational leaders reflect qualities that are typically masculine in nature. Marshall (1984) states, “…leadership characteristics and the masculine sex role correspond so closely that they are simply different labels for the same concept” (p. 19). According to Reay and Ball (2000) characteristics such as control and competition are idealized as management qualities, so female leaders may feel pressure to conform to male standards of leadership.

**Methods**

Our work is interpretive (Crotty, 1998), seeking to understand our experience. Interpretive research is iterative and recursive; data collection, generation, analysis and interpretation are intertwined. Self-study reflects this including gathering and generating items for analysis in a recursive and interactive system (Laboskey, 2004).

Separated by distance, we collaborated through technology (Berry & Crowe, 2009), including:

- Individual journaling through Google Docs providing ongoing feedback using comment tools. Journals included open reflections and critical incidents.
- Six monthly one to two-hour meetings from September through March via Google Hangout. No agendas were created and foci emerged from whatever was most pressing. We shared critical incidents that had occurred since we last met. From this, one story always emerged more prominently. We then shared stories connecting one another’s experiences to the core issue.

Data analysis was ongoing, recursive, interpretive, and collaborative. During our reads of journals before each meeting we began developing a sense of larger patterns and noticing some consistent tensions in our practice (Mason, 2002). We continued generating data and discussing themes throughout the academic year. Three months in, we began a more formal process of data analysis with holistic journal rereading (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Then, we reformatted the journals and comments to add open coding. Each journal received three rounds of coding. We coded our own work and each other’s. After coding, we placed themes at the top of coding columns to show themes we saw across journals (see Table 1 for example). Meetings also acted as time for analysis as we discussed what we were reading and interpreting across journals and emerging themes. Recordings of meetings were analyzed based on prominent themes across journals.

After analyzing, we noticed a divide in our themes between those stemming from internal forces, such as personal values and our perceptions of contexts, and those experienced as external forces, such as societal norms. To frame these understandings, we used Volckmann’s (2012) four-quadrant leadership identity model, which includes (1) internal-entity, (2) internal-context, (3) external-entity, and (4) external-context. We thought the framework would enable us to deconstruct leadership influences for the sake of developing understanding. Data did not emerge supporting the third quadrant; we think this is because the basis of self-study rests within the psychological (internal) and our journals, reflections, and discussions did not capture biological behaviors (such as a reddening face or shaking hands). Focusing on these quadrants, we reviewed all codes, themes, and data to develop findings.
Table 1. Sample analysis of journal excerpt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brenda's Journal</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Alicia</th>
<th>Christina</th>
<th>Brenda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 4, 2016 7:23 pm</td>
<td>Today I met with the elementary assistant principals. The last meeting went very poorly due to my having just reduced four school psychologists and assigning all school psychologists to share two buildings. ... Today however was better. Last month they literally didn't respond verbally when I asked them to participate in a learning activity.</td>
<td>There is literally no way to start on a good, positive note when you begin by coming in rearranging the staff. What an expectation for the Board to have of you at the outset! (Christina)</td>
<td>Unable to start as a positive leader because of the unrealistic expectations placed on you to beforehand.</td>
<td>Difficult decisions Commitment Hope/optimism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Incident - Elementary Principal Meeting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outcomes and discussion

Our findings illustrate a struggle to let our selves live and thrive as leaders and women. With limited space, we report findings related to the quadrants most strongly present during analysis: internal-entity and external-context.

Internal-entity

Internal-entity refers to connections between personal values and self. One struggle was a disconnect between personal values (including leadership values) and what we felt we accomplished in line with these values. Knowing, defining, and understanding our values aligns with Palmer’s (1998) belief that self-knowledge is a cornerstone to good leadership -- what were our values as leaders? How were these values projected? And, how did they interact with our contexts to either intensify or de-intensify dissonance in our professions? Data revealed our shared leadership values were collaboration, relationships, and feeling valued by colleagues.

Each of us felt “success” when enacting our values. For example, Alicia expressed feeling she was “doing the right thing” when collaborating through “facilitating, engaging with, fostering improvement and change to better student success” (Journal 2/6/16). Brenda found a similar sense of “rightness” after engaging in shared decision making and receiving feedback from a colleague: “adjusting my staffing plan after collaborative dialogue with my team and receiving the note affirmed that this type of leading and decision making process is the ‘right’ way for me” (Journal 12/4/2016). Christina felt success when a colleague recognized her efforts toward shared leadership: “She said, ‘I am learning a lot from your leadership’ which means so much to me because … at least one person recognizes what I try to do at work and how I try to treat people” (Journal 10/1/16).
We found when our leadership values were at odds with our actions and decisions, we experienced the most discomfort. Alicia captured this: “The administrative pieces [of my role] are there and have to be done and at times I think I find myself resenting them -- especially if they interfere with the leading part” (Journal 2/6/16). Likewise, Brenda struggled to connect with principals after being tasked with reducing several positions without collaborative discussion and problem solving as she would have preferred (Journal 10/4/16 & 12/20/16). Christina became aggravated when she wanted to decentralize decision making responsibilities and experienced resistance. Existing practices did not align with her leadership values: “DLT [District Leadership Team] is not MY DLT. I can't find a way to move ownership back on the teachers and admins yet, but I have to. I can't have all the cards and hold onto them as if it is MY initiative” (Journal 9/23/16).

Feminist understanding of power reflects a push to empower more individuals rather than limit power to a few (Munro, 1995). Shrewsbury (1987) explains, “…feminist pedagogy embodies a concept of power as energy, capacity, and potential rather than domination” (p. 8). These emerging internal-entity values aligned with feminist concepts of “power for” which emphasizes sharing power (Katz, 2006; Reay & Ball, 2000). The notion of power for rests in the community of an organization with values of connectedness and relationships - something we saw when finding our own leadership values.

**External-context**

External-context refers to connection between outside situational influences and self. We encountered tension between societal norms and how we lived our roles. Whether caused by societal norms or internal perceptions of societal norms, the tensions arose in forms of guilt when navigating roles constituting our identities. Ylimaki (2010) shares that identity has “fluid” roles in “…ways in which we see ourselves in relation to others as well as by the ways in which people identify us” (p. 18).

According to existing research, one identity norm affecting women in leadership is the “ideal worker,” which Bailyn (2000) describes as one who is consistently present without distractions and whose career is uninterrupted by familial interruptions - essentially one whose focus is a single identity. According to Polka, Litchka, and Davis (2008), the barrier for women reaching advanced educational leadership positions is conflicting demands of job and family. The concept of ideal worker and the associated societal norms present an overarching context within which we fulfilled our other identities and experienced guilt when one ideal worker identity came into conflict with another.

**Mom guilt.** Each of us has children: Alicia’s children are 19 and 13; Brenda’s child is 13; Christina’s children are 8, 7, 2, and 3 weeks. Mom guilt manifested when we felt forced to make choices between our mom identities and other identities, struggling to balance. For example, Christina captured the push-pull of leadership and motherhood: “For years, I have found myself saying that I give everything at work. I am collaborative, team-oriented, amiable, personable, focused on building relationships and the needs of others. But when the end of the work day hits, I have nothing left for family” (Journal 10/10/16). Brenda also felt this imbalance and momentarily stepped out of the study in response to her child’s needs. Both Brenda and Christina’s sense of “mom guilt” stemmed from tension in the expectation to be consistently present as both mother and leader. Data collected through journaling and meetings routinely highlighted guilt brought about by felt pressure to live up to an “ideal worker” standard which separates family obligations from professional selves (Bailyn, 2000).

**Researcher guilt.** All of us had doctoral level research preparation; however, Alicia was a full professor and had been a self-study researcher for 20 years; Brenda was a novice with self-study; and Christina had completed a self-study dissertation and published a self-study centered around leadership. As a method of organization, we set timelines for journaling and meeting at the outset; however, these timelines began to feel like deadlines, and we experienced guilt upon
failing to reach them. Although we found the research to be rewarding for our leadership selves, we consistently bemoaned not getting enough completed between meetings (e.g., Online Meeting 10/18/16, 11/15/16, 3/9/17; E-mails 1/23/17, 5/6/17). For Alicia, the study revealed guilt and analyzing the guilt highlighted a value she held as a leader:

I find that when I share the events it is good and it was good tonight to talk about why we (I) feel guilt and why we sometimes struggle to write. I do feel that I am always giving to others - this is definitely a way I am that is fundamentally hard to change. (Journal 2/2/17)

Christina struggled to navigate her roles and commitment to research: “When you’re home, you’re working being a mom; [it’s] hard to focus on scholarly work” (Journal 11/15/16):

This is hard work...I’ve been thinking about why I’m slacking so much when I started this project with such excitement...and I think one reason is that I get tired of thinking! This is exhausting, busy, tiresome work, and I give so much of my time and day to everyone else... taking time to think about and for myself ends up taking a back seat. (Journal 1/30/17)

Both Alicia and Christina felt guilt because of their value for others.

Brenda admitted that joining the team she “was so afraid of not being able to pull [her] weight” in the study (Writing Meeting 1/1/2018). Earlier she explained: “...[the] researcher role will be the toughest to maintain. I’ll have to fight to keep that identity alive” (Journal 12/10/16). The researcher guilt experienced, as with the mom guilt, caused us to feel pressure to conform to the “ideal worker” norm of commitment without distraction (Bailyn, 2000).

Self-care guilt. Each of us understood the value of self-care and its necessity to thrive. However, this self-study showed us grappling with managing care routines. Essentially, “When does caring for others interfere with caring for you?” (Brenda Journal 9/23/17). Alicia developed a major health issue shortly before accepting the interim position that worsened over the next seven months. This altered her life as an administrator and she had to learn to care for herself differently. Brenda had recently moved across country and had to re-establish patterns of self-care. Christina struggled to balance her children’s needs, extracurricular activities at home, a new superintendent, and intensifying anxiety and stress.

We each felt something about our situation hindered our abilities to take care of our selves. Brenda, for example, had to learn how to stop “obsessing” about expectations of others and avoid “ideal worker” perfectionism: “I think an emerging part of my leadership values is to care for me-not the superintendent, not the treasurer although I will continue to seek the balance between their demands but not obsess over it.” (Journal 10/15/16). Brenda was learning how to recognize and counter living up to others’ expectations.

Alicia wrote about her health and its interaction with her leadership:

My position seems like it might finally be recognized as being two full time jobs in one - which has been tearing me apart. I know my health has been affected but I can’t admit that - don’t want anyone to think I can’t do the job but I can feel it and I know the things that are left undone - it is still frustration because the split can’t happen soon enough. (Journal 1/25/17)

Alicia felt pressured to fulfill two roles while her own needs were not met.

Christina recognized the lines between her work and her self were becoming too blurred and she was spending sleepless nights worried about work expectations: “So, work and life are intersecting, and I have to do a better job of figuring that out” (Journal 10/10/17). By identifying sources of guilt around self-care, we took explicit steps to care for ourselves. Christina turned to counseling and reflected on its benefits:
What I’ve noticed in just these few weeks is...I feel less pressure to do things “perfectly”. I believe [counseling is] helping me find more balance because I’m not obsessing over my professional or personal anxieties all day and all night, and I am noticing being able to be more present for my family (rather than still processing work at home). (Journal 11/23/16)

We all felt similar benefits after finding ways to enact consistent self-care practices (e.g., Alicia began drumming and had her position re-classified into two positions, and Brenda found a yoga studio to continue practicing).

Conclusion

By naming and understanding influences on our leadership selves and identities, we can help others understand their leadership experiences, prompting them to consider how their experiences influence how they see themselves as leaders and how that vision is lived in practice. Multiple factors influenced how we felt about our selves as leaders. When our values were aligned with our practice we felt most satisfied. We experienced guilt in non-administrative aspects of our lives. Unlike the mom, researcher, and self-guilt, we documented no guilt associated with our administrative roles -we felt tensions, we worked hard and made hard decisions, but the same emotions were not attached to these aspects of our positions like our other roles. We wonder if this relates to the ideal worker concept. Our roles as leaders dominated and therefore were the catalyst for the guilt of not being consistently present in other roles. We wonder why this is? Is there a cultural, societal or gendered norm that is pushing us to think about our leadership roles in one way and our other roles in another?

References


Critical friends as co-authors: Pushing boundaries and crossing borders together

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As critical friends, we participated in a longitudinal collaborative self-study to explore and challenge our assumptions and beliefs for purposes of improving our understanding and practice (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). During this process, we became critical friends as co-authors— that is, dynamic meaning-makers whose critical friendship surpassed our expectation to act as “a sounding board” (Schuck & Russell, 2005 p. 107), challenge one another, support the reframing of events, and join in the professional learning experience (Loughran & Northfield, 1996). As co-authors, we pushed the boundaries of what we expected of a critical friend through dialogue and collaborative meaning-making. Valuing our whole selves in pursuit of our self-study, we crossed the borders of professional practices to include the silent and unspoken stories from our complex individual identities (Hostetler, Mills, & Hawley, 2014) beyond that of teacher educator researchers. We also invited the knowledge, experience, tensions, and life narratives stemming from our identities as mothers, wives, women of faith, and as minorities in our institutions. In this paper, we describe the process of being and becoming critical friends as co-authors by answering the following questions: How do these recursive processes—meaning-making transactions/dialogic interactions—generate our critical friendship? How do these processes evoke and/or sustain critical friends as co-authors? Our discoveries make visible how self-study guided us to: (1) disarm the boundaries of our individual selves by disrupting our existing understanding of self in relationship to our past lived experiences; (2) cross into a collaborative space where we are able to co-author our narrative lives through a collaborative conference protocol; and (3) push the boundaries of our present work as teacher educator researchers by transforming our professional inquiries through co-authoring.
Context

During our doctoral programs, we--Elsie and Christi--had each researched teachers’ lived and told stories through narrative inquiry methodology. Now several years after the dissertation, we bonded over the shared feeling of still feeling pregnant with the weight of ideas and knowledge from participants’ and our own dissertation stories--stories we had never revealed or revisited since our dissertation journeys. Through an impromptu but intense conversation at a national conference, we discovered similarities in our professional and personal experiences that left us feeling like we had been living parallel lives. More importantly, we felt that we had each been silencing parts of our professional and personal stories. We felt we had more to say about our past narrative inquiry research, yet struggled to break with our past research in light of our present understandings. In response of this recognition, we made a pact to become critical friends who could challenge and support one another to revisit our dissertation inquiries and to be proactive in laboring to give these stories life. Furthermore, we sought to explore the tensions which had muffled our voices. We opened our calendars and put down a date to meet via Skype the following week. In pursuit of our self-study, we continued to meet, at least once a week, for two to four hours each virtual conference call over the course of a year.

Purpose

From this year-long study, we offer new perspectives for being and becoming critical friends as co-authors. That is, critical friends who generate knowledge and understanding together; who compose shared narrative knowledge as critical friends through discourse; who push the boundaries of personal and professional in the context of the self as both whole and dynamically ever changing; who critically consider self in and across the borderlands of the narrative past, present, and imagined future; and who cross the borders of individual teacher-education research, theory and pedagogical practices while interconnecting our knowledge and lived experiences within the broader landscape of teacher education practice and research.

Perspectives

We situated our inquiry in a transactional paradigm, adopting the epistemological stance that humans are active meaning makers who share an ecological relationship with their environment (Connell, 2008; Dewey, 1938; Dewey & Bentley, 1949; Rosenblatt, 1978/1994, 2005). Informed by the Transactional Theory of Reading (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994; Rosenblatt, 2005), a narrative view of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1938), and feminist communication theory (e.g., Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock, 1997; Colflesh, 1996), we positioned ourselves as collaborative, active meaning makers who could read and make meaning from our lived experiences. Drawing from individual narrative inquiry and self-study research, we shared a perspective that stories lived and told are a way of understanding experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Together, we sought to revisit our past research, disrupt our narrative present, and re-imagine how we might live and do research as critical friends and co-authors of our restoried pasts, present, and anticipated future. The pronoun ‘we’ represents how as individuals we come together and share the moral, ethical and educational responsibility in a symphony of voices-our students’ and our own. We yearn for and rediscover new possibilities in our lived experiences while constructing our narrative lives.

Narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry in educational research focuses on educational experience (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2006). The justification for this focus is that “humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). People live, think, experience, and communicate in and through story (Elbaz, 1991). Stories help humans organize experiences, make connections, discover and express meanings. Thus, to study narrative is to study “the ways humans experience
the world” (p. 2). Since people often recall life experiences in terms of specific events, and since people’s memories of past events often lead them to “adapt strategies and processes to apply to new situations,” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 71), identifying critical events and the details surrounding them is useful for “getting at the core” (2007, p. 71) of what is important in a study. For a researcher, holistically studying critical events can be “an avenue to making sense of complex and human-centered information (p. 77). In this study, we identified and analyzed critical events—both in our individual dissertation experiences and in our shared journey as critical friends.

Methods

To facilitate our collaborative inquiry, we positioned ourselves as critical friends who could disrupt and problematize our narrative lives as teacher researchers. At the outset of our study, we relied on—or more precisely assumed—Schuck and Russell’s (2005) description of a critical friend as one who “acts as a sounding board, asks challenging questions, supports reframing of events, and joins in the professional learning experience” (p. 107). Although our focus was attending to critical events as turning points in our ongoing narrative (Webster and Mertova, 2007), we also documented our process of being and becoming critical friends. During our inquiry, we cultivated our critical friendship, valuing the lived-through experience, mindful and attentive to our shared narrative present amid the narrative continuity of our individual lives. We formed a commitment based on personal and professional growth. In so doing, we discovered and nurtured a bond, fortified by a shared purpose of understanding and ever being and becoming. Through our use of a collaborative conference protocol, we discovered, authentically, what it means to be and to become critical friends who can co-author narrative understanding of self in the study. In light of this discovery, we revisited our data guided by the following questions:

• How do recursive processes like collaborative meaning-making and dialogic interactions generate our critical friendship?
• How do these processes generate and/or sustain critical friends as co-authors?

The data we examined included the stories we lived and told together in vignettes, documented critical incidents, field notes, running notes, screenshots from our video conferencing, and drafts of our writings.

Self-study collaborative conference protocol

To navigate our positionality, we used a modified collaborative conference protocol (e.g., Cameron-Standerford, et al., 2013; Bergh, Edge, & Cameron-Standerford, 2018) to help one another re-frame an understanding of experience (Loughran & Northfield, 1998). This process included: (1) identifying a critical event; (2) formulating a self-study question; (3) textualizing the lived experience (Edge, 2011); (4) situating the event in its broader context; (5) sharing one’s ideas and insights with a critical friend; (6) engaging in dialogue, asking questions, making comments, sharing connections, offering observations and allowing the diverse perspectives of each other to be shared. Through the process of (7) re-reading the texts of our research events, we charted turning points and other events; we identified and articulated (8) connections between our experiences, our individual professional knowledge, and the shared understanding from which we built new knowledge together.

Results

In the building and rebuilding of knowledge and meaning-making, the following recursive phases emerged.

1. Throughout the dialogic interactions, narratives are shared.
2. By engaging in dialogic interactions, sharing narratives, and revisiting lived experiences, we acknowledge our ideologies, theoretical underpinnings and common constructs that inform our pedagogical practices and research.
3. We developed a sense of awareness of the meaning we had made during our past dissertation writing experience and the many more meanings to be made in our narrative present.

4. As critical friends, we recognized how our narratives (silent and covert) informed our personal and professional interactions.

5. While sharing our silent and covert narratives, we both espoused and generated a “safe zone.”

6. As critical friends who individually and collectively embody and sustain a safe zone where recursive dialogic interactions occur, we engaged in a process of aligning and positioning and repositioning, while making sure that we were cognizant of our daily experiences.

7. We became co-authors, co-constructors, and co-generators of our narrative and storied lives.

Discussion

Crossing into a collaborative space where we are able to co-author our narrative lives through a collaborative conference protocol.

In our self study, critical friendship was the catalyst through which we would hold each other accountable as we revisited our dissertation stories. We relied on each other to tackle a task (dissertation analysis/dissemination) that we felt could not be done on our own. We collaborated and engaged in dialogic interactions to help talk about the responsibility we both felt we had with our dissertation participants’ storied lives.

Before our critical friendship, we nurtured and guarded our dissertation study. As critical friends and co-authors, we challenged ourselves to break away/surpass the boundaries to (re)birth the dissertation study and our participants’ lived experiences. In doing so, we crossed into a collaborative space where we are able to co-author our narrative lives through a collaborative conference protocol. We identify and describe co-authoring as:

- Dynamic meaning-making through discourse over time, including meaningful silences, that resulted in both refraining one’s own individual knowledge as well as generating new insights and new knowledge together;

- A process of reframing and revisiting critical events in our narrative lives connecting and extending critical friendship to disrupt, problematize, and transform understandings within the broader narrative continuity of the past, present, and anticipated future;

- A process where in our collaborative meaning-making encompassed both our personal and professional knowledge and experiences;

- A state of being, not an end goal.

We were not just acting as a sounding board or even critiquing practice or “getting the work done” (Shunk & Russell, 2005, p. 109). We collaborated for purposes of better understanding rather than working toward an end product to “take away” from our interactions. As a result, we included our whole selves and our multiple identities within the collaborative space. This was a self-study of the whole self in the context of our larger stories, both individual and shared.

Disarming the boundaries of our individual selves by disrupting our existing understanding of self in relationship to our past lived experience.

It was through disrupting our storied lives as educational researchers that we too recalled our own silenced narratives. Together, we began to speak what we had before silenced. We released our inner thoughts, desires and struggles and gave power to our voices to be heard in the safety of our critical friendship and in the arc of a story larger than our individual self. Often times, silenced narratives are discovered within a predominant culture that have established “both normative and prescriptive [narratives] about lives and about selves. [The silenced narrative emerges when]
experiences conform or deviate from these narratives [which] create spaces for voice and silence” (Fivush, 2010, p. 89). As we engaged in dialogic interactions, we acknowledged the narratives that silenced our words; we relinquished those narratives into our safe spaces where they could be disrupted, problematized and interpreted. The stories held within our memories were spoken-willingly released-- into a space outside of ourselves, liberating ourselves from the weight of holding onto those narratives. Crossing the physical border of mind and memory into the present space of discourse to include the silent and unspoken stories from our complex individual identities (Hostetler, Mills, & Hawley, 2014), our discourse went beyond that of teacher educator researchers. We also invited the knowledge, experience, tensions, and life narratives stemming from our identities as mothers, wives, women of faith, and as minorities in our institutions.

In order to give being silenced a voice, Clair (1997) suggests that a “combined [historical and personal] narrative form allows [one] to voice an injustice that has never been rectified” (p. 332). Fivush (2010) describes two different types of silence: being silenced or being silent. Being silenced implies an outside force “when [it] is contrasted with voice, it is conceptualised as imposed, and it signifies a loss of power and self” (Fivush, 2010, p. 88-89). Being silent, in contrast, has implications of power either through shared silence or self silence in the form of reflection or meditation (Fivush, 2010). In sharing our narratives, there were moments in which we were silent--moments when the narrative was so compelling that we quietly contemplated, and moments when one of our questions or observations nudged us beyond our present understanding into a space of powerful and empowering silent reflection and meditation.

**Implications**

*Pushing the boundaries of our present work as teacher educator researchers by transforming our professional inquiries through co-authoring.*

Within the broader context of the theoretical framework and self-study methodology, our individual epistemological and ontological stances brought the following into our critical friendship:

- An extension of critical friendship by including a context beyond the present;
- Lived experiences as “texts” to read, make meaning from, and compose;
- Epistemological stances and ways of being--our metacognitive journey--How do we know what we know and are in the process of knowing?
- Critical friends nurturing conversations that disrupt notions, problematize, and engage in dialogue that values one another's beliefs and practices;
- Dynamic dialogue connected past, present, and future envisionments of our personal and professional selves; and
- Shared ontological perspective that transcended the professional.

These stances led to a transformation of our professional inquiries where we became co-authors of our narratives because we, as critical friends, were each able to listen to the other's narrative, inquire, probe for more details, and share connections. Stories lived and told are powerful conduits--both objects and mediums through which our narrative voices join and simultaneously convey and reconstruct meaning.

In co-authoring our lived research, we discovered, authentically, what it means to be and to become critical friends. We now assert that education research can recognize the perspectives and knowledge of historically marginalized people through story.

Co-authoring can push boundaries and cross borders:

- From professional, compartmentalized self to whole self as critical friend;
- From stories from the past to the stories in the present and possible stories in the future.
Significance

In co-authoring our lived research, we discovered, authentically, what it means to be and to become critical friends. We engaged in dialogues that disrupted our notions of critical incidents and moments of silence. Our conversations problematized our storied lives by consciously folding in our stream of lived stories, the stories we had yet to share. These stories were professional and personal; they revealed the intimate parts of ourselves. The self that is researcher and teacher; mother and daughter; woman of faith and fearful minority in academe. These were not “side stories” or interludes in our research. They were a part of us--of our storied lives, and as such they were included in the whole of our unfractured lives. Out of respect and care and a genuine desire to understand, we situated our narrative lives as both object and medium, and we positioned ourselves as co-authors who both live and do educational research, together.

In telling our story now, we seek to engage in dialogical interactions with the self-study community. Together, may we foster safe zones in which we may be whole, where we may speak the stories we have yet to share with one another, where we may both live and do educational research. May we be critical friends who co-author silenced and covert narratives where we disrupt the dominant narrative. Critical friendship is not just a noun, but also a verb--a state of being, action, ever present in the continuum of our storied lives. It is the action of repurposing, re-seeing, through the eyes of another, what has become invisible to the self. “Critical friends” extends beyond being a sounding board from which one hears one's own voice. It is more. Being a critical friend is to engage in dialogic interactions; transactional events in which new meaning is made. Critical friends engage in a meaning-making conversation, a back-and-forth of ideas, and in this back and forth, ideas are completed.

In telling our story, we incite our self-study community to become insightful of the myriad of dominant, prescriptive, silencing narratives that inform, shape and confine our storied lives. We have revisited the notion of critical friendship by repositioning our colabouring as not just a resource for the completion of a better end product, but as a way of being and knowing which enables an individual to revisit, reignite, disrupt, problematize and challenge one's past and present storied lives. When we remember that, as humans, we are born into storied lives; our existence is a kind of text--intricately woven, a quilt that is stitched and can be restitched, we can reimagine the role of critical friendship as co-authors of our narrative lives.

We have experienced critical friendship and added layers to what critical friendship is--layers of re-imaging, re-inventing, negotiation, accepting, and acknowledging that there are events and incidents that are and will inform our lived experiences, even if our voice was silent when that moment occurred. In this self-study, we share how as critical friends we were able to embrace our past lived experiences, cherish the critical incident that triggered our inquiry, and validate our unique identities and culture. We did not “melt” our stories into one, nor did we vicariously appropriate our unique experiences. We did validate our individual storied lives and generate a non-threatening safe space where we unveiled our biases and disarmed the boundaries that silenced us while creating walls of uncertainty, doubt and fear.

Our positionality as researchers is better informed; it is transformed. I am not a one, but a part of we. As we walk side-by-side, our arms extend and our hands meet, and, as if we had choreographed the moment--our fingers intertwine to embrace the essence of critical friendship. Our hands may release or stray away, but we now know that amid boundaries, our fingers will not only intertwine and interlock, but will also push boundaries and cross whatever borders--together.
References


“The Girl Who Lived”: Exploring the liminal spaces of self-study research with textual critical partners

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Self-study research relies on voice to engage in the “dialogue, collaboration, and critique” necessary to validate and establish trustworthiness in self-study research (Samaras & Sell, 2013, p. 93). Yet, voice—a speech phenomenon that “is not merely equivalent with speaking, but involves the authentic expression of personal experiences” (Warner, 2009, p. 8)—can be rendered silent in the face of powerful and alienating discourses. In the work that follows, I describe my period of voicelessness and the impact of this period on my self-study research. In particular, I foreground my methodological approach to recovering “authentic voice”—a concept of voice where the testimonial of individual experience has “an affective function of persuasion, insofar as the [hearers’] emotional responses to the conveyed personal experiences might bring them around to new ways of thinking and treating the individuals whose collective marginalization and oppression are represented” (Warner, 2009, p. 9).

Rather than present the self-study in which the issue of authentic voice surfaces, I highlight the two-year period of voicelessness (2015-2017) that marks my three-year self-study project. Additionally, I discuss the textual—rather than human—critical partners whose words anticipated my need for care and “othermothering” (James, 1993) and carried me across this liminal period. I close by describing the authoritative pedagogical voice that eventually surfaced in dialogue with J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series (which the title of my paper references). Admittedly, in focusing on this liminal period of voicelessness rather than the self-study itself, I walk a fine line between self-study research and reflection. Yet, I make the attempt in an effort to “[push] the boundaries” of self-study research—our conference theme—and in anticipation of future novice self-study scholars for whom a textual critical partner may be the only collaborative partner available to guide them through the liminal spaces of the study of their teaching practices.

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Voicelessness

My period of voicelessness surfaced within the first months of my professional career in higher education as an African American woman at a predominately white institution (PWI) in the Midwest, United States. In the fall of 2014, I began a tenure track position as an Assistant Professor within a School of Education in the area of TESOL teacher education. In this role, I work primarily with U.S. born K-12 in-service and preservice teachers, many of whom have grown up within a two-hour radius of the University. In order to fully embrace my new position, I felt the need to leave behind my home field of Applied Linguistics (AL) and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), an international field primarily focused on adult and post-secondary education—fields where, as a native speaker of American English, I am part of the socio-cultural majority. My race—though not ignored—is often backgrounded to the symbolic and material power afforded me by my native language and national origin.

However, in the field of U.S. K-12 teacher education I am a marginalized scholar. Much of the marginalization I encounter in this field is communicated through discourses of lack, absence, and difference that circulate in speech and writing about individuals of my race as students and as educators. These are discourses that warn about the “cultural gap” (Sleeter, 2001) and “demographic and cultural mismatch” (Ladson-Billings, 2005) between the predominately white teaching force and the increasingly black, brown, and linguistically diverse student bodies. These discourses echo across dissertations, journal articles, and conference presentations. Their existence in these academic spaces suggest the ongoing presence of socializing forces that reinforce and reify these discourses as authoritative oral and written practices. Moreover, these discourses reflect an entrenched “system of linguistic norms” that have resulted in a “common unitary language” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 270), but one that fails to attend to the differing contextual realities “on the ground”. Such discourses reflect a privileging of whiteness (and thus a prioritization of the needs, concerns, anxieties of white, and mostly female, teachers) and an erasure of the presence of educators of color (and their needs, concerns, and anxieties). Additionally, these discourses fail to consider people of color like myself who teach in PWIs and for whom “the overwhelming presence of Whiteness can be silencing” (Sleeter, 2001, p. 101).

Encountering these discourses of lack, absence, and difference in my initial year on the job was personally traumatic. They were in opposition to my lived experiences as an African American raised in the southern U.S. city of Atlanta, Georgia. In Atlanta, historical segregation gave rise to multiple Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)—Spelman College, Morehouse College, Clark Atlanta University—whose graduates become educators within the state and across the southeast (Irvine & Fenwick, 2011, p. 198). As a consequence, I have always known and been surrounded by K-12 educators of African descent; as the daughter of an African American mom who attended Spelman College, I was well-acquainted with black college professors; as an educator in the city of Atlanta, I spent my first ten years working alongside black teachers. The discourses in my new environment conflicted with this experience, creating dissonance in the foundation of my reality and calling into question the validity of my personal and professional experiences. This dissonance stripped me of my voice and left me in a liminal space of voicelessness where I was unable to produce any scholarly work of note for over two years.

This voicelessness also impacted my teaching. Fortunately, I recognized the need to address the impact of these alienating and powerful discourses on my work. I needed to do so for myself, but also for my current and future students for if I as a seasoned educator could be silenced by these discourses, so then could my students. Thus, at the beginning of the second year of my voicelessness I began a self-study of my teaching practice in a preservice (undergraduate) methods course I teach annually, “Instructional Approaches to TESOL Methods at the Middle/Secondary Grades”. This combined theory and method course introduces preservice teachers to the K-12 pedagogical strategies used to make content area (mainstream) classroom instruction accessible to English language learners (ELLs). However, I also wanted to design the class to challenge students to interrogate ideologies they hold about ELLs. At the heart of my study is the desire to engage with the following pedagogical challenge: “Is there an instructional approach that I can adopt in my TESOL Methods course that reflects my authentic voice, decenters the privileged
position given to whiteness in teacher education, and speaks to all educators from and through a lens (language) of inclusiveness?”

In order to begin this self-study, I had to address my voicelessness. Yet, how does one move forward in self-study research and engage in a critical and collaborative partnership when doing so means reliving the trauma of discursive encounters one wishes to forget and creating textual evidence too painful to record.

**Artists and artwork as critical partners**

Hamilton (2005) provided me with a starting point into my self-study research. Absent “critical friends and colleagues in [her] surrounding area” (Hamilton, 2005, p. 59), she entered into a critical partner relationship with the “spirit” of artist Winslow Homer (1836-1910). Hamilton describes Homer’s work as “controversial in his time…[as he] included many of the people—women and people of color—that were not ordinarily included in art at the time” (2005, p. 61). For Hamilton, engaging with the work and with the spirit of Homer served “as a tool for critical reflection” which she documented in journal form as a way “to explore the effects of this art exhibit on my thinking about my teaching and myself-study” (Hamilton, 2005, p. 61-62).

Though artistic works provide a space for reflection, they also allow for engagement in Bakhtinian dialogue—a discourse-to-discourse engagement accomplished partly by treating sentences (texts) as utterances specific to a time and place that anticipate future utterances (Morson, 2006, p. 55). As such, these texts and our responses to them become our guides—providing the critical partnership to foster collaboration and inquiry, as well as the “intellectual and emotional caring” (Pine, 2009, p. 236) that may be missing in our immediate environment. These artistic texts reach through the time and context in which they were written to address us—their “ideal listener” or even their “superaddressee” (Morson, 2006, p. 56)—in our current context. Their past words, which seem to anticipate our present needs, leave us feeling heard. As guides, these works can provide comfort across the borderlands of discursive discomfort, reflecting the pain of our experience while also “schooling” us in the vocabulary we need to speak for ourselves. Overtime, their words become our words, though enriched with our own ideological intentions—ultimately leading us through the liminal space of voicelessness to a renewed voice enriched by the heteroglossic and polyphonic encounters with the artistic and textual works of our critical partners.

**Dialogues with “Mama Lorde” and “Sister Gloria”**

Inspired by Hamilton (2005), I invited two feminist writers of color to serve as my critical partners—Audre Lorde (1934-1992) and Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004). In inviting these two writers to walk alongside me as critical partners, I entered and became part of an ongoing dialogue about race, gender, and the powerful discourses that silence and contribute to the marginalization of others in the academy. As such, their poems and essays addressing the marginalization of individuals “who stand outside the circle of this society’s definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference—those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older…” (Lorde, 1979/2007, p. 112), anticipated my experiences as a woman of color in a field where I am “conditionally accepted” (Grollman, 2016). Their writings left me feeling recognized at a time when my scholarship and teaching interests were often misrecognized (Bourdieu, 1977) through the lens of my race and gender. Moreover, I encountered the “othermothering” (James, 1993, p. 45)—the African American cultural practice of offering maternal support and care to members of the community who are not their own—that was lacking in my professional life. In my dialogues with these critical textual partners, I affectionately refer to these writer-scholars as “Mama Lorde” and “Sister Gloria,” and I will continue to do so in this text.

I am not naturally drawn to poetry, but in “Poetry is Not a Luxury” (1977), Mama Lorde anticipated me when she wrote that “[f]or women…poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible
action. (Lorde, 2007, p. 37). She further anticipated my challenges as a woman of color in academia when she wrote “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action” (1980). Anticipating the silencing discourses in academia and the fear that hinders one from expressing the reality of one’s lived experiences, Mama Lorde addressed the inner speech that held sway over my tongue and led to my continued silence:

But my daughter, when I told her of our topic and my difficulty with it, said, “Tell them about how you’re never really a whole person if you remain silent, because there’s always that one little piece inside you that wants to be spoken out, and if you keep ignoring it, it gets madder and madder and hotter and hotter, and if you don’t speak it out one day it will just up and punch you in the mouth from the inside.” (1980, p. 22)

Mama Lorde’s words were meant personally for me, delivered in the first-person and drawing upon reported speech. Moreover, her words held back little at a point when she faced the reality of losing her life to cancer. Mama Lorde in her past wisdom counselled my future self, advising me that her silences “had not protected [her]” and that “[our] silence will not protect [us]” (1980, p. 21). Such words moved me to reconsider and reengage with those moments in my University setting where I had remained silent and failed to address the marginalizing discourses that impacted me, the reception of my work, and the perceptions of our students. The honesty and directness of her speech in “The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism” (1981) granted me permission to feel my own anger—“the anger of exclusion, of unquestioned privilege, of racial distortions, of silence, ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal, and co-optation” (Lorde, 2007, p. 124).

Sister Gloria’s writings make visible the pain of those who are made to feel they (we) do not belong. She describes life along the U.S.-Mexican border as “una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds”. This open wound does not heal, but instead “hemorrhages again”—forming a border culture (Anzaldúa, 1987/2012, p. 25). For Sister Gloria, a border culture is:

…a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. Los atravesados live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the ‘normal’. Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens—whether they possess documents or not, whether they’re Chicanos, Indians or Blacks. Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot (1987/2012, p. 25)

This border culture and its inhabitants that Sister Gloria describes speak to me as a woman of color living and working in predominately white spaces. In the small college town in which my University is located, I am not infrequently made to feel like a “transgressor”, an “alien”. The “unnatural boundary” is one erected by the shopkeepers who look at me with not-so-subtle suspicion; it is the discourses of lack, absence, and difference that greet me at work’s door.

In dialogue with Sister Gloria’s work, I came to recognize myself in her writings: I too felt “[a]lienated from [my] mother culture, ‘alien’ in the dominant culture”; I am that “woman of color…[who] does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self. Petrified, she can’t respond, her face caught between los intersticios, the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits” (Anzaldúa, 1987/2012, p. 42). In this recognition, I came to see the power of translanguaging—the unselfconscious and yet determined movement between the linguistic borders of Spanish and English. For Sister Gloria, translanguaging provides an authenticity of voice—a discursive pathway—through los intersticios of the borderland for los atravesados. Sister Gloria’s employ of translanguaging reminded me that the search for voice was unnecessary; the language of one’s culture—my culture—was readily available, sufficient, and waiting to serve as a guide through the borderlands or marginalization and voicelessness.
In the end, my dialogic and critical partnership with the texts of Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa supported, comforted, and even challenged me as a scholar of color teaching and researching in the borderland of a predominately white U.S. higher educational institution. Dialogue with their texts served as social, cultural and linguistic guides through the borderland of my institutional space and los intersticios of my voicelessness. Their writings provided me with the euphemized and metaphorical language to push through the herida abierta left by my encounters in the field of teacher education with discourses of lack, absence, and difference in order to engage my most authentic voice—a voice with the capacity to teach my preservice TESOL Methods course in a way that decenters the privileged position given to whiteness and instead speaks to all educators from, and through, a language of inclusiveness. This language and voice are reflected through my instructional use of an extended analogy I call the “Harry Potter Border Crossing Analogy” (HPBCA).

“The Girl Who Lived”

The HPBCA is “the word…born in dialogue” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 279). It is inspired by my previous readings of J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series and my present critical partnership with Sister Gloria and her writings about the borderland and los atravesados who inhabit this space. Through the HPBCA I present to students an alternative framing of the series—one that foregrounds Rowling’s fantastical division of humans into magical (wizards and witches) and non-magical (Muggles) beings. Instead, the HPBCA foregrounds the numerous borderland experiences faced by the books’ two main characters: Muggle-raised Harry Potter and Muggle-born Hermione Granger. This alternative framing highlights that upon acceptance into “Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry” at the age of 11, Harry and Hermione enter a new social, cultural, linguistic, and political reality—one where they are socially, culturally and linguistically marginalized. Many of the trials and tribulations Harry and Hermione face are a result of their not having been raised in Wizarding society. Through this alternative framing, the HPBCA highlights analogical similarities between the educational, social, and personal experiences of Harry and Hermione and real-world English language learners (ELLs).

Exploring this analogy in my TESOL Methods course, has allowed me to move forward with my self-study research, to transform my silence in los intersticios (Anzaldúa, 1987/2012, p. 42) into action, and to document and attempt to validate student response to our work together. In addition, I am engaged with a professional community of Harry Potter scholars, most of whom are in media studies with an emphasis in fandom, popular culture, and critical pedagogy. Inspired by this long-distance community, I have begun to foster similar community on my home campus. I have gathered together a group of fellow Harry Potter fanatics at the undergraduate and graduate levels and together we have explored themes related to teacher knowledge as expressed through the backstories Rowling provides for three of her characters: Remus Lupin, Rubeus Hagrid, and Severus Snape. Adopting the concept of personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), my collaborators and I draw upon the textual conversations, memories, oral histories, images and metaphors to identify the rules by which these three characters live and make meaning as magical teachers (Thomas, Fox, Russell, & Warren, 2017).

Finally, my engagement with Harry Potter has led me to a world of online fandom and internet “headcanon”, fan practices that build upon my instructional aim to create discursive spaces of inclusiveness in realms ideologized as “white spaces” (Jenkins, 2017). Fandom—like the field of teaching—is overly imagined as white (and English-speaking) public space; it fails to take into account the people of color (and non-English speakers) who participate in the same or similar spaces around the globe (Jenkins, 2017). However, discursive spaces of inclusiveness are being created in online fan-fictional where Harry Potter is reimaged as East Indian (Venkatraman, 2017) and Hermione Granger is of African descent (Begley, 2015). Through Rowling’s Harry Potter, I have access to an abundant world of cultural critique where I can observe and engage in literary / literacy practices that aim to interrogate spaces ideologized as white andcenter discourses that exclude the marginalized “Other” (Woo, 2017). Participating in and writing about these activities
have given rise to my authoritative and authentic voice as a scholar and educator. They have helped to bring forth the Harry Potter Border Crossing Analogy—an extended analogy born in dialogue with my critical textual partners, Mama Lorde and Sister Gloria, reflective of my travails through the borderlands, and with a “sidelong glance” (Morson, 2006) at the silencing discourses of anti-blackness that persist in teacher education.

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**References**


Letting go: Looking back to move forward by crafting a listening space to examine effective teaching and student learning

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We met when we were assigned to co-teach a course together in our M.A. program for experienced teachers. Laura was in her third year, and Kersti was in her first year, as faculty at a university in the southwestern United States. The course—“Effective Teaching and Student Learning”—was developed the year before by Laura for the first cohort of students in a new strand in our Master’s Program focused on Reflective Practice.

The one semester course is intended to both “explore various perspectives on the concepts of effective teaching and student learning,” and assist experienced teachers in “critically examining their own teaching practices through structured collaborative processes that focus on their students’ learning” (Course Objectives). Over time, we realized a tension had arisen between these two objectives. This tension is due, in part, to the time constraints of the course, but the tension also arises because the first objective focuses on an external view of expertise, while the second places primacy on supporting teachers to develop and validate an internal sense of expertise. In this self-study, we explore how we navigated this tension across multiple iterations of the class.

Fall 2017 marked our sixth time teaching this class together. Our planning for the course has often begun by discussing what we wanted students to read and do. This year, we reflected on how the course had often felt rushed and most years we ended up deleting some of the assigned readings in response to feedback from students. We also observed that students were most engaged by the opportunity to study their own teaching through the assigned action research project, but they needed support to find and synthesize literature that would help them to frame and ground their research questions and interests. However, as we attended to our students’ needs to individualize, we were left with less and less time to assign and discuss the seminal readings that we thought helped frame the larger conversations in our field.

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After several years of tinkering with the reading assignments and the course schedule, this past fall we finally felt ready to release some control and decided to scale back substantially on the readings we assigned to students and to expand students’ opportunities to find and work with their own literature. When we decided to make this change to the reading requirements, we realized we had been inching toward this decision for several years. While we are in the process of collecting data to help us determine the impact of these changes, we also wanted to better understand the journey to this point. This chapter describes the subtle moves we made over time that led us to let go and let students’ voices and perspectives take center stage. This shift has caused us to take a more nuanced role in our classroom, the role of teacher as listener (Davis, 1996; Waks, 2015). We return to this point in our discussion.

This chapter details the findings from the first phase of a larger self-study. Here, we describe what we learned from analyzing eight years of course syllabi to better understand the changes that over time led to our decision to foster greater autonomy for our students. By creating space for students to choose their own readings and define and articulate teacher effectiveness and student learning for themselves, we are learning to let go and leverage our own expertise to guide students’ in their work. By letting go, we found ourselves attending to the listening space that was being created by shifting from “teacher as speaker” to “teacher as listener.”

Methods

This self-study arises out of our efforts to explore the relationship between our teaching beliefs and actions (Loughran, 2007), and to dive more deeply into the “dilemmas, tensions, and disappointments” (Loughran & Northfield, 1998, p. 15) therein. We each began by analyzing all syllabi for this course between the first time it was taught in 2010 and this year—fall 2017, looking for what has stayed the same and what has changed. For us, the analysis of past syllabi was a way to unpack our course planning and reasoning as the course evolved over time. Our first round of coding indicated that the main areas of change occurred in the following categories: 1) Readings; 2) Weekly Topics; 3) Assignments; and, 4) Course Description/Objectives. After this initial round of coding, we met to discuss what we were seeing and to unpack why and how the changes might have occurred. We audio recorded this conversation to better capture our thoughts, questions, and initial realizations. In this way, we are utilizing “dialogue as a research stance or methodology” (Guilfoyle, Hamilton, Pinnegar & Placier, 2004, p. 1109).

We each returned to the syllabi, looking carefully within the four categories to understand the nature of the changes. We constructed tables for each of the four categories with the exact language from the syllabi. At this point, we utilized discourse analysis (Gee, 1999; Johnston, 2002) to analyze weekly topics and the course descriptions and objectives. Through an analysis of the discourse in our syllabi, we sought to better understand how we were constructing power relations within the class (Fairclough, 1989), including examining the presuppositions we made about the teacher-learners in our classroom (Gee, 1999). Thus, we examined how readings and weekly topics were framed, how assignments were described, and our how our course objectives were described and evolved over time.

Because one of our main changes to the class was a reduction in assigned readings, we also counted the number of readings assigned each year, noted when readings were assigned each semester and when students were asked to bring their own research into class. The location of the readings during the semester indicated to us our reasoning regarding critical topics and how to best scaffold student learning. When student research was given space in the class was an indication of the importance and priority we gave to students’ inquiries regarding their teaching and their students’ learning.

After this round of individual analysis, we met again to discuss our observations. Again, we audiotaped this discussion and listened to the recording separately to note common themes regarding changes to our course. In this way, we seek to focus “on the space between self and the practice engaged in” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 15).
Outcomes

We identified four factors that, over time, resulted in our “letting go” of our roles as the ultimate authorities on teacher effectiveness in the class. These factors are: (1) Structural program shifts; (2) Listening to students; (3) Smaller cohort sizes; and, (4) Deepening collaboration between us as co-teachers. Here, we focus most carefully on number two due to the implications our findings have for others in teacher education.

As mentioned above, this class is situated within a master’s program focusing on reflective practice. Our class is the last academic class they take. As such, students arrive willing and able to advocate for themselves and their needs. Whether or not we hear them is another matter. One of our findings is that in order for us to truly hear our students and their needs, we must create space for our students’ voices and ideas to be heard. Through our analysis, we have identified three different places this space can be seen (or not seen) in our syllabi. We discuss each in turn.

Weekly topics as framing devices

The first way we communicated to students whether or not we were making space for them, their thinking, and their research was in the wording of our weekly class topics. In our analysis, we discovered that the way we phrased the topics changed over time, moving from statements to questions. For example, for the first three years the course was taught (2010-2012), weekly topics were phrased in the following manner: “Views on teacher effectiveness,” “Views of measuring teacher effectiveness,” and “Policy implications for teacher effectiveness.” Of note in these constructions is that there is no clearly identified agent in the phrase. Whose views of teacher effectiveness would be included in the discussion that week? Based on a review of the accompanying readings for these weeks, we were clearly championing peer-reviewed research. For each week, we assigned traditional research and readings, representing our perspective on the field’s definition of teacher effectiveness and student learning and our “text-based” discussions focused on students’ interpretations of those readings.

In 2014, our syllabus began to reflect a shift toward de-centering our authority, and that of the “academy” and putting our students’ expertise, and their learning, at the center of the course. For the first time, we began to phrase some of our weekly topics as questions. During this iteration of the class, five out of 15 weeks were framed around an orienting question such as, “How does our education system determine who is smart and who is a good teacher?” “What is good teaching?” “How is good teaching connected to learning?” While we still chose the readings around which discussions occurred, discursively, this move is important because “…questions call for answers” (Johnstone, 2002, p. 73). The simple, unintentional act of framing weekly topics as questions invited students, implicitly, into a conversation with us.

While introducing questions within our syllabus was important, it was just an initial step in letting go, and expanding whose expertise was valued. In subsequent years, we began to make more overt shifts. For example, in 2016 our first class topic was, “Building on what you know about effective teaching.” Prior to the start of class, we asked students to bring “3-10 articles you have read in the MA program that help you understand what it means to be an effective teacher.” This move was significant in that we positioned students as knowledgeable, while honoring and attempting to build on the work they had done in previous semesters in our cohort program. This shift helped us to learn more about our students’ thinking about effective teaching. Leveraging the progress we made over the past several years, this year (2017), our first week’s class was simply titled, “Building on your questions.” Rather than starting with assigned readings or readings they had done previously in the program, we asked students to write and then discuss the following questions: “What are your questions about your teaching? Student learning? Our profession? What have your experiences been like in your master’s program? And, what do you want to accomplish in the next two semesters?” By beginning with students’ questions, interests, and needs, we set a different tone at the start of the semester than we had in the past. It was the beginning of crafting a listening space in our classroom.
Foregrounding student questions

One of the aims of this course is to support students to conduct an action research project in their own classrooms. Each year, as we reflect on the course and plan for the next year, we have refined how we support students to accomplish this ambitious work. One piece that has been present in all syllabi is that we ask students to bring in their own research, either in the form of literature they have found that speaks to their topic and/or data they collected for their action research. How, why, and when this research was used in class has varied considerably over time.

The first year we taught this class, we did not ask students to bring in any literature they had found related to their topic. The second year, we asked students in the next to the last class to “Find one article, chapter, or book that has given you insight into teaching and learning.” In our third year, students were required to bring in three “research articles that relate to your area of focus” during the third week, and five articles in week 11. Although it seems obvious now that students needed to identify and work with literature that spoke to their unique inquiries, it took us time to let go of the research we thought valuable for framing effective teaching and student learning. What we realized was that while our assigned readings led to powerful discussions and rich insights, students needed more time and support to craft a literature review framing their own questions.

In the latest iteration of the course, we asked students to find and bring in their own research within the first few weeks of class. In week two we asked students to bring in articles they had read during their program, and in week three we asked students to bring in articles that spoke to their focus. This year, students were also organized into small research groups according to their research topics. After the third week, there were only four weeks where we assigned specific readings. Throughout the semester, students shared research literature they had found with one another and participated in data analysis sessions. Drawing on the literature and research students were doing, the class co-created a literature review on effective teaching and student learning.

By encouraging students to search out literature that spoke to their questions early on, we supported students to surface and articulate their own questions. What we found is that as they engaged with the literature we brought forward, the literature their peers brought forward, and the literature that they brought forward, they were able to view and refine their questions from multiple perspectives. In addition, we had robust discussions about teacher effectiveness and student learning that resulted in nuanced class definitions, definitions that we continued to refine throughout the semester. What was different this year from other years is that instead of us working to guide discussions to draw out key points we thought important from the literature we provided, our students’ research, insights, and expertise guided our discussions. We were no longer the sole experts, but had to listen to and build understanding with our students.

Demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness

In contrasting this year’s teaching with previous iterations of the course, we found that feedback about what was and was not working for students was more fluid. In prior years, when students started to struggle, they waited too long to ask for help or clarification and often did so after much background consultation with one another. For example, in the year that we characterize as the most challenging (not coincidentally, also the year with the highest number of assigned readings), students formed alliances and would approach one of the instructors as a group about their concerns. By the time the concerns were privately aired and publicly addressed, the level of frustration was often compounding their stress, impeding their learning, and confounding collaboration between the instructors. While we did make changes to the syllabus in response to students’ concerns, it was long after the point it would have most helped students. As we reflect on that tumultuous year, we realize that despite the instructors’ best intentions, students felt unheard and with each passing week became more unwilling to risk sharing their struggles with the class openly, never mind sharing what was happening in their classrooms. We believe that the lack of a listening space compromised the learning environment, and students’ opportunities to learn from the instructors and their peers.
What we found this semester is that as we placed students’ questions and interests at the center of our class, students concerns and conundrums became a more fluid aspect of our weekly conversation. If students needed clarification about an assignment, they asked. For example, in their final paper we have asked students to write a theoretical frame. Helping students understand what this section is, how it functions in research, and how to write it has consistently proved challenging. Often, in years past, these sections of their paper have felt forced and were not fully integrated into their methodology or interpretation. This year, as we tried once again to help students understand how a theoretical frame is similar to but different from their literature review, Kersti decided mid-class (based on student feedback and with Laura’s agreement) to remove the requirement from the paper. Our intention and hope was that by focusing more on their literature review, data collection and analysis, their theoretical frames would emerge naturally. Whether or not they did is a question we plan to address in a future paper, but relaxing this requirement reduced students’ stress and freed students up to focus on what they were learning from their research.

In responding to students’ needs, we demonstrated flexibility. We were willing to change assignments and expectations on the fly. This is a result of the strength of our partnership as co-teachers. After six years of teaching together we have developed a deep trust in one another. Even if we don’t always agree, we can find a path forward that is in the best interest of our students. The many conversations we have had about course design, implementation, students’ learning and our deepest wishes for what this work accomplishes in our profession, allows us to be on the same page. This level of trust helps us to navigate more fluidly when our students call on us to be responsive and flexible, usually by being willing to risk sharing their struggles, misconceptions and “rough draft” thinking (Jansen et. al., 2017). We have learned that this fluidity comes with putting students’ questions, needs, and interests at the center and responding responsibly and responsively (English, Tyson, Hintz, 2018) to them.

Discussion

Research suggests that there are different types of teacher listening (e.g., Davis, 1996; Garrison, 1996; Waks, 2015) and that how teachers listen to students has implications for students’ opportunities to learn (Hintz & Tyson, 2014). Emerging research also speaks to the complexity of teachers’ listening (English, Tyson & Hintz, 2018; Hintz & Tyson, 2014). When teachers listen in complex ways, they are also attending to the classroom environment, and reflecting on whether or not the classroom is a place where students are able to share emerging thinking and not just “finished thoughts.” In letting go of our need to control students’ reading, we found ourselves navigating the tension between leaning on the seminal texts and theories that we’ve come to uphold as core knowledge our students needed to learn, and listening to our students and allowing time and space for their interests to guide them toward the knowledge they needed to develop for their own practice and professional growth.

Our working hypothesis is that by creating a listening space for students’ expertise, interests and needs to emerge, and to be heard and responded to, they engage more deeply and authentically with questions about student learning and effective teaching. By opening up this listening space, we are beginning to craft an emergent inductive space for learning while letting go of our more usual, and comfortable, deductive space for helping our students ground their professional development and professional practices in theory.

The “listening space” we describe here is both metaphorical and physical (Davis, 1996). The questions raised throughout this study regarding what it means to teach about effective teaching and learning while striving to be more effective ourselves are powerful ones. Indeed as we listen more, we find ourselves encouraging our students to listen more. It took us six years to be explicit and intentional in how we create listening spaces in our own teaching. As a result, we have reason to believe our students feel more heard, more empowered, and more a part of a learning community.
There are many ways for instructors to create listening spaces within a course. Based on our initial findings, we propose the following set of questions as tools for others to consider in their own teaching. Start with attending to the ways the course is framed discursively in the syllabus by asking, “How does the language used in your syllabus invite students into a dialogue? How does it honor the knowledge they bring with them? Does it strike a balance between peer-reviewed readings and students having space to think and to research their own questions?”

In our early years teaching together, we felt strongly that students needed to read all of the literature we assigned in order to be ready to find research that spoke to their own research questions. In theory, we valued students’ expertise, but we relied on and emphasized others’ expertise more. Our approach was deductive. What we strive for now is a fine balance between what students’ bring to the class and what they have to learn from researchers who have gone before them. As we more fully re-cognize that students come to the program with knowledge and questions about their practice, we have reframed our work to uphold the inductive nature of working with professional educators. Our work is to support students in engaging with literature that informs and challenges their perspectives and practices. As we embrace this shift, we have noticed that not only do our students engage deeply with the literature, they come to see their own work as a contribution to this literature.

While we used this study to better understand how we came to release control in our teaching, what we learned can be applied in the creation of new courses, particularly those taught to experienced teachers. In some ways, this study is less about the number of readings assigned, and more about where authority for knowledge rests and how that authority is wielded (Dunleavy, 2015). Are we as the instructors of the course the main determiner of what counts as knowledge and how teacher effectiveness is defined? Or, is our work to support students to claim – and refine - the authority they already have? In the current political context that has undermined education and depersonalized teachers, we cannot think of more important work than supporting teachers to reclaim their professional practice and raise their voices to advocate for their students’ opportunities to learn.

References


Pushing my boundaries: Understanding, implementing and becoming a teacher educator of culturally responsive practices

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Over the past two years, members of the diversity and inclusion team at Valley Ridge Academy, where I teach middle school science and serve as department chair, developed a multicultural curriculum initiative. Through a collaborative and iterative process the school developed the definition of multicultural education as “a constant and ongoing process of inquiry, reflection, and engagement that transforms students and faculty, school culture and curriculum, community and society. It is grounded in ideas of equity, anti-bias education, and social justice.” The focus of the work invites all teachers to participate; however, the initial resources, examples, and conversations gravitated towards social studies, English, and the advisor program; the teachers in these subjects saw the most immediate grounding of multicultural education in the curriculum. In contrast, many science teachers and others see their discipline as fixed and were unsure how they could make culturally responsive classroom adjustments. Noticing the difference in both comfort and level of understanding drew me to wonder how I could support science teachers in enacting culturally responsive practices.

Valley Ridge Academy (VRA) is an independent school in a northeastern suburb of the United States. In my role, I work closely with the science teachers in grades 4-8 and coordinate with the science department chairs in the other two divisions. Of the just over 1,000 students on the school (650 families) in 2014, approximately 49% identify as Caucasian; 11% Asian/Indian; 9% Multiracial; 9% African American; 4% Hispanic; and 2% other; additionally, eleven families identify as LGBTQ+ (Admissions Director, personal communication, 2017). As a teacher leader, my self-study was an opportunity to problematize the challenge of science teachers’ engagement with culturally responsive pedagogy in my context. I needed to reflect on my understanding and current practice before I could guide others on their journey to discover their conceptions of culturally responsive pedagogy and adjust practice.

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In thinking about my own teaching and work with others, I wanted to recognize my challenges. “Teachers need to thoroughly understand existing obstacles to culturally responsive teaching before they can successfully remove them” (Gay, 2002, p. 108). By beginning to identify my obstacles, I respond to the need for research on how teachers affect change in their classrooms and in their schools. Similar to the work of Han et al. (2014), I explored the meaning of culturally responsive pedagogy through self-study; however, I focused my research in a middle school context with predominately math and science teachers, as opposed to their work in higher education with preservice teachers. In their work, the questions of culturally responsive pedagogy versus content was raised in regard to science. Additionally, the authors made note of the cultural identity of students in teacher education classes as compared to those of the students of the preservice teachers themselves. Coia and Taylor (2013) state the importance of examining one’s own understanding first, which frames the structure of my self-study, where I examine my understanding before I initiate change in my practice and support others in doing so. Where I pushed beyond my boundaries as a teacher and examined my role as a teacher educator of culturally responsive pedagogy.

**Theoretical framework**

I use the framework for culturally responsive teacher education outlined by Villegas and Lucas (2002). The six characteristics include: “sociocultural consciousness, an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds, commitment and skills to act as agents of change, constructivist views of learning, learning about students, and culturally responsive teaching practices” (p. 21). These characteristics describe a holistic development and implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy. Their work emphasizes the importance of context as opposed to these characteristics being taught removed from the curriculum; therefore, this framework provided a way to examine my understanding and implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy in the context of my current school setting.

Additionally, through the school where I teach I had the opportunity to attend The National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) Conference, which provided a platform to examine my understanding of what it means to be a culturally responsive educator. The focus of the work by NAME is around the following six points: “To respect and appreciate cultural diversity; to promote the understanding of unique cultural and ethnic heritage; to promote the development of culturally responsible and responsive curricula; to facilitate acquisition of the attitudes, skills, and knowledge to function in various cultures; to eliminate racism and discrimination in society; to achieve social, political, economic, and educational equity” (The National Association for Multicultural Education, 2017).

**Objectives**

Through reflecting on my learning about culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy at the NAME Conference, I examined my engagement with teachers and teacher educators related to culturally responsive teaching practices. Simultaneously, I reflected on opportunities to enact change in my science classroom and work with others to adjust their science practice. I consider myself both a teacher and teacher educator when I push my boundaries to understand and articulate the pedagogy. The question guiding my research is: How can I more fully engage with culturally responsive pedagogy? I look at this question through three selves: How do I engage as an individual? How do I enact as a science teacher? How do I foster culturally responsive pedagogy as a developing teacher educator?

**Methods**

I collected data in three parts using self-study practices outlined by LaBoskey (2004). I justify my research as self-study as I initiated the research, and it is centered around my practice. I use interaction, “to challenge our assumptions and biases, reveal our inconstancies, expand our potential interpretations, and triangulate our findings” (p. 849) in different ways in each of the
three parts of my self-study. Additionally, I used multiple qualitative methods of data collection.

Data collection

Part 1: Focus on self as an individual. The NAME Conference provided a platform to examine my understanding of what it means to be a culturally responsive educator. I immersed myself in data collection while at the conference. I kept a reflective journal to capture my experiences, feelings, and insights, as well as my peer interactions and discussions at the workshops. My notes and journal were based on six sessions related to my research question over the course of the three-day conference. Additionally, my reflective journal included two events in which I participated with other conference attendees: a tour of Temple Square (home of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) and an Ani DiFranco concert; these experiences pushed me to further my understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy. Interaction allowed me to both expand my understanding and process my authentic feelings. These personal narratives are congruent to those defined by Coia and Taylor (2002).

Part 2: Focus on self in the practice of teaching. In order to examine my practice, I videotaped two science lessons to document what occurs in my classroom, as opposed to my intentions. After analyzing my data from part one, I intentionally chose two classes, where I used lessons created with my planning team and addressed the material stated in the curriculum guide for this study rather than one of the lessons previously adjusted to respond to the multicultural curriculum initiative. I wanted to capture what the students are authentically experiencing using the curriculum in areas without adjustments.

Part 3: Focus on self as a teacher educator. As a result of my findings from part two, I shared a video segment in the workshop where I believed I demonstrated characteristics of culturally responsive pedagogy. The two teachers participating in the workshop constructed a definition of culturally responsive pedagogy. Following this, I shared a video segment where I found my use of culturally responsive pedagogy was absent or weak. I interacted with the teachers as we developed an adjustment to the lesson that included possible solutions to my challenges (LaBoskey, 2004). I recorded segments of the conversation and took notes to keep record of the workshop. Here I used the conversations to expand my understanding of how I inform others of culturally responsive pedagogy. By sharing my identified challenges for the group to problematize adds to the trustworthiness of my self-study. To facilitate the discussion, I used the video analysis protocol described by Klein, Monteiro, Kallai, Romney, and Abrams (2015) to frame the structure of the workshop and to explore the evidence I shared from part two.

Data analysis

I used the framework from Villegas and Lucas (2002) to code the data. I looked at emerging themes around the characteristics in the framework (sociocultural consciousness, an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds, commitment and skills to act as agents of change, constructivist views of learning, learning about students, and culturally responsive teaching practices). Furthermore, two themes emerged in analysis of the data, growth and fear.

The two videos were analyzed using the framework to identify which of the characteristics occurred in the classroom. I identified both absent and weak examples of culturally responsive teaching, as well as examples of culturally responsive teaching occurring in my practice to bring to the workshop in the third part of the study. By sharing my data from part two with others, I open up to understanding my biases to add trustworthiness to my findings. I transcribed the audio and coded the conversation and the notes I took during the workshop using the framework. Throughout this phase, I kept a journal to consider and reflect upon my biases in the analysis process and to consider the lens utilized to analyze my data.
Considering the work of Major (2011), I paid close attention to honestly addressing my position with myself and others as I moved among the three levels of examination: self, teacher, and teacher educator. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) emphasize the importance of the congruence between the findings, what the data show and reality. I am a changing and developing being and did not complete my research from a static perspective, each phase informed the next. Therefore, it was critical I captured a valid and credible analysis of the data to progress. My use of triangulation in the data collection and analysis using the three perspective of myself adds to the reliability of my findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Findings

Part 1: Focus on self as an individual

Based on the six characteristics of culturally responsive teacher education (Villegas & Lucas, 2002), four were present in my reflective journal: sociocultural consciousness, an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds, learning about students, and commitment and skills to act as agents of change. These were addressed in areas of action as well as areas in need of further development.

The clearest theme related to my sociocultural consciousness. Interestingly, the intersection of my cultural and professional identities emerged early in the journal. In my reflection, I feel the push and pull between my visible identity and my invisible identity. As I locate myself as a community member, teacher, and teacher educator in the school, I am clearly bringing privileged areas of my identity as a White, educated, heterosexual female. However, I do not as visibly expose the parts of my identity shaped by my family, religion and cross-socioeconomic experiences. My visible and invisible personal identity both shape how I locate myself in my professional identity.

“My role as an educator is to challenge the power structures” illustrates my awareness to address the purpose of school and the structures of power and privilege. Yet this statement is followed by, “I think the social location that I do bring is not always the one that I should bring.” My view of self informs my unintentional perpetuation of these structures within the school and the larger system. These two excerpts of the journal illustrated a juxtaposition I face. However, my perspective of myself becomes problematic when I think to myself as a teacher. If I justify my actions in response to my deficit views of myself as compared to the White middle class expectations, how can I support others who find themselves trying to break out of these structures?

Examining my affirming views of students, I saw evidence of affirmation when the students’ views were accepting and inclusive. My visit to Church of Latter Day Saints challenged my understanding of my own level of acceptance. I found myself questioning the idea of affirmation when I learned of discriminatory practices in the church. In my journal, I considered the discrimination present in other religions, including my own. While I am at a conference immersed in acceptance of and appreciation of diverse backgrounds, I am struck by this exception to my affirmation of others and my own bigotry.

I saw evidence of learning about students, which builds a foundation for demonstrating affirming views of students (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). A session I attended created the space to consider the idea of asking students to write a journal entry to understand how their family relates with and values science. Knowing these relationships with science could inform conversations around the content and curriculum. Throughout the entries, I noted the importance of knowing the students as people and their interests; this is foundational to any content learning.

My commitment to act as an agent of change was illustrated in the journal through inspiration from this conference, from responses to my studies, from my teaching and the school community. My engagement in self-study to inform my work as a teacher educator of culturally responsive pedagogy begins as I weave the connection between these experiences. I am looking at my sociocultural awareness and thinking about my opportunities to identify and challenge the power in relationships and schools. A journal entry supported that I took the challenge raised in Ani DiFranco’s song, “Which Side Are You On?” as an opportunity to work on my role to act as an
agent of change as I shift from deepening my understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy to move toward action. Each entry wrote my current thinking as well as where adjustments could occur.

The cautious responses throughout my journal are related to both myself and others. I also saw evidence of my own inaction as related to fear and “playing it safe” in my professional identity. While I note the importance of creating a safe environment for others and my role in creating such a space, I realize I may need to push further outside of my comfort zone to do this. Two areas of the framework absent from the reflective journal were constructivist views of learning and culturally responsive teaching practices. As I moved to part two, I considered these were absent in my journaling. Was it the particular focus on self and understanding in part one, or the nature of the sessions in which I engaged, or another reason?

Part 2: Focus on self in the practice of teaching

By engaging in a self-study on culturally responsive pedagogy, I began to acknowledge my own privilege as a White, educated, middle class woman and the ways it creates blinders in my teaching, which is manifested in my practice. The two areas of culturally responsive pedagogy that were absent in my reflective journal, constructivist views of learning and culturally responsive teaching practices, were present in the selected lessons. Additionally, I observed challenges related to my sociocultural consciousness, which created tensions with my privilege.

Evidence of my sociocultural consciousness in the video of my lessons was exhibited regarding the recognition of the power imbalance between the students and teacher in the classroom as seen by where I stood. Often, I would join the table and sit with the students or lower myself to eye level. My posture valued the knowledge and questions the students brought to the classroom. However, two challenges in regard to sociocultural consciousness relate to my identity and the questioning patterns that I use in the classroom. My emphasis on formal academic writing was evident in both lessons. Again my deficit perspective of myself—the challenge of learning to write as an adult—led me to reinforce writing in the classroom. When I overemphasize formal writing with my students, I perpetuate the power structure. The other challenge visible in the video of my teaching is the use of known answer question patterns. Using this pattern favors some students over others. Students whose families do not use the same questioning pattern are placed at a disadvantage (Heath, 1982). These actions in the classroom maintain the White and middle class norms.

Examples of constructivist views of learning were present when the students created definitions in both lessons. In one, the students defined gas (state of matter), and in the other, expand and compress. In both classes, they used observations and prior knowledge to construct their definition. Further they pushed beyond the definition to understand and explain application in the provided example. However, in neither case did I make meaningful connection to their own personal experiences. Yet in each class students were encouraged to contribute, even with only a partial understanding. Additionally, students were offered opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge in various ways: writing, speaking, and drawing. There were examples where students started an explanation or built on another student’s idea. My value of student participation and contribution to the class content knowledge base is evidenced as I encouraged all of their contributions.

An example of culturally responsive teaching practice was the classroom environment and the structure of the lessons. In both classes, the lesson was organized to provide independent, small group, and full class processing time to honor students who are comfortable collaborating at different levels to make meaning. At the end of one class a student approached me to discuss her science research interest for the upcoming science project. She shared her topic, prior knowledge and current learning, and then she shared why the topic was of interest. She connected the idea of studying yeast to her celebration of Passover. This meaningful connection was what I hope for my students to engage with during their science projects; however, this moment illuminated the contrast between the curriculum used throughout the rest of the school year and the independent project. This contrast informed part three of my self-study.
Part 3: Focus on self as a teacher educator

The structure of the workshop led to evidence of constructivist views of learning as a teacher educator. Three phrases in my data: “how would you define?,” “we are generating” and “what I’m hearing us talk about is” were used as I asked the participants to generate a working definition of culturally responsive pedagogy using the evidence involving my findings from part two. However, I also noted in some places I filled in the conversation and led the discussion toward the framework, rather than allowing the science and math teacher participants to get their on their own.

The workshop created a space for the participants to make meaning of their own experiences. In doing this, three additional characteristics from the Villegas and Lucas (2002) framework were present: learning about students (teachers), an affirming attitude towards students (teachers) from culturally diverse backgrounds, and commitment and skills to act as agents of change. In allowing the participants to process my experiences, I invited an honest, and at times, very deep reflection from the teachers that extended to themselves. They shared personal challenges connecting to my experiences, and my role allowed me to learn about the teachers and where they needed support to develop these skills. In portions of the dialogue transcript from the workshop, I saw evidence of my affirmation of their work and journey to engage with the discussion.

By focusing on my strengths and weaknesses, I allowed an opportunity for the participants to speak about their practice by reflecting on what I needed. Here I offered support to consider tangible skills to act as agents of change as we planned my “improved lesson” and they reflected on their own work. As I look at the data, I saw evidence of modeling culturally responsive pedagogy as I become a teacher educator.

Throughout the three levels of data collection and analysis, I began to see my own obstacles to culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002, p. 108). However, I pushed beyond this discomfort in part three when I exposed my understanding and created a safe space for the participating teachers to do the same. I found my personal growth in understanding and engaging with culturally responsive pedagogy to be the most optimistic thread throughout the themes in the framework. While I recognized areas where my understanding is developing and my biases are present, my data reflected a positive stance in both increasing understanding and movement toward action related to culturally responsive pedagogy. Throughout the six characteristics I see more reflection, desire to understand what I do not yet understand, and willingness to share with others in this context about my less visible identity so I can begin to unpack how this affects the ways in which I view others.

Implications

I am further prepared to support science teachers in engaging with culturally responsive pedagogical practices and incorporating more inclusive curricula. As I look at my own practice, I realize how much opportunity I have for growth to include more culturally responsive pedagogy and content. In my work as a teacher and a teacher educator, it is important to honestly recognize my bias and make adjustments through authentic work with others. Moving forward, I will engage science teachers in the process of reflecting on their own practice to look for examples of culturally responsive pedagogy and identify areas for improvement. I will use part three of my self-study for the foundation as I work with teachers to improve their work as culturally responsive educators and again use a modified version of the video analysis protocol described by Klein et al. (2015). Using my own challenges as a starting point creates a vulnerability to the group; however, opening up this way creates a space for growth and an understanding that we are on a journey together.
References


Public education is widely seen as fundamental to a free, democratic society (Ravitch, 2014). However, in the current sociopolitical context (era of standardization, accountability, etc.), it is with greater frequency being positioned as undesirable or “less than” in political discourses and social debate. Education and teachers are often positioned as scapegoats in times of sociopolitical challenge. While there are current threats to, criticisms of, and admitted problems with public education, it continues to be the mainstay of schooling in the US. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), public school enrollment increased 7% from 2000-2014 and is projected to increase another 3% by 2026. Public schools currently serve over 80% of US school age students.

Enrollment shifts are often due to localized demographic changes; however, the current political climate has begun to have an effect on the perceptions and realities of public education. In fact, the current US president is a vocal critic of public schools and has used his position to erode federal resources and monies earmarked for public school and his bully pulpit to challenge the fundamental value of public education in a free, democratic society. Though the current US presidential administration clearly has a loyal following, most constituents of public education (students, parents, teachers, and school leaders) do not hold the belief that there is something inherently wrong with public education. Meier (1995) argued, “It’s quite possible that American society can develop a viable economy that ignores the fate of vast numbers of its citizens, one not dependent upon a universally well-educated public. But only at a cost to democracy itself” (p. 6). That early perception of threat has become more pronounced in recent years; nevertheless, public schools continue to educate the majority of American youth.

For us, Valerie and Laurie, as products of public education and teachers/teacher educators committed to serving and improving that system, the increase in public school enrollment engenders hope, despite the apparent threats to a democratic public education for all students. As former public school students, teachers, and current teacher educators, in this inquiry we endeavor

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to examine ways current thinking about public education, combined with our own experiences in it and with it, influence how we educate future public educators. Valerie is tenured faculty at a small, private, liberal arts institution in the Northeast teaching secondary and elementary education undergraduates. Her students are predominantly white, traditional college age, and from middle to upper middle income backgrounds. Laurie is tenured faculty at a fairly large state institution in the Southeast teaching undergraduate and master’s level middle level education students. The school typically serves a large percentage of students from lower income, rural populations, many of whom are first generation college students.

As teacher educators, we have consistently conducted collaborative self-study research focused on shared values related to teacher education and parallel experiences in our unfolding academic careers (Ramirez, Allison-Roan, Petersen, & Elliott-Johns, 2012, Ramirez & Allison-Roan, 2014, Allison-Roan & Ramirez, 2016). This self-study first examines our own experiences, as they highly impact the way we teach, what we teach, and how we position public education in our practices. In order to offer students an open, honest perspective, we have to first know our strengths and limitations, investigating lived experiences and perceptions of schooling. Further, this self-study incorporates students’ views of public education, their schooling experiences, and their thoughts about their futures as public educators. Because our students have typically been raised in an educational context vastly different than our own, there is potential for disconnect or disparity in our views about and values related to public education. This self-study is an attempt to better understand our own stances about public education and how our lived experiences have shaped our teacher education practices. While we are strong proponents of public education, we understand and want our students to understand that experiences with and perceptions of public schooling are complex and require consideration of context, privilege, location, and personal circumstances. We hope to better understand the lenses through which our students view public education, as the majority of them have progressed through that institution and will likely teach in it as well. We see this study as a first step in prompting our students to unpack their own lived experiences with schooling, empowering them to then more fully understand their future students’ experiences.

Framework

Bullough and Gitlin (2001) and others (i.e., de Freitas, 2008; Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2000) posited the merit of educators telling and interrogating their personal histories as learners. Doing so allows them to come to more fully know the sources of their tacit beliefs/theories of teaching and learning and makes possible the critical examination of uncovered assumptions about what is “good” and “appropriate” in teaching others.

Bullough and Pinnegar (2001), believe who a researcher is is central to what a researcher does. Thus, they see value in the use of autobiography in teacher education. Summarizing Pinar’s (1980, 1981) conclusions, they asserted “one always teaches the self” (p. 13). As teacher educators, we begin with sharing of our narratives to understand our professional ideals, but we must not end there. We must query how our histories were shaped and how historical contexts align or contrast with our current political, social, and personal spheres. Promoting autobiography, Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) provide a framework and guidelines for its use. While they suggest 14 unique guidelines, we have chosen to focus on five we find most relevant to this examination. They are:

1: Autobiographical self-studies should ring true and enable connection,
2: Self-studies should promote insight and interpretation,
3: Autobiographical self-study research must engage history forthrightly and the author must take an honest stand,
6: The autobiographical self-study researcher has an ineluctable obligation to seek to improve the learning situation not only for the self but for the other,
8: Quality autobiographical self-studies attend carefully to persons in context or setting (pp. 16-18).
These guidelines provided structure for us in writing our own autobiographical accounts of our schooling experiences. Likewise, we encouraged students to consider them as they wrote their autobiographies. A shared framework provided an opportunity to see commonalities and differences, analyze all as data sources, and challenge our individual and collective perspectives of public education.

Experiences with public schools

Below are brief summaries of our personal schooling autobiographies and a description of how our experiences as students subsequently influenced our values and actions in our roles as teachers and, later, as teacher educators.

Laurie: I am a product of public education but attended only three schools in my K-12 experience, all of which were close enough that my siblings and I could walk to school. While we lived in a relatively stable community where my parents still reside today, we were in an area where poverty was the norm. We relied heavily on programs like WIC, food stamps, and welfare. My parents did not finish high school and my two older siblings followed that same path. In my neighborhood, teen pregnancy, violence, substance abuse, and unemployment made it difficult for many to focus on or emphasize education. For me, school was a safe haven. I took pride in the fact I could be successful and I worked hard to please my teachers, knowing from a very young age I would someday be just like them. My trajectory is a straight one: I attended a public college while living at home, taught in a public junior high very near where I grew up, and eventually earned degrees that would allow me to teach in a public university. Public education has essentially been my entire life and I would not be where I am today without it, so I fully support it. A flawed, ineffective public education was simply not my experience, and I find myself becoming defensive when it is positioned as the scapegoat for all society’s evils. I believe the current push toward privatization will only serve to further marginalize or disadvantage students who might otherwise be highly successful. Schools with adequate funding, rich resources, quality teachers, and support for families and community can make a major difference for students coming from less than ideal circumstances.

As a public school teacher, I taught in a large, diverse junior high school where our student population was comprised of over 50 nationalities/languages. In that context, I felt it was imperative to not only espouse, but also model, a belief in a democratic, free, equitable education for all students. Many of my students were from backgrounds similar to my own where education was not a priority in the midst of more pressing social and financial stressors. Many had also come from situations of oppression, displacement, or prosecution. I felt I had the power, as a teacher, to help mitigate the potentially negative effects of students’ home circumstances. Building strong relationships, providing a safe and consistent environment, and being an advocate/resource for students was a priority. At times in my career, unfortunately, I encountered teachers who were not of the same mindset. I often heard negative comments about “your students,” in reference to students of color or students from marginalized backgrounds. I also saw variance in expectations for students from particular backgrounds, i.e., those who lived in low income housing, who were perceived as undocumented, etc. Those experiences contributed to the desire to become a teacher educator; I wanted to help prepare teachers who believed in the inimitable and inherent potential of each individual student. I hoped (and still do) to instill in my teacher candidates an understanding of young adolescents, specifically, and a willingness to embrace the uniqueness and foster the positive development of all students, independent of their backgrounds.
Valerie: I am the product of public education. My story is different from Laurie’s in that it occurred across 9 schools in three states in 13 years. I grew up in circumstances of poverty and transiency; additionally, I was identified and subsequently tracked as a learning disabled student early in my schooling. Similar circumstances for many children lead to poor education outcomes and diminished life opportunities. That I eventually grew to demonstrate academic prowess and to achieve an academic career I attribute to factors/influences within the public schooling I received. At pivotal moments, public educators and practices intervened, resulting in me being empowered rather than further disadvantaged. My public schooling was not flawless, but in retrospect, I can see that for me it fulfilled the promise of enabling me to overcome my childhood circumstances. I am an ardent proponent of public schooling as a pillar of our free and democratic society because I know firsthand it can fulfill its promises when it is well funded, has public support, and is carried out by competent, caring educators. I see the societal shift toward privatization as an impending tragedy for vulnerable learners and their communities.

I began my teaching career at a junior high school where I had once been a student. Early in my career, my students were occasionally the younger siblings of my junior high school peers. The student population at the school had always been economically diverse but had historically been overwhelmingly white and religiously homogeneous. Over time, the school became increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse. Sadly, it was not uncommon to hear/observe colleagues (some of whom had once been my teachers) project deficit thinking onto our students who were not members of the predominant faith, were from lower economic circumstances, and/or were linguistically and/or culturally different. My own history of frequently being the outsider, the one who was perceived as less than, I believe, disposed me to quietly champion for students who didn’t fit the model student profile. Perhaps driven by a subconscious desire to right wrongs I had sometimes felt as a student, I sought to provide affirmation to and celebrate accomplishments of individual students others might be inclined to view negatively. While I am sure I was far from bias-free, I hope my efforts made school more welcoming, particularly for those who felt marginalized in other spaces in the building. After 12 years of teaching, I spent the next eight as a school administrator working in elementary schools that served predominantly low income and culturally diverse student bodies. My drive to advocate for students who came from challenging life circumstances grew stronger, as did my belief that public schools could and should be a mechanism for bringing about greater social equity. I am transparent in my current work with preservice teachers that my goals are to develop in them dispositions of advocacy, the capacity to see all learners as valued members of their school communities, and the skills to wholeheartedly and effectively teach them.

**Methods and data sources**

Major data sources for this study include our and our students’ school autobiographies -- narrative accounts of our experiences with and perceptions of schooling. We have, in previous research, been drawn to narrative inquiry and autobiography as it allows for personal reflection and a lens through which to view lived experiences. As our students engage in the narrative process alongside us, we hope to not only model reflective practice, but also instill in them a desire to think critically about experiences. Taylor and Coia (2009) suggest autobiography is a reflective tool that can raise issues of authenticity and power. As such, we strive to foster in students a stance in which they are able to see their experiences not as “fact” but as a personal perspective or individual perception of reality.

In addition to autobiographical narratives, we collected notes from our teaching/class discussions, anonymous student survey responses, and shared researcher reflections. We compiled data independently, reading and rereading as we looked for emergent themes, attending to our institutional differences. Throughout initial analysis, we reflected collaboratively, sharing
thoughts, questions, and interpretations. Subsequently, we compiled all data, again reading, coding, and analyzing for themes following a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While we recognize the importance of systematic data analysis, self-study methodology allows for flexibility, focusing more on the nature and topic of the study (Loughran & Brubaker, 2015), rather than strict adherence to prescriptive methods. Exploring emergent themes, independently and collectively, afforded a view of public education beyond specific contexts or individuals.

Outcomes

We purposefully chose to focus on perspectives of public education because most of our students will teach in those settings. Instead of viewing them as a dichotomy, we see them both as existing somewhere along a continuum that includes broad and varied quality. Our students who had some experience with private education were able to offer unique lenses through which we can all examine strengths and limitations as well as the common discourses that arise from those within and outside public schools. Obviously, each student’s and our own schooling narratives are distinct and even those who share the commonality of being educated in public settings have the potential to be vastly dissimilar.

An interesting initial finding was the diversity (or lack thereof) students noted in their experiences. While a considerable portion of public school alumni reported their schools, or particular classrooms, as being homogeneous, there was still a wide range of perspectives about lived experiences. A background of academic homogeneity tended to correlate with students thinking homogeneity led to better educational outcomes for all learners, a perspective not well supported by educational research (Slavin, 1990). This example highlights how contextual factors influence the way individuals view schooling overall. Those factors also seem to contribute to students’ future plans. Individuals educated in public schools wish to emulate the public school teachers who influenced them, having positive perceptions of their time in school. One student, who hopes to teach in low-income, diverse schools commented, “like some of my previous teachers, I want to excite learning and foster a community of respectfulness and authenticity (anonymous survey).” Another stated, “I want to teach in a public elementary school. I really enjoyed my time at elementary school. The teachers made such an impact on my education that I would like to do the same for students,” (anonymous survey). Only one individual expressed a desire to teach in a private school setting. Most wish to return to the community, and often the exact schools, in which they were educated. For example, one student responded, “I really hope to teach at the school I went to. I love the atmosphere and it helped me grow into a well-educated student,” (anonymous survey). Yet another simply wants a public school placement, “just because that’s what I’m most comfortable with and know the most about,” (anonymous survey).

Our findings overall showed a range of school experiences, positive and negative, whether they were public or private. However, there were also significant commonalities. As in our experiences, student/teacher relationships and teacher investment/advocacy for students was a theme among student autobiographies. In this finding, students’ personal experiences confirmed empirical studies (i.e., Cooper, 2014) which attest to the influence teachers can have on the long-term school experiences of students. In addition, students overall spoke to the need for belonging and sense of identity beyond academics. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1943, 1970) and more recent iterations (i.e., Kenrick, et al., 2010) were confirmed, where sports, theater, art, music, or particular social group were all positively referenced, despite context.

A finding we found interesting and which parallels national statistics (i.e., Ravitch, 2014), is that relatively few of our students were like us in family/school histories; that is, having lived educational experiences that were paramount to significantly altering their anticipated trajectories. Rather, for most, their schooling fulfilled what might be seen as their birthrights, replicating the educational attainment and economic positioning of their parents or communities. For us, post-secondary education was neither expected nor easily attainable; we saw it as a means for economic security and a way to break the cycle of poverty and dependence on social services. Our students, on the other hand, report higher education as an expectation necessary to ensure their social and
Chapter 42: Examining attitudes and beliefs about public education through co-autobiographical self-study

Economic status. Pew Research Center (May, 2017) reports a significant increase in individuals entering the workforce with at least a bachelor’s degree, up from 26% to 40% in one generation.

Cultural norms of our backgrounds did not include expectations of school success and higher education access. Our personal experiences, then, have positioned us to feel very passionately about public education, which in many ways is in contrast to our students, most of whom may not view public education as a catalyst for altering or providing an alternative future path. One challenge we face as teacher educators, both before this study and perhaps more so now, is how to instill in our students an understanding of the possibilities of public education. We continue to believe in the potential of public education as a fundamental social good and an “equalizer of sorts” (Nieto, 2018, p. 57), but how do we reconcile the disparities between ideals and realities and our school experiences versus those of our students? As we work to refine our practice, this is a question we will continue to address and reflect upon. This work has helped us recognize how our experiences have shaped our views of public education and how those may be perceived as biases in some ways. We strive to be transparent, admitting through our autobiographical narratives, and other aspects of our practice, our commitment to preserving public education. We realize not all our students will teach in public schools or hold them in the same regard we do, yet we present it as a viable and powerful option, one that can truly make a difference in the lives of students.

Conclusion

This self-study has potential to inform our work as teacher educators as well as that of other teacher educators who prepare preservice teachers for public schools. Analysis of our own perspectives helped us see how we view and present public education to our preservice teachers, potentially influencing their own views, positively or negatively. Likewise, we hoped to foster in our students more critical, thoughtful analysis of about the contexts in which they were each taught and will teach. Using autobiography allowed us to learn alongside students, getting to know them more fully and challenging them to examine their (and our) biases and preconceptions about students, teachers, and practices in schools. Other researchers can use autobiography to elicit student responses to this or other important contemporary topics. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert, using autobiographical/narrative accounts heightens students’ awareness and emphasizes the place of (his)story in teachers’ development and understanding of practice: “Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it” (p. 18). If we hope to learn from experience and use it as a means for improved thinking and enhanced practice, we need to intentionally and honestly analyze our contextualized experiences and those of others. This process provides deeper insight into individual and collective thinking, allowing connection between and among perspectives and improving the learning of the self and others. We see value in this work for teacher educators who strive to improve their practice and broaden their perspective, regardless of the topic.

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Chasing two rabbits: Using self-study to help grapple with the process and product of teacher education during an international education project

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Brian is a high school science teacher in a medium sized urban school in the United States who is also a PhD candidate studying teacher education. From previous work in the Republic of Georgia as a Fulbright Teachers for Global Classrooms Fellow, he was asked to serve as a subject matter expert (SME) on the Training Educators for Excellence (TEE) project funded by the Millennium Challenge Corporation in the Republic of Georgia.

Brian’s involvement with the project lasted one year, with most of the work occurring over four months, two of which took place in Georgia working 40-50 hours a week with Georgian SMEs. Prior to departure, two months were spent analyzing preparatory documents and Skyping with colleagues. The task was to develop 24 hours of professional development for more than 18,000 Georgian science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) teachers with the aim of improving student outcomes (IREX, 2016) while also “improving [teachers’] ability to utilize student-centered teaching methodology and classroom assessment” (S. Gorgodze, personal communication, May 28, 2016). The pedagogical shifts required of Georgian teachers as part of the TEE program were significant in their own right but were considerably more dramatic in light of Georgian teacher examinations. Similar to content and pedagogical exams required of teachers in the U.S., Georgian teachers are required to pass content examinations; however, only about one in five Georgian STEM teachers passed their content exams in 2016 (S. Gorgodze, personal communication, May 28, 2016).

The average age of the Georgian teacher is 48.3 with 22 years of teaching experience (OECD, 2013) which means many current Georgian teachers were educated under Soviet rule, speak fluent Russian, and previously taught in the Soviet education system. Takala and Piattoeva (2012) caution not all former Soviet teachers will be willing to discard their own identity for Western education practices, and failure to attend their professional identities has been a significant reason for education reform failures in post-Soviet education systems. Thus, utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000) throughout the project was paramount especially considering

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Brian is a U.S. citizen and speaks neither Russian nor Georgian.

Georgia is facing significant issues as a country: high unemployment, an education system in need of improvement, overdependence on agricultural employment (Zhang, 2017), and a shifting border with Russia (Joyce, 2017). Brian needed to remain cognizant of the ethic of care and attention to reform (LaBoskey, 2004) while working to meet the demands of the donor.

**Aim**

The singular circumstance of a budding democratic nation, regional geographic pressures, and the nation-wide scale of Georgia's teacher professional development project created tremendous pressure for Brian. Not only was this the first nation-level project for Brian, serving as an expert in education was a first as well. These factors prompted Brian to examine his “situated practice” (Lassonde, Galman, & Kosnik, 2009) and pose a self-study research question by asking, how does being selected to serve as an expert affect Brian’s practice as a teacher educator?

**Literature review**

A demand of the donor was to incorporate student-centered instruction in teacher professional development. Student-centered instruction incorporates students’ prior knowledge and culture into classroom activities (National Research Council, 1999); is rooted in constructivism that requires teacher scaffolding (Lee & Hannafin, 2016); and requires consistent assessment and feedback on student learning (National Research Council, 1999). These three “tenets” would form the backbone for Brian’s approach to developing teacher training, employing strategies such as think, pair, share (Lynam, 1981), team-based learning (Michaelson, Knight, & Fink, 2004), inquiry-based learning (Educational Broadcasting Company, 2004), and project-based learning (Thomas, 2000) among others.

These student-centered strategies have been shown to improve student outcomes at both high school and higher education levels. A Stanford study found that when high schools employ student-centered pedagogy, students outperformed similar schools that were not student-centered on state assessments, graduated more students, and improved college eligibility by enrolling in more college preparatory classes (Friedlaender, Lewis-Charp, Cook-Harvey, & Darling-Hammond, 2014). Higher education instructors also generally agree that student-centered classrooms are more effective and that students are receptive to these strategies (Brown Wright, 2011; Connell, Donovan, & Chambers, 2016).

Since not all Georgian teachers had exposure to student-centered strategies, teachers might need to review some theory. Brian embraced Korthagen and Kessel’s (1999) suggestion that theory should be presented in a way that teachers can implement that theory authentically, under the supervision of teacher educators, such that the teacher has an opportunity to evaluate their perceptions and subsequent actions against what theory might prescribe. During training, then, teachers would learn theory that underpins a strategy and practice that strategy with peers under the supervision of a skilled instructor. In this way, experienced peers and the instructor can help shape teachers’ gestalts while gaining knowledge about how to behave in a given situation (Korthagen & Kessel, 1999). Reflecting is also a critical step in this process and Brian wanted to make sure it was addressed in the training, so he planned on including the ALACT and onion models of reflection (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005) in the training modules.

Brian’s initial idea for training would require less lecture and more “hands-on” activities allowing teachers the opportunity to combine their teaching experiences with new theories and strategies while receiving continuous feedback from peers and a skilled instructor. In short, teachers would be learning the way their students would learn after their training—student-centered.
Methods

Daryl, an identity scholar and Brian's graduate adviser, agreed to serve as a critical friend (Costa & Kallick, 1993) during this self-study. We employed dialogue (East, Fitzgerald, & Heston, 2009) as the main method for conducting the self-study and used a shared Google document as an interactive journal (Makaiau, Leng, & Fukui, 2015) which served as our means of dialogue. Brian journaled every day and Daryl used the comment feature of Google Documents to ask probing questions or share his thoughts. Brian would then reply to his comments the next day.

One week before Brian departed for Georgia, he was contemplating in the interactive journal how he would approach working with colleagues, the Georgian government, and his employer. Daryl responded by stating, “It seems like you’re using a sports metaphor here. In sports, there are winners and losers, adversaries, competition. How does framing the relationship in this way affect your approach?” After the fifth journal entry, Daryl stated, “You have a tendency to set up situations in terms of dualities in which you’re in one “camp” and your opposition is in another “camp.”” We realized quickly that Berry’s (2007) tensions provided a framework to discuss how Brian was feeling, while exploring his tendency to frame his experiences as dualistic competitions. Grounding Brian’s journaling in Berry’s (2007) framework ensured he would name a particular tension, describe “where” in the spectrum of that tension he resided for a given situation, and how that position in the tension may have influenced his behavior or the project’s deliverables. This, in turn, provided Daryl ample opportunities to respond constructively as a critical friend. The word “tension” appears at least once on all 26 pages of dialogue, evidencing that tensions were a central framework for our discussions.

The interactive journal is comprised of 38 pages of journal entries, comments by Daryl, and Brian's replies to Daryl. In addition to the interactive journal, there were 371 emails, and one interview which was transcribed. We used the method of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to analyze the data, which was collected and analyzed in near real time. This manner of dialogue, delayed by one day due to time zone differences, influenced Brian’s thoughts and behavior while working on the project, which Brian would detail in the next journal entry, such that as time went on, Brian's journal became both a reflection on his ongoing experiences and a reflection on the journal itself. The process repeated every work day for two months while Brian was in Georgia. At the end of the work week, we would discuss the journals and emails over a one-hour Skype meeting, evaluating decisions Brian made, asking and answering questions, and determining what themes we were seeing in the writing. These themes would influence Brian's journal entries for the next week. Consistently documenting contexts, feelings, and behaviors in near real time, interactively with Daryl, ensured that we would be able to accurately identify situations that were potentially affecting Brian's practice and thus answer the research question.

Analysis and findings

The data generated in this self-study occurred over 9 months with the bulk of “real-time” data occurring over the two months Brian was in Georgia. Data was often analyzed over hours and days, rather than months. The high stakes nature of the project created a strong sense of purpose, accompanied by stress and anxiety that imposed a strict timeline for data generation and analysis, ultimately reducing time for reflection. Interpretations from the analysis were consumed near-real time to aid decision making while in Georgia. Brian had to choose an interpretation, act on that interpretation while at work, reflect on the day's choices, and report on the outcomes of choices, often within a 24-hour period.

As a critical friend, Daryl's initial mindset in replying to Brian's journal entries was to notice assumptions in Brian's thinking, particularly those showing a cultural bias. While cross-cultural issues were never distant, we quickly identified a plethora of interwoven threads—some cultural and others intensely personal. This culminated, about a month into our dialogues, with a naming of the product-process tension, which became the driving force for Brian's reflections and our discussions going forward. The following sections are themes that emerged from our discussions.
Chapter 43: Chasing two rabbits: Using self-study to help grapple with the process and product of teacher education

Expert-ness

Brian focused early on his need to demonstrate that he added value, laying out domains in which he was not an expert (“my content skills are fundamentally lacking,”) and those where he was (“I am expert in how kids learn and how to engage kids.”) This notion of expert-ness piqued Daryl’s interest, so he asked what this meant to Brian, and whether, in Brian’s view, “it is your job to help [teachers] become ‘experts’?” This became a common approach for Daryl, asking questions both to clarify Brian’s thinking, and to take that thinking to other levels.

Later, Brian recognized his need to be an expert in many arenas, including teaching (“I do consider myself an expert learner.”) and even his reasons for pursuing a PhD (“I need a degree or someone to bestow ‘expert’ upon me.”) He began to realize his need to be seen as an expert was creating a lot of tension for him on the project: “I want to feel my contributions matter. If I am just a shmo, that might not be true. But an expert? Well, who could argue with an expert?”

During the Georgia project, Brian believed he could not compete with the intellect and experience of Georgian content area SMEs. Yet, Georgian teachers were failing the subject content exams, the “product” of teacher education. The tension between process and product was the issue revisited almost hourly between Brian and the Chemistry SME throughout the project, although they did not name it as such at the time. The Chemistry SME, knowing Georgian teachers well, suggested Brian create some theoretical presentations so Georgian teachers could see the link between the pedagogical shifts expected of them and content knowledge. After Brian created this product, the Chemistry SME raved, indicating this would be exactly what the Georgian teachers needed. Brian wrote about this in the journal and Daryl, after having read multiple journal entries about Brian’s expert-ness preoccupation, responded with a bit of good humor by asking, “Did you get to feel like the expert?” Brian replied, “Kind of. I was more happy that I did something that the Georgians valued. I felt like I actually helped.” Initially meant as a lighthearted way to stimulate discussion, this exchange exemplifies Brian’s discovery that his contribution to the Georgia process was not his level of expertise, but his desire to be an instrument in the education of Georgian teachers.

Relationships

The importance of Brian’s relationships emerged when he wrote about a colleague’s “meltdown” over a lack of science content in the training, expressing concern for her. This struck Daryl as ironic, given Brian’s emphasis on inquiry over content. When Daryl asked about this, Brian wrote, “It’s definitely a need to support [her]—she’s very nice.” Part of his concern was pragmatic, but he also acknowledged, “the human element of compassion. I don’t want her or anyone else to be upset.”

After this exchange, Brian began writing more about relationships, including reconsidering the project’s meaning for him: “I feel very responsible for Georgia’s future. For some reason, I absolutely love this place.” In reflecting on past experiences, he came to realize, “that my compassion for others and sheer joy to be around people has a real significant effect on how I see, think, and act professionally.” This was a marked shift from his initial focus on expert-ness and completing a quality product.

Naming the tension

About a month into Brian’s project, we had identified a number of tensions Brian was grappling with: inquiry vs. content, expert vs. idiot, finishing the job vs. fostering relationships, and navigating the needs of multiple stakeholders (government vs. teachers, employer vs. donors). It felt like we were wandering around without much progress, but in a Skype conversation, we managed to articulate the tension underlying all of these: process vs. product.

The effect of naming this tension was immediate and pervasive, the start of a complete paradigm shift. At one point, Brian wrote, “The tension of process vs. product is haunting me! It has officially crept into my psyche.” Further in his journal, Brian wrote, “As you pointed out, I started out obsessing over product, and now seem to be more wrapped up with the people and
the process.” Through our discussions, Brian had recognized a paradox—he had been intent on engaging teachers in a process of learning how to guide their students through a process, but his focus had been simply on getting a job done.

This shift had a number of impacts on his reflections. First, his frustration decreased as he worried less about the goal and more about meaningful collaboration. Contrasting himself with a colleague who was still frustrated, he wrote, “I don’t blame [her] but it’s the process. It’s clear to me the Georgians need a lot of time to process what we wrote.” He also took a more critical view of the project’s focus on directing teachers: “I get that directions are important, but also…let teachers have a chance at understanding something on their own and giving them time.” He also began reflecting back on American education: “we’ve chosen the product for kids via standards. This is what you should know. That’s an amazing amount of control.”

The biggest benefit to Brian was accepting the ambiguities in the project and allowing himself to focus on what was most important to him—process. The latter half of his journal focused much more on his growing relationships with the Georgian people, and a rejection of the idea that it was his job to “fix” them: “I basically said that it’s not for us to push the Georgians—they like it or they don’t. Not our call.” Ultimately, this led him to reject his “expert” role, which he found very liberating: “This thinking makes my ‘expertise’ completely irrelevant. And it shockingly feels really good right now to say that, at this moment. On some level, I have no idea what my role is here or back home. And I am ok with that.”

Outcomes

In response to the research question, Brian’s practice was significantly influenced by his title in that it was a significant source of anxiety and dialogue with Daryl. The desire to serve as an expert obfuscated what Brian was most concerned about—helping the Georgian teachers. Once Brian was able to accept that his title was simply a name and did not have to influence his work, he was able to focus on creating training that balanced pedagogy with content. The balance was also driven by his desire to form and maintain strong relationships with colleagues, which Brian discovered made him feel as though he was fulfilling his obligation and doing “expert” work. Interpreting the findings through Kegan’s Constructive Developmental Theory (CDT) (Kegan, 1982, 1994) makes these findings particularly noteworthy.

There are five stages in CDT of which the third and fourth stages are relevant to this study. Stage three individuals form strong relationships with others and adopt ideologies of adjacent cultures or institutions. Kegan’s stages are hierarchical, so stage four individuals possess the same attributes as stage three individuals, except they can develop their own ideologies rather than blindly adopting cultural or institutional norms. Kegan (1994) uses a board of director’s example to distinguish among the stages: an individual in stage three is part of a board of directors, has ideas and votes, but will always do as the board directs. Individuals in stage three struggle when a board of directions cannot help them make critical decisions. An individual in stage four is the chair of the board, who may or may not accept the board’s suggestions, and can arrive at their own decisions independent of social or institutional influence. Kegan (1994) defined someone in stage four as possessing self-authorship.

Brian believed he had to deliver a product that was in congruence with the government’s ideology or risk termination of his services. Developing congruence among an individual’s behavior, the institution’s ideology, and the individual’s work product is a hallmark endeavor of someone in stage three. The amount of time Brian and Daryl spent on discussing the product-process tension, however, is emblematic of people in stage four. The product-process tension, then, was a manifestation of Brian’s cognitive dissonance when he was asked to deliver a product per contract, a function performed by someone in stage three, by educating teachers, which is a process that requires self-authorship (Helsing, Howell, Kegan, & Lahey, 2008). Brian and Daryl’s dialogue during this self-study identified the developmental paradox of process-product which helped Brian advance his work of delivering the product, while honoring his relationships with colleagues and incorporating Georgian culture.
By naming the tension and exploring how that affected Brian’s practice, he was able to recognize that to be the expert, he had to remain self-authored despite aspects of the contract which he initially felt constrained him. Brian was experiencing the paradoxical nature of compulsory education reform—do what the institution wishes, but also educate, which requires a higher developmental stage. In answering this self-study research question, Brian had to alter his practice significantly by redesigning his product such that it met contractual obligations while also educating Georgian teachers. Further, Brian realized that if he should find himself being an expert or implementing policy, he would do well to accept the suggestion by Helsing, Howell, Kegan, and Lahey (2008) that teacher educators include explicit psychological support to aid in transitioning from stage three to stage four during teacher education contexts that include significant variation from the prevailing culture or ideals. Kegan (1994) claims that almost half of all adults are in stage three or in stage three and transitioning to stage four, meaning that a significant portion of teachers expected to conduct a paradigm shift in their instruction at the institution’s behest may not be developmentally capable of doing so. The outcome of this self-study is especially salient for teacher educators implementing significant educational paradigm changes.

A simple way to encapsulate this self-study, perhaps, comes from a story shared during Brian’s interview with the chemistry SME. She told Brian that being accountable to both the Ministry of Education and Georgian teachers in their efforts to include content and pedagogy was like an old Georgian proverb about chasing two rabbits: when you try to catch both, you catch neither. Through this self-study, we discovered that if we wish to create training for teachers that spans developmental stages without addressing teachers and teacher educator’s developmental stages, we may end up chasing two rabbits.

References


Section three

Developing local knowledge

This section brings together projects that explore the use of self-study as a way of developing local knowledge. Like fifth columnists working from within to understand the lay of the land, they emphasise that expertise must take account of local constraints, issues, cultures, and assumptions. There is a tension inherent in extending personally developed knowledge for a wider audience. These are stories we all know and tell – made powerful through being told again, in new ways, by writers with scholarly intent.

*I tell my story for me, you hear my story for you*
Presenter and audience: The two selves who go public in self-study research

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Self-study is about learning from experience that is embedded within teachers creating new experiences for themselves and those whom they teach. Like new teachers, teacher educators must learn to learn from experiences and self-study is a way for teacher educators to do that. (Russell, 1998, p. 6)

In their historical overview of the development of the self-study school, Samaras & Freese (2009) described the significant role of the Castle Conference “as a valuable forum for bringing researchers together to dialogue, to ask probing questions, to make their knowledge public and open for critique, and to contribute to the evolving nature of the field” (p. 6). In essence, Samaras & Freese are drawing attention to the importance of moving beyond the ‘self’ in order to make the knowledge from self-study public, useable and applicable in the work of others.

If self-study is to be meaningful in the development of the pedagogical practice of, in particular, teacher educators then the nature of the dissemination of our self-study research and the ways in which we interact, build upon and interpret the knowledge derived of that research matters. But how does that play out in reality? What is it that we do as a community that fosters the public critique of our work in ways that encourage others to engage with, and build upon, our findings? These are questions which have been at the heart of self-study since its inception (see for example, Hamilton et al., 1998), and, it could well be argued, are questions that we continually need to address in order to ensure that we practice what we preach – a tenet of self-study.

Whitehead (1989) famously invited the S-STEP community to confront the disparities in what we say, what we believe, and what we actually do in our teaching work, and to acknowledge the possibility of being a ‘living contradiction’. In this paper, we attempt to take up Whitehead’s challenge through a consideration of how and why we engage in ‘going public’ which, as Shulman (1999) noted, is a key aspect of scholarship that should be neither overlooked nor taken for granted.

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As teacher educators working together in the same institution, our collaboration consistently reminds us that we view much of our work through a pedagogical lens. Not surprisingly, we consider the Castle conference as an invitation to do more than simply present a self-study paper; we aim to create a pedagogic experience that will engage participants in the study, both cognitively and emotionally. Doing so in writing – the forerunner to a session at the Castle - is challenging. In this paper, we attempt to place the reader in context through what we describe as a trigger, or the ‘way in’ to the situation. The trigger is drawn from a critical incident (Tripp, 1993) derived of the pedagogic experience we attempted to create at the last castle conference (Forgasz & Loughran, 2016). In it, we draw attention to how pedagogic intent, practice and interpretation interact to create outcomes not always envisaged.

Our collaborations have led us more and more to examine what we do publicly when engaging in learning from self-study research (our own and that of others). Our purpose in this paper is not to rationalise our behaviour or to justify our approach (Loughran, 2002); rather, to open up the situation to scrutiny in an attempt to advance our practice as a community more generally. In so doing, we aim to foster a legitimate invitation to the self-study community to purposefully seek to ‘practice what we preach’.

**Trigger**

At Castle 2016, we reported on a study of a teacher education practice developed by Rachel, working with John as a critical friend. When planning the nature of our Castle presentation of that study, we agreed that our main aim was to invite the audience to consider their own practices in relation to both the self-study approach we had adopted and the key findings of Rachel's study. To achieve our aim, we decided on an interview approach whereby John, the critical friend, would be the host and ask Rachel key questions about the aims, methodology, and key findings of her study. Following some ‘context setting’ and familiarisation with our approach to working together, John would then pose a question about Rachel’s responses for the audience to discuss amongst themselves, first in small breakout groups and then as a whole. Then we would move to a Q&A on the next aspect of the findings.

Because we wanted the questions to enable exploration of the complexities of practice in sophisticated ways, we pre-planned some broad topics and questions. However, our planning was intended only as an advance organiser of themes, not as a script. We wanted to remain present and responsive from moment to moment. Therefore, rather than presenting a well-rehearsed routine, we chose to largely improvise what was, in the end, a public performance of our selves and of our relationship. In true improvisational fashion, we ended up pursing some topics that were unplanned and allowed discussion of others to go in unexpected directions.

Our pedagogic intent was to engage the audience in the study. Because of the roles we had assigned ourselves, the course of the conversation was, in many ways, determined by John's often rigorous and robust questioning in his role as the critical friend (as agreed in advance of the session), designed to keep us sensitive to the issues and draw out genuine views and ideas rather than pre-planned ripostes. Rachel responded with various degrees of enthusiasm, confidence, vulnerability, and even surprise when faced with unexpected (and unrehearsed) lines of inquiry.

Feedback we received after the session was polarised. For example, some found the session to be helpfully educative while others were deeply troubled. Interestingly, a sticking point that arose appeared to be based on the structural dynamic of the session itself: Rachel's teaching and research practices were laid bare for microscopic interrogation, first by a critical friend and then by the audience.
Questions arose in the form of contradictions and tensions as illustrated by the following juxtapositions: “Was this the performance of how a rigorous research process is buoyed by unflinching critical friendship? or, was it merely evidence of a disturbing power dynamic at play?” and, “Was Rachel’s vulnerable sharing a courageous and agentic act? or, was she being held up to uncomfortable public scrutiny?” Further to these, “Were the audience being invited to explore the nuances of their teaching and research practices? or, were they being told what to do and how to do it?”

Response

Initially we were surprised and somewhat taken-aback by some of the responses. As evident in some perspectives offered on the experience, our pedagogic intent was not realised in the ways we had anticipated and aspects of our practice were interpreted in ways that were initially confusing and confronting. Upon reflection, we came to appreciate how these divergent readings of our relational dynamic and our intentions could be possible. The experience raised for us questions about the gap between intention and reception in the public presentation of research in the context of a conference (Castle in particular).

Some months later we discussed the possibilities for a new self-study collaboration catalysed by our Castle (2016) experience. We speculated about some of the factors that we thought might have contributed to the differing interpretations – and the disparity between those received by each of us separately. As a consequence, our conversation turned more broadly to the ‘purpose’ in going public with self-study research; in respect of both presenters and audiences.

Through our discussion we began to tease out some of our underlying assumptions and intentions in relation to what we aimed to achieve, offer, and gain by going public with our own work, as well as when we engage with the research presented by others (i.e., exploring both our presenter and our audience experiences and perspectives). We also speculated as to the enablers and obstacles for achieving those aims. Our initial assumption hunting (Brookfield, 1995) led us to pose a number of questions derived of our experience that go to the issue of purpose in ‘reporting and reception’ of self-study research.

Questions

This is a conceptual study designed to consider both presenter and audience roles in the act of ‘going public’ with self-study research in conference settings – the Castle in particular. Specifically, we draw on both existing literatures and our personal experiential understandings in order to interrogate the questions about the public sharing of self-study research that were catalysed as a consequence of the situation described in the trigger (above). As such, the paper is intended to confront some of our underlying taken-for-granted assumptions about reporting self-study research, reconsidering them by reframing the conference presentation as a pedagogical encounter. As a consequence, the questions that emerge go the very nature of:

- Presenting self-study research findings - is there a pedagogic intent/what is the purpose in going public?
- Testing for resonance – (how) do others identify with the situation?
- Audience learning - what might others learn or consider in relation to their own teacher education practice and/or their own self-study research?
- Presenter learning – (how) is audience feedback given/received?
- Engagement – as a community what is involved in meaningfully engaging with research outcomes?

Due to word limits for the paper we are not able to explicitly respond to each question, but in terms of a big picture viewpoint, we argue that these questions shed light on two (perhaps tacit) foundations of the Castle conference, the nature of: a ‘safe space’ in which to share self-study research; and, intentions and actions (from a presenter and audience perspective) when engaging with self-study research. We focus attention on each of these in turn below.
Safe spaces: Safety ‘from’ and safety ‘to’

[The Castle Conference is] a safe space for creating a learning community of self-study researchers who are willing to ask questions, clarify terms, take risks experimenting with innovative approaches, and examine and reframe their views about teaching and teacher education practices. (Samaras & Freese, 2009, pp. 6 – 7).

The self-study literature has numerous references to risk-taking, displaying vulnerability and seeking honest feedback and professional critique through research and practice (see for example, Brandenburg, 2008; Clarke & Erickson, 2004; Kosnick, Beck, Freese, & Samaras, 2006; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). However, when it comes to sharing self-study beyond the written word alone, such actions require a genuine sense of trust and safety in order to both encourage and support what it might mean to ‘go public’. These qualities (asking questions, taking risks, and examining and reframing one’s views) describe not just a hope in undertaking self-study research but more so, an expectation of how to engage with others in the dissemination of research (particularly at the Castle Conference).

The notion of ‘safe spaces,’ then, assumes great importance in the self-study community as it implies the active development of an environment (or perhaps even a culture), in which portraying the reality of one’s own practice is essential to meaningful engagement with the situation under scrutiny. As accounts from the field suggest (Berry, 2007; Bullock, 2011; Clift, 2004), the historical claim that self-study seeks to build a sense of community to provide a safe haven for teacher educators to examine their practice (LaBoskey, 2006; Schuck & Russell, 2005) is fundamental. That is especially so when considering those teacher educators who perceive their teaching work to be undervalued and whose research into their own practice may be dismissed as lacking rigour (within and/or outside of their home institutions). Sadly, such situations persist despite the field being formally recognized for over a quarter of a century, and may be all the more confronting for those in research intensive institutions where teaching can at times be characterised as lesser work – especially when under constant pressure to produce quality research.

In one sense, the Castle Conference creates opportunities for self-study researchers to be safe from: personal criticism; marginalisation; rigid pre-ordained structures; and, the pressure of conformity. Perhaps more significantly, an environment that offers safety from all of these oppressions then simultaneously creates possibilities in terms of safety to: take risks; innovate; be vulnerable; and experience learning through uncertainty. These kinds of outcomes (to which Samaras and Freese (2009) and others refer) can be experienced as freedoms, for example, the way the Castle Conference invites a diversity of approaches to research presentation and participation. However, the power of invitation may only be realised through the attitude of whole-heartedness (Dewey, 1933); alternatively, an invitation may be interpreted as some form of mandate or expectation, neither of which encourage the whole-heartedness to prevail.

For us, the sense of safety to also crucially extends to how we engage with, and respond to, each other’s research: safety to critique; safety to challenge; safety to push each other’s thinking; and, to be pushed and challenged ourselves. Our willingness to offer and receive robust and frank critique in the course of conference dissemination is, arguably, a very powerful indicator of just how safe a space really is and brings into sharp focus the proposition that a ‘good learning experience can be uncomfortable’ (Berry & Loughran, 2002). In self-study there is often ‘considerable tension between a commitment to collaboration, on the one hand, and genuine critique of others’ ideas and positions, on the other, [it] is a tension that is always operating’ (Cochran-Smith et al., 1999, p. 243). If, as audiences to one another’s research, we shy away from the tension of creating uncomfortable experiences, we may well be squandering the potential opened up by having created a ‘safe space’ in the first place. Capitulating to polite ineffectuality diminishes the scholarly and pedagogical promise of ‘going public’ and raises questions that go to the core purpose of sharing the findings of our research through conference dissemination in the first place.

This is not to suggest that genuine critique of others’ ideas and positions is a simple or straightforward act; and it should not be blithely interpreted as such. Rather, we are acknowledging that it can be incredibly difficult to offer robust public critique and just as difficult to be genuinely
responsive to even the most legitimately constructive critique. There are abiding dilemmas to be managed in the search for pedagogic equilibrium (Mansfield, 2016) in the act of going public with self-study research. For those offering critique, an appropriate balance must be sought between superficial encouragement (sometimes expressed as uncritical affirmation) and robust pursuit of ideas (sometimes experienced as an undermining attack). For those responding, being ‘at ease’ in the face of uncomfortable pedagogic experiences demands humility of an order that is perhaps only possible when there is an explicit sense of safety in the situation and in one’s own sense of professional worth. Nurturing these capacities for critical exchange in one another is essential to the creation of a research community that offers its members a safe space in which to evolve and thrive.

**Performing ourselves: Intention and reception**

If the opportunity to approach Castle Conference presentations is largely viewed as a pedagogical encounter, then a focus must inevitably sharpen around the pedagogic aspects of our ‘performance of self’ as teacher-learners (Smith, 2017) rather than presenters and audiences. It seems reasonable to suggest that the relational and interactive nature of Castle Conference presentations (the pursuit of the ‘safe space’), not only encourages, but should also enhance the possibility of being both teachers and learners by embracing both the roles of presenter and audience.

Keltchermans’ (2009) notion of the teacher’s professional self-understanding offers a helpful analytical framework for thinking about how we perform ourselves – and how that might be received at the Castle Conference. At the centre of Kelchtermans’ proposition is the acknowledgement that because “teaching is done by somebody … [i]t matters who the teacher is” (p. 258). That proposition resonates well with the intent of self-study as the experience of the person matters, and thoughtful examination of experience helps to build community.

To reframe Kelchtermans’ central proposition in relation to performances of self at the Castle Conference, it could be stated that: we are received by others in a particular way as a consequence of others’ perceptions of who we are as teacher educators and as self-study scholars. Therefore, the way we understand ourselves as members of the self-study community matters, yet to a large extent that understanding is influenced by how others see us perhaps more than how we see ourselves.

Kelchtermans emphasised the view that all pedagogical encounters are “importantly characterised by passivity, by being exposed to others and thus being vulnerable” (p. 265). How we are perceived by others most certainly influences how we are received. The better we understand those perceptions/interpretations, the more agency we have to take pedagogical ‘risks’ in attempting to create meaningful learning experiences through ‘reception.’ Kelchtermans’ five dimensions of professional self-understanding illustrate how, in pushing the bounds of this form of risk, the self is challenged personally and pedagogically. His dimensions are: self-image; self-esteem; job motivation; task perception; and, future perspective (see pp. 261 – 263), and they certainly prompt serious reflection on the extent to which one is prepared to take a risk and the consequences embedded in so doing.

Consider for example, questions we might ask ourselves when contemplating our engagement in pedagogic experiences at the Castle: how do I see myself within the self-study community and how am I positioned/perceived by others (self image)?; how competent and confident do I feel as a teacher educator and as a self-study scholar (self esteem)?; what do I hope to get out of attending self-study conferences (job motivation)?; how do I understand my role and responsibilities as both presenter and audience of self-study research (task perception)?; and, how does all of that fit within my broader career intentions (future perspective)?

With heightened self-understanding of ourselves and our practice as both presenters and audiences, perhaps alternative possibilities will open up for future (inter)actions that defy the default behaviours of defensive justification or passive agreement. In his self-study of how his students interpreted his practice, Russell (1997) boldly stated *How I teach is the message.* Kelchtermans (2009) built on Russell’s premise, proposing that *Who I am in how I teach is the
message. In light of all of the above, we might suggest similarly, that in conference settings, *Who I am shapes the message*. From that perspective, participation in self-study sessions at the Castle may well engender new meaning.

**Conclusion**

By way of conclusion, we reconsider some of our own questions about what happens when the conference presentation is conceptualised as a pedagogic encounter. The matter of whether there is pedagogic intent in presenting self-study research becomes entirely self-evident since a pedagogic encounter is, necessarily, driven by pedagogic intent – assuming an understanding that “telling is not teaching” and “listening is not learning”. The more important question, then, is about the nature of that pedagogic intent, part of which goes to the matter of resonance. Discerning whether and how our research questions and/or outcomes resonate with others is a dimension of trustworthiness in self-study that is crucial to engaging others in the research. In the pedagogic encounter of the conference presentation, presenters and audiences alike are thus positioned as teacher-learners who potentially both learn from, and teach one another something about the question(s) under investigation – i.e., moving beyond story (Berry & Kosnik, 2010).

As presenters, this means conducting and presenting research that will make a valuable contribution to knowledge development and thus help to advance the field of teaching and learning about teaching. It also means being capable of ‘letting go’ and taking on new ideas and new learning (genuinely reframing and learning to abstract from that experience to others).

As audiences, being teacher-learners means participating in such a way that we learn something about our own teacher education practices and/or our self-study research. Sometimes that might also mean questioning and countering the ideas being presented in an effort to facilitate the learning of self and others at the same time.

Whether in our roles as presenter or audience, approaching research dissemination as a pedagogical opportunity derived of critical exchange goes to the very heart of reflective practice and the importance of the pedagogic approach to withholding judgment built around Schon’s (1983) notion of framing and reframing. That, surely, is an important way of seeking to practice what we preach and address instances of being a living contradiction – the heart and soul of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices.

**References**


Critical incidents: Problems of practice AND celebrations of practice

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Once upon a time, in December, 2015, we created a Critical Friends Group following the sudden death of a friend, Bia. Bia had been a personal friend as well as a professional mentor to us and to many others in our shared field of mathematics teacher education. We missed her laughter, wisdom, advice, and artichoke dip. To make sense of our professional lives without Bia, we began by sharing research interests and papers (Harkness & Noblitt, 2017; D’Ambrosio & Kastberg, 2012; McCloskey, 2014) via Skype™ conversations. Each of us knew Bia and each other differently and our first meetings were attempts to build a sense of acquaintance.

Collectively, we are mathematics teacher educators (MTEs) who teach methods courses at large universities. Many of our conversations have underscored our collective frustration with state and institutional mandates for accreditation. We have also bemoaned the limited modes of inquiry that traditionally count as scholarship in mathematics teacher education. And we have talked at length about ways to support each other and sustain our work. Shelly is a perfectionist who is constantly battling this addiction by using estimation rather than finding exact answers. Signe is a self-described “control freak” who is working to let go. And, Andrea is a recovering people-pleaser. We know these things about ourselves because we realize that we are “better” selves when we reject the stresses of perfectionism, control, and people-pleasing. However, these realizations and the willingness to change the practices that have defined us in the past have been incremental and challenging. During our first conversations we agreed to share our own individual problems of practice in mathematics teacher education in the form of “critical incident” (Goodell, 2006) stories. We wrote these, posted them to each other, and then responded to each other in writing.

Critical incidents can provoke change. In our field, mathematics teacher education, we encourage and celebrate change in beliefs, knowledge, and practices. Change can happen very slowly and perhaps imperceptively over time; yet, in mathematics teacher education, there is precious little time (Simon, 2017). As MTEs we feel pressure to prepare future teachers, perhaps,
by using assignments that call upon critical incidents or reflection on experience (Dewey, 1920; Schön, 1983, 1987) that motivate change. In the methods courses, we encourage future teachers to reflect upon, identify, and discuss problems they have experienced in their field placements or that they have experienced teaching and learning mathematics. The goal of these reflections is to provoke change in beliefs, knowledge, and practice.

According to Hole and McEntee (1999) critical incidents are stories from teachers’ professional lives shared to motivate rethinking and changing practice. Hole, a fourth-grade teacher, outlined a typical process of sharing these stories of ordinary events: 1) Collect Stories; 2) Ask What Happened? (write down what happened without any analysis or judgement); 3) Ask Why Did It Happen? (examine underlying school structures and values and beliefs); 4) Ask What Might It Mean? (find the meaning in the ordinary); 5) Ask What Are the Implications for Practice? (rethink and change practice).

Yet, in exploring self-study of critical incidents in mathematics teacher education we unearthed a shared assumption that critical incidents are problems of practice to be solved. Citing Hole and McEntee (1999), Goodell (2006) noted, “A critical incident can be thought of as an everyday event encountered by a teacher in his or her practice that makes the teacher question the decisions that were made, and provides an entry to improving teaching” (p. 224). Goodell’s rationale for using discussion and writing to reflect on critical incidents included the idea that engaging in such activities enables teachers to “see their current practice as problematic” (p. 225), an important step in changing practice.

Framing incidents this way, serves to align the term critical with problematic. The focus is on shifting practice to attend to solving a problem or at least reducing or eliminating the factors that gave rise to a problem of practice. In fact, Goodell’s (2011) future teachers described critical incidents as “problems” or “intense” situations (p. 118). In her self-study, most participants found reflections on and discussions of critical incidents as helpful but Goodell (2011) noted:

... few of them see what to me is the true value, which is that developing the habit of thinking about teaching changes the way you teach. Only two of the 37 [future teachers’] papers analyzed showed this type of metacognition. My previous self-study highlighted this fact and from that time on I tried to improve significantly the feedback I gave students in class discussions and on written work to help them think about the implications for their teaching (what they learned). (p. 122).

Using self-study, Brandenburg (2011) questioned her assumptions about Roundtable Reflective Inquiry (RRI) in secondary mathematics methods courses. RRI generated “discussions based on critical events in their mathematics teaching practice ...” (p. 77). Brandenburg described the critical events as “issues” or “problems” or “problematizing learning” (pp. 79-80). In fact, during the RRI that Brandenburg reflected upon, future teacher Jess’s “voice was faltering and she was clearly upset” when Jess described to her classmates a subtraction lesson that did not go well (p. 82).

Slightly different from these accounts of critical incidents, other descriptions do not position them as strictly problems of practice. Like Hole and McEntee (1999), Tripp (1993; 1994) identified critical incidents as common or ordinary events that often afford teachers the opportunity to reflect upon hidden trends, motives, and structures of their practice. Newman’s (1987) critical incident protocol sounded more like stories from practice to be retold rather than problems of practice:

I had asked the teachers to keep an eye on what was going on in their classrooms and to bring to class a couple of short descriptions of incidents which caught their attention. I saw the stories as a tool for conducting research on ourselves. These “critical incidents,” as we came to refer to them, offered us a way of exploring our assumptions about language, about learning, and about teaching. (p. 727)
Recall that our aim with sharing critical incidents with one another from our teaching practice was such that we merely wanted to get to know each other. We did not follow the process shared by Hole and McEntee (1999). We were not going to try to “fix” each other’s problems of practice. Yet, like future teacher, Jess, sharing critical incidents made us feel mostly terrible about ourselves and our teaching practice. Our view of critical incidents developed over time as we grew to know ourselves and each other. We found that we, and other MTEs, had used critical incidents to identify “problems of practice” so that future teachers, either individually or collectively, could figure out how to fix them.

On February 26th our story took an unexpected turn when we decided to share “positive” critical incidents. We each posted written accounts of positive critical incidents prior to our March 4th Skype™ conversation.

Shelly, the self-described perfectionist, wrote to us about a positive critical incident that occurred at Urban High School. A former future teacher, Jasmine [pseudonym], saw Shelly in the hallway and invited Shelly to come into her classroom. Jasmine excitedly introduced Shelly as, “Dr. Harkness. She was my teacher.” In her reflection, Shelly wrote:

> When Jasmine enthusiastically introduced me as her ‘teacher’ rather than her ‘professor’ I felt loved and respected as her equal. I left UHS with a warm heart. … Perhaps I perseverate on the negative critical incidents and I should be looking for these kinds of small positive critical incidents. They are also critical so why is it that I don’t celebrate them? I’m certainly not looking for recognition or rewards. But I do need confirmation that what I am doing makes some difference in my small world.

Signe, the self-described control freak, wrote a positive critical incident about an email she received from a former future teacher, Karen [pseudonym]. Karen described a lesson that Signe modeled during a methods course about building airplanes and measuring flights and that Karen taught in her second grade classroom:

> I just wanted to share some pictures and thank you for exposing us to great activities that CAN be used in a classroom. This was such a fun way to combine math and science for my students who rarely have time to do science. I know how great it feels when my students share with me something that they learned that they have been able to apply in class, so I thought I would share the same with my teachers …

In her reflection to share with our group, Signe wrote a series of questions regarding Karen’s email: “Hey, but wait… what did I do? Why this activity? Why this student? Was there a special relationship or connection? Was this activity just that good?”

Andrea, the self-described people pleaser shared, in writing, a positive critical incident about a guest lecture she led for future teachers whom she did not know. She was invited to speak with the future teachers about intervention and remediation for “students-labeled-as-struggling.” Because this was a topic that Andrea cared deeply about she had a “strong clear sense of her perspective, and of what I had to offer.” She felt good lecturing, a teaching practice that is sometimes not valued in mathematics teacher education, because it “felt freeing” and it allowed her to:

> … claim and affirm my expertise in a way that I don't usually get to do. And it felt great. And talking about it felt great, and Signe and Shelly provided the time and space for me to relive that moment through re-telling and to think more deeply about how I could incorporate elements of that experience into more of my teaching practice.

Notice that all three of us experienced learning and questioning as a result of positive rather than negative emotion generated during the writing and telling of these critical incidents.
Pause in story. Note to reader: How did you feel when you read these positive critical incidents as compared to how Jess (see Brandenburg, 2011, above) felt when she shared her critical incident? What emotions emerged for you?

We realize that our analysis of critical incidents and the turn to positive incidents in our practices as potentially sustaining can be linked to existing studies in positive psychology. Our ongoing, reflective analyses on our initial critical incidents provoked largely negative activating (e.g., anger, anxiety, shame) and deactivating emotions (e.g., despair) (Voerman, Korthagen, Meijer, & Simons, 2014). Though we discussed the critical incidents, what led up to them, and how we might have handled them differently, exploring the incidents left us feeling mostly defeated. In our collaboration we sought ways to discuss our practice that provoked positive (e.g., joy, hope, pride) activating emotions and encouraged persistence and a sustained exploration of practice. To fulfill this aim we turned to crafting and discussing critical incidents that were positive. Such moments suggested competence in our work as MTEs and supported our representations of self by using positive personal traits or character strengths such as kindness, self-control, creativity, or curiosity (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). Contrasting our experiences with critical incidents that left us feeling the need to leave mathematics teacher education with experiences that seemed to encourage us to further engage with our work, inspired our initial inquiry and desire to understand why negative incidents seemed to be privileged in mathematics teacher education.

Thus our use of negative and then positive critical incidents sparked our interest in exploring their use in mathematics teacher education and led to our identified self-study topic. LaBoskey (2007) suggested that self-study collaborations differ from traditional professional collaborations in that the interactions themselves become data for the study and an impetus to reframe the inquiry. Such conversations turn toward the improvement of practice. Our research is framed using self-study methodology (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001) characterized by openness, collaboration, and reframing (Samaras & Freese, 2009). The following research questions emerged in our conversations about both positive and negative critical incidents.

**Aim and objectives**

Why are negative critical incidents privileged in teacher education work? What can we learn about ourselves, our students, and our colleagues when we move towards sharing positive critical incidents?

**Methods**

Stories need settings, hence, in order to document our work, we recorded 11 Skype™ conversations between February 12 and June 8, 2016. These conversations ranged from 36-82 minutes in length. In July and August we transcribed the conversations and began analyzing the transcripts. In order to recapture the essence of the relationship we had created through Skype™, each of us read the 11 transcripts individually, taking notes. This decision was intentional, because we approached our conversations and our work as MTEs from different stances and perspectives.

After deciding to move from using critical incidents to become better acquainted with each other and to research the use of critical incidents in mathematics teacher education and other fields, we created a document in order to analyze our transcribed conversations. Andrea created a “Data Analysis Document: Critical Incidents Project” for recording our individual analyses with the directions: “Our agreed-upon plan for this initial analysis pass is to attend to moments of joy, connection, affirmation, etc. which were sustaining to us and meaningfully contributed to our own teaching practice and development.”

After completing this document, we wrote what we termed “Ah-Ha” stories and emailed these to each other. These Ah-Ha stories described the impacts the rereading of the transcripts had on us individually. We used the data, transcripts, the Data Analysis Document, and Ah-Ha stories, in order to triangulate and strengthen the trustworthiness of our self-study story.
Outcomes

On April 1st, 2016, we talked about the impact of using critical incidents in our mathematics methods courses. Signe said:

… they're puzzles. They're complications. They're places where growth or change would be the goal. … we might see the more neutral character but there's still a problem to be solved and that's at the heart.

Later, Andrea noted:

… And then in our field there's no easy way to find spaces where learning and growth can happen in positive ways. … It seems there always has to be a problem to solve, a struggle, something unpleasant before there are things worth sharing and growing from.

Signe continued:

We've seen critical incidents but they're framed as puzzles or problems to be solved rather than moments to be celebrated or explored with an open heart. Happy heart.

We began to wonder why negative critical incidents seemed the norm for our profession.

Andrea responded:

I would argue that negative critical incidents are privileged, personally and professionally, and I think that's a problem. And it's keeping us from growth ...

Signe asked for clarification:

… So your claim is that negative critical incidents, say that again. You said, 'I would argue negative critical incidents' [stops]

Andrea repeated with a one-word description for negative critical incidents:

Are privileged.

As a result of self-study, which moved from using critical incidents to get acquainted to studying their use in mathematics teacher education, we have questioned and challenged the privileged nature of the use of negative critical incidents in mathematics methods courses that we teach for future teachers. Perhaps we do not have an answer for this questioning for others but for us we have realized that the act of teaching has been typically viewed as solving problems of practice.

We have also learned that critical incidents are not fixed events in our lives along a time line. They occur in a time and place with others in context. Yet, as we grapple with them in our minds they become different in character and texture to us. They shift as a source of evidence of our practice and reveal the extent of change we have experienced. What can seem at first to be a negative incident can seem more positive when viewed at different times from different vantage points in our lives and vice versa. Critical incidents can be “many in one” so that as we contemplate them, individually and collectively, they help us use different lenses to view our practice.

Additionally, we have learned that the emotional element of the critical incident experience produces a way of knowing about their significance. In fact, this realization steered us towards a self-study by Forgasz and Clemans (2014), who positioned emotion as a dimension of epistemology within their teaching practice. “Feelings are impulses in which thought is felt and feeling is thought” (Forgasz & Clemans, p. 62). This quote resonated with us on many levels. It motivated us to rethink the use of negative critical incidents as a privileged ritual (McCloskey, 2014) in mathematics teacher education. Positive critical incidents, which we shared with each other, created emotions of celebration, joy, connection, affirmation, and helped us sustain our work. Moral of the story: If we want future teachers to experience these same emotions then we should ask them to write positive critical incidents!
Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015) conveyed the purpose of self-study as the researchers’ desire “to move beyond the particularities of practice by making public the developed understandings (through conference presentations, research reports, journal manuscripts) in order to make them informative for others and available for critical debate (p. 509). Remember: Originally we used critical incidents as a way to get acquainted with each other following the death of our friend, Bia. Our early aim was to use critical incidents as springboards to move from professional space to the building of relationships in order to see ourselves in relation to our individual selves and ourselves in relation to each other and our shared field of mathematics teacher education. We then moved toward studying the use of critical incidents in teacher education. Ideally, our story might motivate other teacher educators and MTEs to join in a “critical debate” (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015, p. 509) about the use of critical incidents to motivate change for future teachers and for MTEs themselves.

Did this story end with a resolution? No. With answers? Positive critical incidents have the potential to facilitate learning through the emotions of celebration, joy, connection, and affirmation. With more questions? Definitely. We are still musing: Why do negative critical incidents seem privileged in teacher education work? What more can we learn about ourselves, our students, our colleagues when we move towards sharing positive critical incidents?

References


It’s a balancing act: A self-study of teacher educators’ feedback practices and the underlying tensions

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While there are documented benefits of full-time faculty participating in clinical supervision, challenges, such as conflicting time demands, personal bias, adherence to common evaluation forms, and power differentials, can create impediments to effective practicum supervision (Ciuffetelli Parker & Volante, 2009). We, as teacher educators, turned to reflection through self-study to investigate our professional practice with the aim of better understanding and overcoming those challenges. Like Bullock (2017), we utilized teacher candidates’ perspectives to disrupt, confirm, and extend our narratives. We focused on the practice of giving teacher candidates feedback on their developing teaching during their clinical placement in elementary schools. Feedback is central to our work as liaisons (i.e., university-based supervisors) with teacher candidates in the field and critical to their learning and improvement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Through this self-study, we sought to answer the following research question: What underlying tensions constrain our feedback, as liaisons, to our teacher candidates in clinical placements? How can we better negotiate those tensions to make this work sustainable for full-time faculty?

Theoretical framework

Self-study researchers recognize the tensions of working in hybrid spaces between universities and schools (Martin, Snow, & Franklin Torrez, 2011; Williams, 2014). Martin, et al. found that clinical practice is intertwined in negotiating complex relationships in and across these hybrid settings. For example, Bullock (2017) found that teacher candidates often receive “conflicting messages” from mentor teachers and liaisons (p.181). Yet, conditions created in these hybrid spaces provide powerful opportunities for professional educators to learn in and from practice (Zeichner, 2010).

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In our university context, high quality clinical preparation is embraced as the cornerstone of an effective teacher preparation program (CAEP, 2015). Participation in clinical work is encouraged across non-hierarchical structures, including tenure-track faculty, administrators, part-time supervisors, full-time clinical faculty, and lecturers in the university (Snow, Martin, & Dismuke, 2015). This invitation to participate in clinical work creates dilemmas for tenure-track faculty who are encouraged to privilege research over teaching (Labaree, 2004). Despite the time constraints and tensions of balancing research, teaching, and service for faculty, our program liaisons meet regularly as a group to "share publicly their work with each other and enact change, as they engaged in professional development through a community of practice" (Snow, et al., 2015, p.1). As teacher educators working in this hybrid space, we recognize our need to form communities to advance our professional learning and identity development. Dinkelman (2011) highlights this need for professional learning through communities of practitioners by reflecting that "Relationships with close colleagues, especially those of us who have intentionally come together to form collaborative inquiry communities of practice, play a crucial role in clarifying my identity as a teacher educator" (p. 320). Therefore, collaborative critical reflection and the joint decomposition of our own practice (Grossman, 2011) takes a central role, shaping our identity and practices as teacher educators.

We framed our reflection on our feedback practices through the five-level heuristic of teacher educator reflection (Nelson & Sadler, 2013). In level one, technical reflection (Wellington & Austin, 1996), we viewed our feedback practice through an externally mandated state-wide framework for formatively and summatively evaluating preservice and inservice teachers (i.e. The Danielson Framework for Teaching [FFT], Danielson, 2013). Schön’s (1987), work on reflection in and on action, guided reflection on participation with our candidates in our reflective practicum in hybrid spaces. We used an iterative process of professional reflection, taking up deliberate reflection of the perspectives of others and personalistic reflection centered on critical self-examination and the improvement of our own practices (Vali, 1997). Next, we extended our learning through the use of critical reflection with intentionality by making our findings public to problematize our feedback practices. Finally, we utilized our findings to advance future inquiries, professional learning, and improvement.

**Methods**

We engaged in a collaborative self-study, borrowing from phenomenology, (Merriam, 1998; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, Hamilton, 2009) to identify the principles and practices at the core of our professional experience. We took a systematic (Samaras & Freese, 2006) hierarchical approach to reflection (Nelson & Sadler, 2013; Valli, 1997), moving from reflection on and in our own practices (Schön, 1987). We began with a personalist reflection in a private space and continued publically with small group critical reflection to examine the spaces between self, practice, and hybrid contexts (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004). A collaborative examination of the phenomena provided us an opportunity to “probe practice” (Hamilton, 2009) across cases and question individual understandings of practice (Martin, Snow, & Franklin Torrez, 2011; Loughran, 2004). We took this approach to focus on facilitating further development of our collective and individual knowledge and practice (LaBoskey, 2007; Hamilton 2009) and improve teaching and student learning.

**Participants**

Each of us are university-based teacher educators who transitioned from public school teaching to work as teacher educators. During this self-study, we taught university-based courses, conducted research, led school-university partnerships, and served as liaisons for elementary candidates in their year-long clinical experiences (i.e., professional year). As liaisons, we conduct weekly seminars and observations of our candidates’ teaching. Shannon is a third-year, clinical assistant professor with her FFT certification and served as a liaison for five years. Elisha is a first-year, tenure-track assistant professor who completed her FFT training midway through
this self-study. She has teacher education experience from her previous university. Penny is a second-year, tenure-track assistant professor who already completed FFT certification. She also has teacher education experience from her previous university. We also serve as liaisons in public schools partnered with our teacher education program that serve communities living in poverty. Additionally, five of our teacher candidates and mentor teachers collaborated with us in this project as participants; however, in this chapter, “we” refers to the three teacher educator participants only. IRB approval was obtained from the university and school district, and participants provided written consent.

Data sources and analysis

We followed our feedback interactions with five teacher candidates in three schools across the 2016-2017 school year. We collected formative observations and assessments scored on the FFT and observation notes. We audio-recorded and transcribed debriefing conferences of the observations. These data were collected for our teacher preparation program, whether or not teacher candidates participated in the study. The teacher candidate participants were invited to complete a survey on their perceptions of clinical feedback after they graduated to mitigate power differentials that existed as our students. Additionally, we completed three electronic surveys responding to jointly constructed prompts, kept reflective researcher journals, and participated in collaborative conversations as critical friends.

Pre-analysis

Before interacting with the data, we completed Survey One eliciting wonderings, predictions, and fears regarding the examination of their own feedback data. Each of us then created narrative journal entries.

During analysis

We engaged in qualitative cyclical coding of our own feedback data sources transcribed and presented verbatim. We read and identified initial emerging codes in the transcripts. Next, we “chunked” the codes into themes to identify primary trends across documents, highlighting key characteristics of individual feedback patterns. We wrote memos and journal entries. Then, we completed Survey Two, responding to prompts about patterns and concerns. A discussion of the individual memos ensued toward agreement on procedures for reading one another’s transcripts, memos and personal journals, we discussed what it means to be a “critical friend” (Hamilton, 2009) tending to trustworthiness, integrality, and potential difference in our analysis. We committed to using descriptive and inquiry based language and lenses to examine the data rather than lenses of evaluation and judgment. This helped us establish boundaries in our feedback to one another. We each agreed on a sampling of one another’s data to review. We conducted an analysis of the debriefing transcripts, including frequency counts of types of goals set and an analysis of the length of talk time across liaisons, candidates, and mentors in debriefing conversations. Finally, we examined the qualitative and quantitative linkages across the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Post-analysis

After reading the data, we created response memos for each data source. Then, we completed Survey Three, where we provided evidence of validations, extensions, and challenges to our feedback practices based on all the data and then proposed individual and group improvement goals. Collaborative conversations ensued identifying themes across our data. We analyzed the themes we identified as central to our professional experiences more deeply as they related to our question.

Outcomes

We discovered that all three of us perceived “doing it well” - providing meaningful feedback to our candidates - as a balancing act across a variety of variables and relationships. This balancing act manifested for us in three tensions.
Chapter 46: It’s a Balancing Act

Act one - Balancing the development of teacher candidate identity and skilled practice

We identified a tension between providing feedback targeted at improving candidate functional competence on our common evaluation forms and more anecdotal feedback aimed at developing positive dispositions and teacher identity (Mayer, 1999). Each of our candidates mentioned that our (liaison) feedback was useful for improving practice while simultaneously commenting on how they felt supported and encouraged when given feedback. One candidate commented on the feedback survey, “Being someone that is hard on myself, the feedback allowed just the right advice and enough support to encourage me to keep going (CFBS p.2)” Each of us, independently, identified this balance as intentional in our practice. Elisha explained, “I think of the candidate as an individual...as a person with intersecting identities. I like to leave students with things they can feel good about, but also with specific actions they can take to improve upon for next time (Survey, 2017)” Shannon reflected on her candidates’ comments, “Helping candidates build positive identities as teachers is central to developing their confidence. We are there to do more than calibrate and set goals. (Survey, 2017)” We all identified balancing feedback with candidates’ various developmental needs; although, there were compelling differences as to how each professional reported negotiating that work. For instance, Elisha reported intentionally framing feedback messages that “have been shown [in social psychology research] to mediate and mitigate identity threats” (Survey, 2017). Reflecting on her underlying beliefs about feedback, she wrote, “different learners have different needs depending on the learning context, which means that different feedback structures will differentially serve learners” (Memo, 2017). Our teacher candidates’ feedback served as a central data source that surfaced the importance of balancing feedback that fosters teacher identity as well as skills.

Act two - Balancing liaison and mentor teacher feedback

We as well as our candidates identified differences between liaison and mentor teacher feedback. Four out of five candidates identified the mentor’s feedback as being incident- and context-specific while they categorized our feedback as more generalizable and conceptual. One candidate responded, “The feedback I was given from my mentor teacher was more day to day, contextual information. Feedback from my liaison was often improving more conceptual skills of teaching” (CFBS p. 15). While candidates found both types of feedback meaningful, they did have to balance multiple perspectives on their teaching performance.

Perhaps the most difficult relationship in the feedback triad to negotiate was between ourselves and the mentor teachers. We identified this tension as a central experience and lens through which we engaged in triad debriefing conferences, bi-semester meetings when the mentors joined our debrief conversations with our teacher candidates to discuss the candidate's development. We agreed that our central dilemma was creating space for the mentor to give feedback, while ensuring that we provided feedback that candidates could understand and take up to develop their identity and practice. We all saw creating that space as a way of honoring the mentors' expertise and experience. Each of us perceived and navigated this tension differently when giving feedback to candidates in these triad conferences. Elisha reflected on this tension as one in which, on the one hand, she was negotiating the need to cultivate long-term relationships with and build capacity in experienced teachers so they continue to serve as mentor teachers. On the other hand, she had to ensure that candidates received feedback that supported multiple developmental goals. Elisha named her strategy for dealing with this tension as “reframing and interpreting mentor feedback” (Memo, 2017). She intentionally referenced the mentor’s feedback and connections she saw to broader themes in her own feedback. Shannon reported wanting to give mentors a voice to honor their knowledge, but used a strategy for steering feedback toward candidate’s goals she called, “extending or adding on” (Memo, 2017) to balance the mentor’s feedback with her perspective as a liaison. Penny reported being very guarded in these conversations not wanting to be “the big bad professor, coming in from the university to tell them what to do and how to teach and how to mentor” (Survey, 2017). She did not want to “risk alienation or offending the mentor” which has been documented as an issue in teacher education (Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009, p.16). She responded to this tension by taking a “listening role” to honor the mentor's jurisdiction

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over the classroom space and professional expertise. This proved difficult to negotiate at times, especially when the mentors (not trained in the FFT) would either inflate scores or underestimate the candidates’ progress, since they lacked the vantage point of the liaisons that allowed us to draw from our knowledge of and experience with development across candidates and career trajectories.

A quantitative analysis of the percentage of words spoken by the university liaisons and by the mentors triangulated the qualitative data and revealed differences in the balance of space that was afforded for mentor participation during debriefing conversations. Penny deferred most often to the mentor teacher in triad debriefing conversations talking only 34% of the time when the mentor was present as opposed to 73% of the debriefing conversations when the mentor was absent. She spoke nearly half as much, giving the mentor that additional space to give feedback. In contrast, Shannon talked 55% of the time when the mentor was present instead of 71% of the time, creating room for the mentor to give feedback but not to the extent Penny had. Finally, Elisha did the majority of the debriefing, talking 62% of the conference, when mentors were present, which was consistent with the 65% when the mentors were absent. In Elisha’s conferences, the candidates tended to speak less when the mentors were present. These word count percentages align with our qualitative analysis. Elisha’s strategy of “reframing and interpreting” mentor feedback for candidates required more decomposition and commentary than Shannon’s “adding on or extending” strategy.

Each of us negotiated the balance between mentor and liaison feedback in a different way. Yet, none of us felt confident that our approach maximized candidate learning, while honoring mentor teacher expertise. After reflecting on and analyzing the data, we uncovered a common desire to be more intentional about the balance of talk time and power during triad debriefing conversations and a willingness to experiment with elements of one another's strategies to extend our practice.

Act three - Balancing the development of individual relationships with time constraints

We identified a third tension between nurturing relationships with our partner schools, mentor teachers, and teacher candidates and our time constraints as tenure-track faculty. All of us reported the establishment of relationships with candidates as central to providing meaningful feedback. Penny said, “I need to build a relationship with each candidate so that they know that I am a ‘safe space.’” Shannon echoed this idea when she said, “‘Doing it well’ means taking the time to develop relationships with my candidates so I can better serve their needs” (Survey, 2017). All five teacher candidates rated feedback from their liaisons as meaningful and implied that their relationships with their liaisons supported their processing and use of feedback. From our liaison perspective, we experienced a constant tension between the time we invested in giving candidates written and verbal feedback, and our complex, high-stakes university workloads as pre-tenure faculty. We documented that supervision took two to three times more time than a traditional university-based course, although the credit allocated was the same. Viewing time as a critical, but limited, resource created tension between balancing personal and professional expectations for ourselves and from our candidates, mentor teachers, and partner schools for our liaison role with our college and university expectations for productivity in research and successful teaching. Shannon explained,

“This work goes well beyond the 3-credit course load allotted to me by the university. I could do much less and still be meeting university expectations for this work.... I would rather do this well than cut corners and fit the job into the time allotted. The day I start counting hours, is the day I will have to quite this work (Survey 3).

All three liaisons identified creative efficacy that allowed them to meet their own expectations. For example, Elisha said, “I now give feedback by email, through our portfolio system, and verbally, during our debrief conversations. I ask the candidates to record those conversations so they have a record of what is said. Even with that multiphase approach, time is and always will be a problem.” Penny reported, “working around this by catching up with students informally on other days (drop-ins) or during our group seminar times” (Survey, 2017). However, all three
of us identified limited time as the biggest constraint to giving skillful feedback. The knowledge that the additional hours and work dedicated to supervision went unrecognized by the university, but was highly valued by the partnership schools, professional educators, and teacher candidates created an additional layer to this tension for us. Each of us reported making personal sacrifices outside of work to meet both university productivity expectations required to obtain tenure and the professional expectations of our partners in our liaison work. Each of us framed this as a professional and personal dilemma as well as recognized the emotional cost of navigating this tension over time in the high-stakes environments of preK-12 schools and higher education.

Significance

Learning about our practice from heuristic reflection (Nelson & Sadler, 2013) through collaborative self-study offered insights into our own and others’ approaches to balancing core tensions when giving candidates feedback in clinical settings. We found that our attempts to provide skilled feedback that supported teacher candidates’ growth and development was constrained by the multiple demands on our time and the complexities of negotiating relationships with mentor teachers and teacher candidates. We recognized that negotiating these tensions are endemic to the practice of providing feedback. This finding was perhaps the most important, as it allowed us to put aside anxieties about “doing it right” and dig into what we can accomplish while balancing the complexities of this work.

Tensions made transparent through our self-study have resulted in actionable changes to our practice that we hope have implications for teacher educators. First, despite having the FFT as a common observation tool, we learned to value the differences across the feedback we each gave our candidates, especially centered on developing teacher identity and dispositions. This finding resulted in revisions to our observation form, including space for open-ended anecdotal notes and to document goals related to skills and dispositions. Second, creating alternative spaces for sharing feedback, such as phone conferences, afterschool meetings, or technology, show promise for reducing the time pressure from squeezing in feedback sessions during passing periods and recess. This opens up more space for all members of the feedback triad to participate in debriefs. Next, these data opened up honest talk with department administration to negotiate more realistic time allowances for faculty in supervision roles.

The epilogue to this study is that two of us have been able to find a more comfortable balance in our multiple roles. Although one of us has been advised repeatedly by faculty in the promotion and tenure committee to give up her liaison work and focus on research. Unfortunately, the third researcher in this study encountered such difficulties balancing the demands for scholarship and her liaison work that she has had to put this work aside for now, despite it being a key part of her teacher educator identity. This study and recent workload adjustment reaffirms the need for teacher preparation programs to find innovative solutions that honor the work of liaisons and provide time and space for teacher educator development.

References


Becoming inquirers: A self-study into developing understandings of building researcher participant relationships

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From schooling, teaching, and research experiences, we know relationships are integral in conducting research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; LeBoskey, 2004; Long, 2008; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009; Slife, 2004; Slife & Richardson, in press), and are fundamental and primary in daily life. In speaking of current research orientations to ontology, Slife and Wiggins (2009) write:

> We are relational beings – we exist for relationship ... [It’s] the basis of the self and of reality in general ... [and] the good life, from this view, is the life of good relationships ... [We] need to belong and be part of something greater than ourselves, such as a community. (p. 20)

These words remind us we are contextual beings with human needs to build relations with other beings (McIntyre & Cole, 2010). Relationships come from interactions, actively engaged with others over time. All relationships we have established through our studies are fundamental to our identity as inquirers. This understanding led us to question the knowledge of relationship we built in our studies and the ways this knowledge manifested in our role as researchers. Self-study of teacher education practices research (S-STEP) has similar ontological orientations (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). Through an ongoing process of positioning and being positioned within inquiries, as well as our inquiry into these events, our identity and understanding have been formed and revealed (Harré & van Langehove, 1999). Developing and maintaining relationships with all involved in the research process is imperative (McIntyre & Cole, 2010).

Through our experiences with our participants, we began noticing how relationships with them influenced data, analysis processes, and developing understandings: the quality and depth of relationships mattered. Eliza’s research was alongside Sean, a teacher new to the profession who came from a warehouse managerial position. Through inquiring into their relationship she realized the tensions she felt. Eliza’s inquiry took place in an Out of School time Classroom

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(OSC) at a daycare within a western Canadian city as she worked to gain a better understanding of children's experiences out of school. Emma's research was alongside Tessa, a Kindergarten teacher in a newly opened Canadian public school. Her research goal was to understand how teacher and children co-composed a curriculum of care. As a newcomer in the country, Emma continuously felt vulnerable in the classroom landscape. She realized her identity shifted in relation to the kindergarten children and Tessa.

As we talked about our developing relationships with our participants, we saw a need to inquire into what we knew and were coming to know about developing relationships. That also led us to see how these relationships shaped our identities as researchers. We recognized the fundamental importance of relationships and, in inquiring into our experiences in order to understand how our identities were being shaped, noticed three themes: movement, identity shifting as researchers, and vulnerability in relation to participants.

Methodology

Our desire to think deeply about our knowing of developing relationships led us to closely examine our actions and interactions in two separate narrative inquiry studies. Using Dewey's (1938) notion of experience, we critically inquired into these relationships with an intention of improving our research practice. We began moving our notions of relationship building as we sought to understand our practice – looking at and studying ourselves.

During fieldwork, Eliza kept field notes on her developing relationship alongside Sean, an OSC teacher, and Emma came alongside Tessa to informally talk about the relationships they were building.

We independently reviewed field notes, recorded conversations, made individual and collective anecdotal records, and discussed shared narratives of experiences. We engaged in dialogue (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009) online (i.e. Google Docs, video chat and phone calls) constructing notes from our weekly conversations. We began unpacking our experiences attending to knowledge and understandings about developing relationships revealed in the data. Together, we pulled forward themes in our stories. We sought to discern meaning and identify implications for practice, the wider landscape, and ourselves. To develop trustworthiness in our analytical process, we constantly problematized these threads and our knowledge to bring a deeper understanding of the relationships that must be built with participants. As we ‘world-traveled’ (Lugones, 1987) to our participants worlds and each other’s worlds, we considered how we were creating and re-creating those relationships.

In that moment it became clear the study we were engaging in was a S-STTEP as described by Pinnegar & Hamilton (2009):

A stance toward understanding the world [. . . through which] we study ourselves in relationship to others and . . . seek to gain understanding in order to move ideas forward in specific settings like classrooms or more general settings like education... [I]n the collection of the data and the presentation of the work, we make the relationship of self to the other a central part of the focus of the work. (p. V)

Our stories in building research relationships

Eliza & Sean

Sean was having a very hard time today. He seemed annoyed at the chaos and wildness that the children displayed upon leaving school that I had come to see as normal behavior. He thought that they were having problems with lining up, more than what was normal. I don't know that I felt that way. I wondered how Sean could think he knew what was 'normal' when he had no experience, training or education concerning children, let alone childcare. I have to remember that I have had different experiences teaching. I, too, have had days when
even the littlest problem seems devastating. Some of the kids never makes things easy for the
teachers though. Sean always wants a line of two where each child is looking forward, all of
their possessions in their backpacks and their heads lined up behind the child in front of them.
Dan doesn't feel it necessary to be in a perfect line. If he is close, he's in line, and that is good
enough. (Interim Research Text, October 8, 2015)

Sean started teaching in the OSC in January 2015. The other teacher, who was to be the
primary teacher, started at the same time but left one month later, leaving Sean as the primary
teacher. Looking back, I hadn't given enough thought to who I might be in coming alongside Sean,
and so I also was not aware of how much my own identity would shift by being in relation with
him. In working alongside him, I was reminded of things I knew as an early childhood teacher. I
had very different ideas about “normal,” and I realized I did not reveal much of this to Sean.

For the first few months I felt a great amount of tension. I had spent more than a decade
working with children, learning how to be the best teacher I could be working in daycare and
afterschool care. As I began to question the growing tensions I felt, I realized I had to question
my own identity as a daycare teacher. I was looking at Sean as a person with years of experience
in childcare instead of imagining how it must be for Sean to find himself the primary teacher in a
situation he was unprepared for.

I saw Sean get more upset as children wandered around and failed to stay in line against the
wall that was the designated meeting point for the Out of School Care class. “OSC! Up against
the wall!” While directly looking at Dan, Sean says, “Dan! UP AGAINST THE WALL!” (Field
Notes, June 10, 2015).

I flashback to experiences of watching people being arrested. I feel a moment of great tension
as I realize the contexts in which I have heard these words said and the moments of unease
that they bring to mind. The rebel in me wants to have all the children run away from “The
Wall” as fast as they can just because they were told that was where they needed to be. I knew
that tone, the one Sean had instinctively used to demand attention. I heard it as a child when
adults were trying to bring my attention to behavior they did not want to see. When I first
became a teacher, I also used that tone to do the same thing, yet, I had not thought about the
way it felt as a child when adults used that tone with me. Sean’s voice calls again, “Ok, OSC.
Line up!” (Field Notes, June 10, 2015).

Though most children were in a line as they sat or stood with bodies touching the wall, the
meaning was clear. Now the order was that bodies should stop moving and all talking should
cease. A straighter line of partners was needed as children paired themselves or were paired by
the teachers. This made me realize I had to start viewing Sean differently. Up until that moment,
I had felt a divide between Sean and me. Now, I was confronted by the possibility that we were, or
had been at one point, similar. This realization forced me to reexamine every experience I’d had
alongside Sean. At the time, I had not been able to name my feelings, though now I recognized the
shift in how I was viewing Sean and myself made me feel vulnerable.

Emma, Tessa and the children

I realize that these last two weeks I have come into the school thinking: “I am not good enough
for this research”. With Tessa … I feel I am building a relationship in diverse ways, but I
cannot understand what is going on with the children, or what is going on with me in relation
to them. I thought that in order to build a relationship with them … we needed to share a
playful time. However, I am also experiencing the need to be seen, really seen by them. Not
only as a random adult who comes to the classroom, plays, or shares a time with them on
Mondays and Wednesdays … I have felt myself invisible during this first month, even with the
families who came to pick up them (Field notes, October, 2016).
This feeling of being invisible to children and their families required self-reflection, and helped me be aware and imagine how they would be living that first month at school. It took me a while to see that they were not causing me to be invisible. They were, just as I was, trying to discover the schooling world and themselves in that new atmosphere. Children played, connected and disconnected, built patterns, traced the first letter of their names, danced in hallways, or just were in an in-between world they created for themselves where they could playfully travel (Lugones, 1987) and feel safe. The notion of that “in-between world” was significant for me as a researcher. Tessa described it as, “You will think they are not here, in the classroom. They are in another world, or they seem they are invisible … but they are not. They are in the classroom using their imagination”. Her words stayed with me until December. At that time, I was wondering had also created my own “in-between world”, my own “in-and-out connection”? I remember separating myself from the children because I was afraid of telling them how vulnerable I felt as a researcher and as a woman in her thirties trying to figure out this new school reality. As a researcher I was “supposed to know” what/how it looks to be in the midst of an educational context.

The principal taught me to sign up as a “visitor” every day I entered the school. All the social codes seemed different. I remember the day the Kindergarten teacher introduced me to the families and children: “She is Miss Emma, a researcher who works at the university and is from Spain…”.

It is fun to repeat to myself I am “Miss Emma” but it has taken me a while to understand that “Miss Emma” is really me. In Spain, we call our teachers by their name, so for more than eight years, all my former students have called me “Emma”. I feel my identity now lives beyond a new name (Field notes, December 2016).

I started to inhabit the place: recognizing myself as Miss Emma and accepting the children’s invitation to be part of free time games. When I was not a patient with headache, I played the customer in their professional restaurant. It seemed important for them to have me there. Perhaps, it was a way to say: “we have someone to cook for…” They created rules: “Now you need to give me this”, “You are going to love this tomato with two bananas”, “You have pain in your arm, right? I see…” (Field notes, October 2016).

In reading time, children often asked me: “Why do you speak different?”, “Can you say this word again, please?”. At the beginning, I felt uncomfortable. I felt vulnerable. Michael, a Korean little boy who could not speak English at all, felt similar vulnerability. He would come to me repeating words aloud and, when another child kindly corrected the way I pronounced something, Michael always whispered: “It is okay teacher. I know”. We felt vulnerable, but also united. We inhabited the classroom as we made ourselves both seen and yet vulnerable.

Through the weeks, as they became more familiar with the environment, I inhabited the classroom in a different way accepting vulnerability and the shifts experienced in my identity as a researcher. I also changed the way I signed in at school, from “visitor” to “researcher”. This was my way to feel part of the school community.

Discussion

Throughout our independent research projects, we shared our writing and questioned together. This provided opportunity to both solicit and provide feedback and promoted reflective learning. It supported us in developing our relationship encouraging us to reflect on our research practice.

For both of us, relationships have been at the forefront of our research. We felt relationships built through our research were fundamental to the inquiry process and to who we were as researchers in relationship. As we shared stories of our experiences, read them, and discussed them, we noticed three themes appeared simultaneously and were interwoven. The first one relates to movement, as we began to view our participants differently. The second highlights how we were aware of shifts that being in relation created in our research and personal identities. Through this awareness we became consciousness of vulnerability running throughout our narratives. We
experienced the three themes simultaneously and saw in our stories that, so in our stories we lived them as we were being and becoming researchers in relation to our participants.

Movement

As we came alongside our participants, we each experienced movement, or a turn that caused us to question how we viewed our participants and who we were in relation to them. Lugones (1987) describes this as ‘world-traveling’. For Eliza, as she interacted with Sean, she became aware of a growing tension when watching Sean interact with the children in the OSC. Yet there was an innate desire within her to understand Sean, to see past her own tensions and view him differently. As time went on and Eliza continually questioned her views of Sean, she was able to make a turn and view Sean from his world, from his experiences and histories. This allowed her to move from seeing Sean solely through Eliza’s experiences and expectations of what an OSC teacher should be and view Sean as one who was becoming.

Emma began her experience alongside Tessa preoccupied by the worry that she was ill-suited for the work. As Emma questioned what experiences she needed to build the kind of relationships she envisioned for her research, she questioned her feeling of invisibility, a feeling she was aware of through observing and living alongside the children. As she worked to become visible to them, she experienced a significant movement, turning from a primary consideration of herself, to a primary consideration of others. She was able to view herself in relation with the teacher and children in the classroom and the stories carried into the classroom atmosphere. This movement reminded her that children were travelling from their home-worlds into the classroom-world, as she was travelling from different school and research experiences into this educational space.

Identity shifting as researchers

As we experienced movement allowing us to view our participants differently, we questioned our own identities as teachers and researchers as we came alongside the children and teachers in our research. For Eliza, the tensions she felt alongside Sean caused her to question her own assumptions about who she had been as a teacher in an OSC classroom. As Eliza watched Sean try to organize children into a line as they left school, the tensions Eliza felt caused her to question the teacher she had been in the past and who she was in that moment. She was not a teacher in that OSC or in any position to assume a role to correct Sean. There had been a separation, with Eliza as researcher and Sean as participant. As Eliza was confronted with the realization that she had acted in similar ways, she experienced a shift within her relationship with Sean. Eliza’s identity as a researcher disconnected from her participant shifted as she began to view Sean as a fellow teacher who had similar experiences as a teacher learning how to be in relation to children in an OSC classroom.

Through the research process, Emma experienced a significant identity shift when Tessa introduced her to the children and families as “Miss Emma”. This was the first time she was called “Miss” and she did not know what it meant. As time passed, the children offered her a clear idea of what emotions and experiences were attached to that “new” name. Knowing more about who she was and who she wanted to become, not only as researcher but also in the multiplicity of her shifting identity, allowed her to think about the importance of not assuming she knew what it meant to be a researcher. She also noticed being in relation with them shifted her identity; her “new” ways of living and being alongside them also shifted something in the educational landscape. The ways that she played with the children and the stories she shared with them from Spain allowed her to think about how this particular research experience had educative power to shift her whole identity.

Vulnerability in relation to participants

As our identities as researchers shifted and we were able to view our participants differently, Eliza and Emma experienced vulnerability. As Eliza realized that the tensions she felt from Sean’s actions were actions that she had made in the past, she felt vulnerable. Her memory of herself, as someone who would never respond to children as Sean had, was challenged. As she continued to
come alongside Sean, building her relationship with him, she felt vulnerable as she realized that in order to continue being in relation with Sean authentically, Eliza needed to be open with herself and Sean and the children about who she had been as a teacher and who she was in relation with them.

Emma experienced vulnerability differently. As she tried to understand the context in which she was researching, she was confronted with differences in her language, living them as language barriers that her participants mentioned several times. She did not know what to say in response to their questions, but those wonders helped her to understand what they meant for her relationships. At the same time, she encountered the growing realization that there was not a “traditional title” for her presence in the classroom: she was not a teacher, a parent, a teacher’s aide, or any other title that she was familiar with on the educational landscape. As she attempted to figure out her own place in the classroom, to find a name that resonated, she felt uncomfortable in this uncertainty.

Though we were not always conscious of vulnerabilities we felt alongside our participants, it became clear that each of us had experienced vulnerability throughout the research process. These vulnerabilities were part of shifts in our identities shifted that influenced the movement we experienced in building relationships with our participants.

Conclusions

We believe this chapter offers insight into relationships within research, particularly early career researchers questioning beliefs, practices, and expertise. The findings of this study emerged from our challenging previously held assumptions (Brookfield, 1995) and inquiring into relationships we built with participants. As we engaged in and dialogue together, critically analyzing our experiences, stories and data, we realized the significance of seeing beyond our initial view of our teacher participants. This helped us to act with respect in the relationship and disrupted assumptions about ourselves in relation. In creating and maintaining relationships, we saw the necessity to travel to their worlds (Lugones, 1987).

Wondering together and critically looking at each other’s stories and experiences, caused our relationship to change as well. When we began, our offices at the university were side by side—allowing us to share our thoughts and feelings easily, building on our newly formed friendship. Critically inquiring into our relationships with participants, we our relationship changed, transitioning from casual into an academic relationship. We questioned each other and challenged assumptions and our identities shifted. Sharing experiences together, we became vulnerable. We became awake to our vulnerability in relation to our participants. Our data revealed, we had to embrace these feelings and focus on the other, rather than the self, in the relationship. Experiences as researchers in multiple settings caused us to view our relationships, and our identities, differently and in relation.

Finally, we uncovered how relationships we created alongside our participants positioned us causing us to revisit our identities as researchers, teachers and scholars. Since relationships are fundamental to our research methodologies, we need to attend carefully to them. They are complex, multilayered, and sometimes tensioned-filled. Our knowledge about developing, initiating, and sustaining relationships contributes to how we as researchers interact with participants. Deepening relationships through elements of trust and respect enabled us to deepen understandings within our studies. We experienced how tensions (i.e. institutional, interpersonal, self-perception and identity) arise within research and can support or disrupt relationships. As we take up new projects using our understandings of the evolution of research relationships, lead us to develop stronger relationships, and be better researchers.
Reference list


Building questioning as a relational practice through self-study

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We (the authors) met in 2013 and embarked on self-study to improve the relational nature of our practices in mathematics methods. In 2016, we turned to collaborative self-study on mathematics teacher educator (MTE) questioning that emerged from our prior work on MTE feedback. In an earlier interaction separate from this collaboration, Signe was challenged to recognize that she asked questions positioning teacher-learners to hypothesize how other teachers and students were thinking, rather than positioning teacher-learners to draw on their own thinking. Signe brought this quandary to the group where Susan, driven by her curiosity of others’ thinking, and Alyson, driven by her love of conversations with teacher-learners, joined Signe in the goal of improving their questioning through self-study. We wondered: What characteristics of relational practice inform questions in mathematics methods courses?

This paper summarizes views of relational practice and questioning as a practice, describes the methodology we used to study our questioning practice, and discusses the outcomes related to examining and improving MTE questioning.

**Background literature**

Here, we define questioning practice, describe the importance of relationships in teaching and learning that support characteristics of relational teacher education, and describe how using self-study to examine our questioning practice allows for exploring questioning practice as part of relational practice.

**Questioning as a practice**

We define practice as “engaging with others in ways that lead to the accomplishment of goals through the use of the knowledge, theories, and understandings” (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p. 16). For us, questioning as a relational practice is a goal directed activity informed by knowledge,
theories, and understanding. We seek to build “knowledge from practice” (p. 17) as a way of “knowing to” (p. 18) question as a practice. In inquiry, we are driven to become aware of what informs our questions and ways we use questioning to build our relationships with teacher-learners.

Relationships and relational teacher education

Relationships have been identified as critical in teaching and learning (Grossman et al., 2009; Russell & Loughran, 2007). Exploration of relationships in self-study has revealed the complexity of coming to know and be known by teacher-learners (Kitchen, 2009). The significance of relationships in teaching and learning gave rise to descriptions of relational practice. Grossman et al. (2009), drawing from the work of Fletcher (1998), described relational practice in which relationship is crucial to success in teaching and learning. This description highlighted the utility of relationships for teacher-learners, but not ways in which teacher educators’ practices could be characterized as relational. Kitchen’s (2005a, 2005b) description of relational teacher education as teacher educators “knowing in relationship” (2005a, p. 18) illuminated how a relational practice is constructed through knowing: knowing oneself and knowing teacher-learners. Like Fletcher (1998), Kitchen drew from notions of empathy and vulnerability to describe relational practice and identified seven defining characteristics: understanding one’s own personal practical knowledge, improving one’s practice in teacher education, understanding the landscape of teacher education, respecting and empathizing with preservice teachers, conveying respect and empathy, helping preservice teachers face problems, and receptivity to growing in relationship. Kitchen’s discussion of relational teacher education drew from evidence of his teaching over years of practice. We hypothesize that particular practices, such as questioning, can be viewed as components of a teacher educator’s relational practice. Looking through the lens of relational teacher education at questions an MTE poses has the potential to unearth factors that influence the construction and posing of questions to teacher-learners. We used Kitchen’s relational teacher education as a lens to explore our questioning as a relational practice in mathematics methods courses.

Self-study of questioning practice

Exploring MTE questioning with self-study methodology creates space for understanding questioning as practice informed by philosophy (Berci & Griffith, 2005; Gadamer, 1975/2004) and empirical research (Dillon, 1982) with the goal of improving questioning practice. Our study of questioning, like that of Olsher and Kantor (2012), focuses on question-asking and characterizing our questioning practices. To describe a questioning practice, we draw from Dillon’s (1981, 1990) definition of questions as “interrogative utterances” which are “followed by answers” (Dillon, 1981, p. 51). Dillon (1990) described two sources of assumptions: assumptions in the logic of the question (question-sentences) called presuppositions, and assumptions about the context in which the question is asked (question-situations) called presumptions. Studying our assumptions afforded insight on characteristics of our questioning practices.

Questioning can be viewed as a strand of relational practice, since questions communicate the teacher educator’s interests and aims to teacher-learners. Each strand of one’s practice contributes to the development of a relational practice, but the question could be raised as to whether a single strand can be seen as relational. We suggest that one strand of practice can be viewed through a relational teacher education (Kitchen, 2005a) lens to gain insight into ways understandings of self and others are drawn upon in questioning. It is from this perspective that we can label questioning practice as relational.

Aims

The following research questions guided our inquiry:

- What are characteristics of our questioning practice?
- How is our questioning practice relational?
To explore relational characteristics of our questions in mathematics methods courses, we viewed them through Kitchen’s lens of relational teacher education (2005a, 2005b, 2016) that Kitchen described as “a reciprocal approach to enabling teacher growth that builds from the realization that we know in relationship to others” (p. 17, 2005a). This lens afforded viewing our questions as drawing from our personal histories, experiences as MTEs, and understandings of the teacher-learners’ histories and experiences.

**Methods**

Our view of self-study methodology is derived from two characteristics identified by LaBoskey (2007), interactive and improvement aimed. For us, engaging in self-study involved openness, collaboration, and reframing (Samaras & Freese, 2009). Our question-asking practices were opened to each other for scrutiny. This openness afforded multiple perspectives on experiences of questioning resulting in insights about our questioning practice. Collaborative conversations created insights and revealed areas for exploration. Reframing our initial questions from insights informed our ongoing questioning practice and encouraged considering alternative ways to pose questions based on these insights. These conversations unearthed tensions that informed our questioning practice, revealing ways that relationships were used to inform our practice.

Data collection and analysis occurred in three phases. First, we visited each other and observed at least one class meeting. During the observation, field notes were taken and discussed and then amended in light of discussions. These notes were provided for the teacher. Observing each other allowed us to gain perspective on each other’s teaching and contexts. We became oriented toward each other’s work and had insights about what factors might influence the questions each of us posed. For example, Signe and Susan teach methods with elementary teacher-learners and Alyson teaches methods with secondary teacher-learners. Each of us also audio-recorded at least one class session. We then each identified questions posed to teacher-learners during at least one methods class session. What counted as a question was informed by our view of teacher-learners’ engagement. When teacher-learners were exploring, whether prompted by a question or a directive, we considered the activity a question. Examples of questions from each author’s work illustrate differences in the content and approach (See Table 1).

Analysis of our questioning occurred in three phases. First, we identified questions, presuppositions, presumptions, purpose, and roles for teacher-learners associated with questions from one class session and created a table (see Table 1). *Presuppositions* are assumptions conveyed in the logic of the sentence. *Presumptions* are beliefs conveyed in the question-situations (Dillon, 1990). *Purposes* refer to the reasons the MTE posed the question. *Roles* describe the ways in which teacher-learners were positioned in responding to the question. Summarizing our findings, we described insights and remaining dilemmas about our questions, presuppositions, presumptions, purpose, and roles. We read the summaries in preparation for our discussions of findings in four recorded online conversations (August 10 & 29 and September, 5 & 19, 2017).

**Table 1. Examples of Questions**

**Alyson**: The hat you are going to put on is that of the students that wrote the work. And you are going to look at the feedback that the other group wrote. And you are going to decide as the student who wrote that, that is the feedback that you got, what would you do next? (9/13/2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presuppositions:</th>
<th>Presumptions:</th>
<th>Purpose:</th>
<th>Role:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is a next step to which mathematics-learners can reply.</td>
<td>PTs can pretend to be someone else and get into another person’s thinking.</td>
<td>To mimic the act of receiving feedback with a chance to critically examine it after.</td>
<td>Mathematics-learner receiving feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Alyson: What I want you looking at now is what was the feedback and how did the math learner respond to it? Use your observations of those pairs to think about – do we have a complete list of what makes effective feedback? Are there some things you would suggest that we should not do? Are there some things you would suggest that we absolutely should do in responding? Can we use the feedback and student responses to that feedback to make some observations about, adding to or taking off of our list about feedback? (1 minute pause.) Are there some finer points that we need to add to this list about things we should consider when we are writing feedback to the students in the letter writing exchange? (9/13/2016)

Susan: So the text on this page [reads text on a page of a counting book]. So what I want you to do is, if this were the question and you were reading this with a group of kids, I want to know what level of cognitive demand, based on the criteria for these levels of cognitive demand, where do you think this would fall? Is it a lower cognitive demand like memorization, or is it a procedure without a connection or is it more of a higher cognitive demand where it might be something related to a procedure with a connection or something that’s more like doing mathematics, ... [elaborates by continuing to rephrase the questions] ... so think about that, and then of course I want you to think about how to justify your claim, there may be more than one answer here, ok, so, um I’ll give you two or three minutes to work with your group or your partner, and see what you think. (9/12/16)

Signe: What is a confusion you have seen out in the field? (3/6/17)

Chapter 48: Building Questioning as a Relational Practice through Self-Study
Our collaborative conversations served as a second phase of analysis during which we focused on understanding our questions as relational (Kitchen, 2005a). During conversations we identified areas of excitement and concern as well as understandings of commonalities and differences in presuppositions, presumptions, purposes, and roles for teacher-learners, which are shared as outcomes in the following section. Our discussions focused on ways questioning was influenced by our view of our histories as learners and mathematics teacher educators. For example, our love of mathematics and interest in discussing mathematical thinking with teacher-learners surfaced in many discussions. We focused on ways our questions were influenced by the teacher-learners and what we understood about these learners. We pressed each other to explore how teacher-learners' problems of practice were taken up or how empathy was conveyed (Kitchen, 2005b) in our questions. For example, Signe consistently wondered if the questions she posed situated the teacher-learners to respond from their own experiences rather than hypothesizing about experiences of other teachers or mathematics-learners.

Discussions resulted in what we term structural changes toward improvement of our questioning practices. These changes were aimed at improving the ways in which we enacted questioning in the classroom but did not necessarily attend to teacher-learners' experiences and other relational elements. Making these structural changes unearthed deeper tensions around the experiences of teacher-learners in our classes and allowed us the space for inquiry into questioning as a relational practice. These tensions are reported as Assertions for Action (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009).

The third phase of analysis included the construction of narratives focused on explaining the structural changes we made and describing lingering questions. We read and discussed these narratives, building perspectives on questioning as a relational practice. These discussions were recorded for our review (December 12 & 19, 2017). From these discussions, we constructed ways of talking about the tensions that still remained as we tried to make sense of our questioning as relational.

Outcomes

In our collaborative self-study, emerging understandings of characteristics of relational teacher education (Kitchen, 2016) in our questioning practice came in waves. The outcomes represent three waves: characterization of our questions, structural changes suggested by the characterization, and greater tensions revealed. The first wave, drawn from characterizing our questions according to Dillon (1990), illuminates understanding self and other. Despite significant differences in our contexts, we identified commonalities across our presuppositions, presumptions, purposes, and roles. Even though we work in different contexts, we could describe common factors that informed our questions. We could see the different ways these factors played out as we developed and posed our questions.

Presuppositions and purposes

Question-sentences and purposes revealed reference to knowledge we consciously held and wanted to bring to teacher-learners’ attention. For example, Susan believed that a teacher’s awareness of cognitive demand associated with questioning around mathematics tasks was important. The logic of her questions included the assumption that analyzing the demand of tasks is an essential part of planning lessons. For example: “I want to know what level of cognitive demand, based on the criteria for these levels of cognitive demand, where do you think this would fall?” (September 12, 2016). As this example suggests, our questions contained an expectation that teacher-learners should take on views of teaching and learning that we had developed from our experiences as mathematics-learners, teacher-learners, and MTEs.

Presumptions and roles

Question-situations and roles involved intent, contexts, and teacher-learners. We consistently asked questions with the intent of learning what teacher-learners knew. Signe asked about
confusions teacher-learners noticed in their work with children. “What is a confusion you have seen out in the field?” (March 6, 2017). Her intent was to gain insight into teacher-learners’ experiences. We collected teacher-learners’ experiences with an earnest desire to understand their insecurities and problems of practice (Kitchen, 2005b), yet our planned sequence of questions unfolded without drawing from the issues teacher-learners raised. We wondered if we built from teacher-learners’ responses. We had empathy and respect for teacher-learners but struggled to convey it or to help teacher-learners face the problems they described. Instead our questions focused on moving toward goals and work products planned before we knew the teacher-learners.

Our questions positioned teacher-learners to take on a variety of roles during a single lesson. Alyson noticed that her questions positioned teacher-learners in many different roles during one class meeting such as reflective practitioner, researcher, teacher, and mathematics-learner. She thought of Whose Line is It Anyway?, a television show where actors change roles after a minute or two, generating chaos and comic situations. She felt she expected too much of teacher-learners and wondered what messages about teaching as reflective practice teacher-learners might gain through shifting roles so quickly and frequently.

**Assertions for action and understanding**

The second wave of understandings that emerged drew from structural changes to our questioning practices. We improved our practice by attending to observations that concerned us from analysis of our questions. Susan worked to constrain her posing of questions to shorter statements instead of repeating or saying variations of the same prompt multiple times. This afforded more time for teacher-learners to discuss and respond. Alyson also worked to shorten her question statements, providing more clarity to the questions asked, and reducing the number of roles in which she asked teacher-learners to engage. She accomplished this by planning her lessons in a new structure that allowed her to focus both the questions asked and activities planned for each class. Signe shifted words to ensure that teacher-learners would feel they could answer from their own experiences rather than by imagining the experience of others and then trying to answer from that perspective.

The third wave of understanding is more difficult. Once the structural changes were enacted in each of our classes new challenges and tensions emerged that could not easily be fixed. We continued to discuss these challenges, and next share insights from each of us.

**Susan**

Susan attended to her long introduction to questions by consciously posing planned questions. This structural change unearthed a significant tension. Reducing the introduction to questions freed up time for teacher-learners’ interests and concerns. Their responses in whole class discussion surfaced their concerns and dilemmas or insecurities with teaching mathematics related to their experiences in their field classrooms. These interests and concerns turned the discussion in directions Susan had not anticipated, making it difficult to cover planned content. Susan wondered if she was really listening to the teacher-learners. Was she participating mindfully and thoughtfully in discussions with teacher-learners?

Susan felt tension between providing time and space for teacher-learners to articulate their experiences, concerns, and insecurities about teaching mathematics and being able to acknowledge and build on their ideas, while also trying to keep on track with covering course content. Susan felt most comfortable when discussions remained anchored around mathematics content, and less so when class discussions drifted into more general issues of pedagogical moves. Yet, teaching the teaching of mathematics requires facility with blending mathematics content and teaching practices. What is an appropriate balance and blend of content and methods that provides time and space for teacher-learners to connect through sharing and raising their interests, concerns, dilemmas, and insecurities?
Alyson

Alyson began using a new planning method which provided for more concise questioning and positioned teacher-learners consistently either as teachers or learners of teaching pedagogy but left Alyson wondering if she was truly conveying empathy through those questions and positionings. Through the roles employed, Alyson was seeing her students thinking more clearly and better understanding their struggles but was left with questions surrounding the relational characteristic of conveying empathy. Some students responded with favorable comments about Alyson’s teaching during the semester and seemed to connect with Alyson, spouting excitement about the teaching profession because of it. Yet others disconnected at times and considered if a teaching career was the best choice for them. Have Alyson’s changes allowed her to convey empathy and support to all students?

Signe

Signe wondered if she was actually curious about learning about teaching. Raising this issue unearthed tensions for Signe’s receptivity to growing in relationship (Kitchen, 2005b). Signe felt she wanted to learn from teacher-learners, but perhaps her curiosity was about learners’ and teacher-learners’ mathematics, rather than pedagogy and learners. Wondering about her curiosity about teaching was difficult to admit and even felt alienating from colleagues. Signe loved thinking about children’s mathematics and teachers’ insights about and use of this mathematics. As she tried to enact a questioning practice aligned with Dillon’s (1981) suggestion that questions should be asked only when the teacher is actually curious about learner’s thinking, she faced her limits. Teacher-learners’ views of the work of teaching seemed less informed by mathematics of learners and more by concern for the whole child. How could she build her interest in general pedagogy and holistic views of learners?

Conclusions

Our initial inquiry helped us develop descriptions of our questions. This resulted in adjustments to our questioning approaches. We first focused on our questions, rather than looking beneath questions to explore how relationships were formed through our questioning. In our second wave of inquiry, we discussed what we understood about our questioning practice as we looked at our findings through the lens of relational teacher education (Kitchen, 2005a). From this vantage point we identified ways the structure of our questions and questioning could become barriers to teacher-learners. Asking a single question and waiting for teacher-learners to respond, asking teacher-learners to take on fewer roles in a single class meeting, and asking teacher-learners questions their experiences could help them answer were changes informed by our exploration of questioning as a relational practice. These changes allowed for greater clarity in our questioning practices, but unearthed additional puzzlements.

The final wave of inquiry was more troublesome; as we celebrated our structural changes we continued to wonder about tensions our relational practice raised. Although these tensions and questions cannot be easily resolved, they are useful to begin to further understand the complexity of factors that inform our questioning practice. Embracing this complexity rather than trying to fix it, allows us to be excited by the puzzle of our practice. Unearthing the triggers of time, empathy and curiosity affords us with ways we know through questioning and in relation to teacher-learners.
Chapter 48: Building Questioning as a Relational Practice through Self-Study

References


As a secondary science teacher and, more recently, a science teacher educator, I (first author) often found it difficult to articulate and discuss the reasons for my actions and teaching decisions with my students of teaching. I searched for ways of coming to better understand the complexity of decision making processes and how to work effectively within them to benefit my students’ learning. As I have learnt to purposefully inquire into my practice I have become increasingly aware that my role as a teacher of teachers requires me to manage dilemmas. Teaching then involves being a ‘dilemma manager’ (Lampert, 1985); an important issue in conceptualizing and framing teaching and learning about teaching.

Dilemmas usually signal feelings of uncertainty, perplexity, doubt or confusion. When acted on, it can invite the process of problem setting (Dewey, 1938), reflection and inquiry, leading to reframing through which a ‘conversation’ with the problem occurs (Schön, 1983).

Different frames for problem recognition, such as dilemmas (Cabaroglu & Tillema, 2011; Tillema & Kremer-Hayon, 2005), tensions (Berry, 2008) and pedagogical discontentment (Southerland, Sowell, Blanchard, & Granger, 2010) capture the essence of teaching as being problematic. A common theme across these theoretical frames is the value placed on uncertainty as a way of recognising a misalignment between intentions and actions.

In my experience of becoming a teacher educator, I initially drew on pedagogical discontent as a framework for recognizing moments of unease. However, not all moments of interruption engender feelings of negativity – which discontent tends to suggest. Unrest also encompasses a desire for action associated with positive emotions; a crucial perspective on learning to teach captured through the construct of Pedagogical Equilibrium (PE).

PE (Mansfield, 2016) draws on the theoretical lenses of cognitive equilibrium (Piaget, 1959), cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) and pedagogical discontent (Southerland et al., 2010) and...
Chapter 49: Framing learning through self-study: The search for pedagogical equilibrium

offers an opportunity to frame and articulate the complexities of teaching – and in this study, how that plays out in teaching about teaching. PE is noticeable when a dilemma arises and unsettles routine knowledge - challenging existing equilibrium. In responding, learning abounds and as this study illustrates, sheds light on the complexity of teaching and offers opportunities to explore teaching and learning about teaching beyond the technical-rational (Schön, 1983).

Humans seek to make sense of new experiences through assimilation or accommodation (i.e., cognitive equilibrium) (Piaget, 1959). However, the human tendency is to rush through or avoid such situations as feelings of uncertainty and ‘not knowing’ tend to be uncomfortable (Dewey, 1930). The process of cognitive equilibrium is initiated through disequilibrium as a consequence of a lack of a schema to make sense of something new, hence the process of equilibration is initiated; in teaching, that same process is recognizable through PE.

In my shift from teacher to teacher educator I quickly became aware of how the problematic nature of teaching was raised to another level in teaching teaching. The journey from high school science teacher to science teacher educator has not been straightforward and PE has been a frame for understanding the development of my practice by using moments of uncertainty, perplexity and surprise as opportunities for learning. In essence, I have come to see how my learning about teaching has been an organised search for better states of equilibrium. The lens of PE therefore offered a way of framing the self-study reported in this paper because it created an invitation for learning about my teacher education practices.

Aim

This research reports on the development and application of the construct, Pedagogical Equilibrium (PE), as a way of framing and articulating my professional knowledge of practice as a teacher educator. The question that underpins this research is, ‘How has the use of PE as a way of confronting and processing my experiences of being a living contradiction supported my development as a beginning science teacher educator?’

Method

This paper presents a self-study project conducted during my second year as a teacher educator. The research was situated across two biology method units, with two classes in each unit consisting of approximately 58 students in total.

The research involved the collection of multiple data sets including:

- Personal Journaling before and after teaching at the start and conclusion of teaching semesters (PJ)
- Video and Audio Recordings of tutorial sessions (VR/AR)
- Student Reflections (post-tutorial) conducted by the RA in my absence (SR)
- Post tutorial Reflective Discussion between myself and critical friend/research assistant designed to probe taken for granted assumptions based largely on students’ responses during the post-tutorial reflections (RD).

All data were transcribed and a thematically analysed. Data sets were coded using the identifiers of semester 1 (e.g., S1 or S2), week number (i.e., week into the semester, W1, W2) and data source (e.g., PJ – personal journaling; SR – student reflections).

Results

As a beginning teacher educator one of the main challenges to equilibrium was what Whitehead (1989) described as being a ‘living contradiction’. I quickly came to see that modelling ‘good teaching practice’ was harder to enact than I had initially assumed. It played out in three distinct ways. The first was through developing a clear Recognition of moments where I noticed a
misalignment between my intentions and actions for teaching – either identified by myself (during self-reflection) or induced by discussion with my RA during our conversations/workshops. This led to problem setting and subsequent Actions that were initiated in an attempt to address the situation followed by Testing of the action in terms of perceived impact on student learning and engagement.

Recognition: Confronting ‘telling’ as teaching

One of my personal philosophical underpinnings of teaching was to model good educational practice. My journal data (PJ) before the teaching semester commenced highlighted my desire to model what I considered to be ‘good practice’, which included knowing where the students were at and using that as a way of planning teaching and learning experiences.

Modelling good practice is important to me – that I am showing my pedagogical reasoning so that I am demonstrating the complexity of the decision making process. They might then see the ‘back end’ of teaching as well as the ‘front end’. I want them to appreciate teaching as more than just giving an activity – that it is fluid and depends on the audience ... It [shows] teaching is problematic, as you don’t necessarily know what to expect ... (S1, W1, PJ)

Often, my rationale for workshop design highlighted the tensions experienced when feeling conscious of not wanting to act in certain ways, but that also meant feeling uncertain about how to work differently. My uncertainty was related to how to enact theory and create conditions for engagement in learning.

... I end up telling as a way of helping, but it’s not productive. I feel that my critical friend might be telling me what is possible or what I might do, but that again is telling and not teaching. This is more about my learning. How can I work this out for myself? What stimuli do I need to receive or how does it need to be structured to help me move along and to learn? Ideas are fine, but what I do and the way I do it is not the same as other people. I have to learn for myself and not necessarily be told. How to create those conditions for them [PST’s] where they can also learn without being told? (S1, W3, PJ)

So I still don’t know how to manage this. Do I go, “here are alternative conceptions, this is what they are, here’s a summary” or do I go, “Here’s an article, read it and you give me a summary and tell me what alternative conceptions are.” What if they don’t read it, or understand it? I want to do it that way because I know that way’s more meaningful but I only have 2 hours, so I’m torn between, I’m going to have to tell you what this ‘alternative conception’ theory is and then we’ll go from there’, but then I’m torn because I’m telling. (S1, W1, RD)

I don’t like the way I feel after these tutorials. So much increased emphasis on what works and not works places pressure on me to think about and criticise my actions to the nth degree. It’s annoying and frustrating. I can live with some degree of uncertainty, but this feels … like I am second guessing all of my actions to the point where I don’t know what is the right course of action now. Am I a walking contradiction? Am I practicing what I preach? Am I not just doing to them what I say not to do – teach without knowing what the student needs? (S1, W10, RD)

With my pedagogical equilibrium unsettled, I found it difficult to justify my approach to teaching teaching. I was beginning to see that I felt as though I was preparing them for teaching when they were comfortable with teaching (i.e., more experienced) and not caught up in the early experiences of trying to manage their new role. I noticed a shift in my thinking. I was challenged by where they were in terms of their own needs and concerns and my sense of where I wanted them to be – and therefore ready to respond to – and the two were not necessarily congruent.
Chapter 49: Framing learning through self-study: The search for pedagogical equilibrium

John: You don’t have to blurt it all out and transfer it to them and I think if you can just ... step back from it a little bit and have a little bit more confidence in your knowledge and go with your gut instincts ... I think sometimes you force it, like 'I've got to get them to do this and it's all on me', on yourself. Hand it over to them and give ownership to them ... in your head and in the activities, you’ve got the dissonance, but they don’t. They just want you just to transfer your knowledge and your identity to them. ‘Just tell us what we need to know’. In both workshops yesterday you mentioned at different stages about the relationship between theory and practice for them, but you also talked about their students and how important the context of teaching is for them. You said how they have to make it real for the year 9’s and make it something that they can relate to as well. But then to be able to do that – they just can’t transfer it into their own head and apply it to themselves ... so interesting and so frustrating that they do not see that as important. Hello, that’s what she’s talking about! It’s applying [that lens] to me. It [what you are saying to them] applies to me. That’s why you’re creating these situations for them but they don’t seem to understand it themselves. It’s just crossing that bridge ...

Jennifer: I don’t necessarily think this teacher education model works well like this because we’re telling them stuff that they’re not ready for, so we’re automatically teaching in a way that contradicts what we’re teaching. We talk about, ‘you’ve got to know where your students are at’. Well, I can’t just teach about classroom management because that only prepares them for the first two years. (S2, W10, RD)

Deliberately seeking to understand the cause of uncertainty enables framing and setting of a problem, thus making it explicit. However, in becoming sensitised to the problem, more of the associated complexities of the problem become apparent. Similarly, realisation about the nature of the problem can be stressful as more complexities of the problem emerge, leading to further uncertainty. This can lead to feelings of helplessness, which can lead to avoidance. Therefore, framing the problem with the help of a critical friend, and moving on to trialling particular modes of action are valuable in maintaining perspective and assisting in persevering and making progress.

Action: Problem setting as a way of moving forward

In framing and therefore thinking more deeply about the root cause of my challenge to equilibrium (i.e. feeling like a living contradiction) I was able to ‘set’ the problem. In setting the problem I was then able to start to conceptualise action plans where I could start to find ways of addressing the sense of unrest. Framing action plans on a weekly basis was more manageable physically and mentally, as the action could then be placed in the context of individual workshop experiences. This also provided opportunities to test out individual actions which invited reflection and unpacking with my critical friend afterwards.

This week it is going to be more about them and less of me. If they have not engaged it will have to hurt, as that was what was required. They cannot work well in this first section without having done the pre-reading materials. How will I cope when they stress and put up blockers about not being able to engage because they have not done the pre-thinking? (S2, W2, PJ)

Still lots of telling – I feel like I am rushing, but it seems like there is not enough time. I know that not everything I am telling them is important, nor is it landing for everyone. Experience is more meaningful than telling – but which experiences are best? (S2, W2, RD)

Planning to do things differently meant that post-teaching discussions with my critical friend called some of my actions into question and caused me to see that although I was trying to act in ways that I felt might address my pedagogical concerns, it did not mean that resolution was
immediately at hand. Sometimes actions exacerbated the existing sense of uncertainty.

Jennifer: It’s not about them learning the content, it’s them learning how to set up conditions to help their students learn about the content - still unsure how to do that. Because I’ve been very positivist in the past and my PhD caused me to, sort of, swing so far the other way, I wonder with my teaching whether I have swung too far the other way. It’s almost like it’s becoming too theoretical … should I be making some things more explicit rather than trying to get them to critically think and come up with the ideas themselves? Should I be saying, ‘right, here is a way in which you can assess student progress that is formative in nature’, and actually just tell them? Rather than getting them to see the value in it themselves and developing that thinking themselves? Am I making this too hard for myself?

John: No, I don’t think your bar is too high, but do you need more scaffolding? … Maybe you [could] provide the resources for them to get to the new level and the opportunity to reflect on something at that level and then introduce them to the next level, but you don’t have to actually give it to them. You don’t have to hold their hand. (S2, W10, RD)

With many possibilities for acting, it can be difficult to know which action will have the most desirable result. Therefore, action is experimental, where possible modes of action can only be trialled and then assessed. To learn from these experiences, reflection needs to be more than just focusing on the specifics of any given situation. It needs to also involve stepping back to draw inferences about the experience that can inform future practice more productively. As teaching is problematic, thinking about the nature of a situation and modes of actions means not seeking ‘one size fits all’ solutions. This kind of reflection on action is challenging and requires focused reflection which benefits greatly from collegial perspectives and associated non-judgement discussion.

Testing: Learning about students’ engagement in learning about practice

Recognizing a problem and developing ways of acting led to a questioning of the influence that my learning about practice had on my students’ learning about practice. Learning about different ways of structuring learning opportunities and the conditions I thought might be effective (in theory) and then coming to know (through experience) the impact was also challenging. Managing this challenge helped in some ways to address my need for pedagogical equilibrium because it led to deeper personal learning. In so doing, the learning I was experiencing about my teaching of teaching was more substantive than I might earlier have envisaged.

Jennifer: I was actually pretty happy with yesterday. Yeah I thought – I’m beginning to get a better appreciation for the less is more [principle]. I still struggle with it – so much I feel I have to get in at the start of a unit. But, yesterday I got a feel for that, the less is more idea. I walked away thinking yeah, I’ve got a better appreciation for that now because I think part of my tendency, and as a teacher has always been, I’ve got to make sure I’ve got enough to do and that it’s got to cover everything I need to cover, but it doesn’t necessarily have to be cramming everything in. So learning what can be put back on them to do and what is valuable for them to do with less help from me, but the implication for that is, the preparation for it has got to be good. So the thinking you put in beforehand and what you get them to do beforehand then becomes important but then that has time management issues because you think you have these great ideas but do you have enough time to get them to do it all. So for next year, I will get them to do more beforehand, but I now know what that will look like. (W2, S2, RD)

Jennifer: Because I wonder too whether they can draw out if I were to give them more group time and I think this is also that letting go and being confident in that they will engage –
letting go of that control then how do we bring it back together and unpack it as a group, or do we need to have so much back together and unpacking as a group? ... But then I don't know how to unpack as a group because if I unpack with one table like we did with that graph and the trends on the graph only that table benefitted from that. That is not shared with everybody else. So the idea of bringing it back as a group is to share the understandings with everybody ... (S2, W12, RD)

Testing of my action plans was valuable, especially as the learning was derived of not only my 'lived experience' but also that of my students. As I came to see how my testing led to different forms of student engagement it encouraged me to plan more confidently for the future – not necessarily because I had something 'new' to do, but rather because I had experienced new forms of shared learning experiences; the conditions for learning (Smith, 2017) I was attempting to create appeared to be having traction.

Learning about student engagement led me to the realisation that learning has to be a considered conversation between all members. When one person feels listened to and feels that their contribution directs the flow of the discussion, they are more likely to engage in learning through participation and therefore become more invested in the process. The challenge as a teacher educator is to allow that knowledge to shape my practice and the ongoing challenge is to continue testing ways of enabling this 'conversation' with my students of teaching.

Conclusion

As this study suggests, I have come to see that being comfortable with uncertainty offers a positive way of naming and framing my practice; being comfortable with uncertainty is somehow empowering. Moments that stimulate perplexity, curiosity, or surprise begin to demand attention in ways that go well beyond searching for the ‘best way’ of acting. As such, managing dilemmas offers a conduit to knowledge development through the experience of searching for a more steady pedagogical state, i.e., the search for pedagogical equilibrium results in learning.

As the data in this paper shows, PE created an interactive and recursive process of data collection and analysis of not just my practice, but also my understanding of my students’ experiences of that practice. As the data suggests, uncertainty triggers a search for a new state of equilibrium; something that is important in understanding both teaching and learning about teaching as a complex and sophisticated business.

Considering my learning about teaching teaching as a search for PE offered a lens for conceptualizing, describing and interrogating practices and beliefs of teaching teaching and confronting being a ‘living contradiction’. Interruptions offered the opportunity for learning about my teacher education practices by inviting ‘discussion’ with the situation through reframing (Schön, 1983). Therefore, becoming unsettled and experiencing uncertainty, surprised or not knowing how to act were valuable indicators (and perhaps necessary ingredients) of learning about teaching.

As I trust this study illustrates, teaching about teaching can be viewed as an invitation to develop ways of making the problematic explicit for students of teaching within the context of their shared learning about teaching experiences. If they learn to be comfortable with uncertainty in their own learning about practice it might help them to see beyond learning to teach as a search for ‘activities that work’ (Appleton, 2002) and genuinely begin to understand teaching as a complex and sophisticated business; that would be a very good outcome for teacher education.
References


Student and teacher: An interdisciplinary collaborative self-study intersecting physics and teacher education

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We, Samya and Valerie, began our professorships at a small liberal arts institution in Northeast United States in 2008. Samya is an associate professor and physics department chair. Valerie is an associate professor and education department chair. In 2016, we, along with colleagues from our institution’s math and chemistry departments, received funding from a nationally funded grant to support the development of teacher candidates committed to teaching math, physics, and/or chemistry in high need urban and rural secondary schools in the US. Valerie is the principal investigator (PI) and Samya is a co-principal investigator (Co-PI) on the grant.

One of the grant’s primary goals is to ensure recipients receive both content area and education coursework that “reflects current and innovative best practices in STEM pedagogy.” Courses within the math and science secondary education programs have been refined so they model collaborative, hands-on, problem-based pedagogies. The hope is that program graduates will develop the dispositions and skills necessary to adopt similar instructional practices as teachers. Samya’s introductory level course PHYS-105: Independent Thoughts and Explorations in Physics exemplifies the innovative pedagogical approaches we hope graduates emulate.

Samya created her course relying on her tacit understanding of principles of student engagement, motivation, and concept development. Her preparation for teaching higher education did not include formal instruction in theories of teaching and learning. So, while PHYS-105 has been recognized by her students and others as being highly engaging and effective, Samya herself is often unable to identify specific components of the course that are fundamental to its success. She sometimes struggles with articulating how and why they matter. Having the ability to more fully reflect on and systematically cross-examine her practice would be useful to Samya in further perfecting PHYS-105, as well as her other courses. Additionally, she would be more equipped to discuss her teaching practices with others (including students who may pursue teaching careers), so they might develop similar practices.

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Chapter 50: Student and teacher: An interdisciplinary collaborative self-study

Through the proposal process and the first year of the STEM grant, Valerie was acutely aware of her limited mathematics and science background. Her academic preparation required minimal exposure to these fields. As a teacher educator, her teaching load includes courses on general methods of instruction and management for secondary education. Valerie has a deep understanding of educational theory and pedagogy and has extensive practice in modeling and discussing pedagogy with secondary teacher candidates, but her instruction has typically been framed from her understanding of language arts, modern languages, and social sciences. This sometimes results in students majoring in STEM disciplines not finding her instruction fully relatable to their future practices as teachers.

This collaborative self-study was designed to facilitate mutual professional growth. We believed we were uniquely situated to assist one another in gaining insight about our identities and values as educators and in understanding and developing our skillsets as professors working to prepare future math and science teachers. During the fall semester, Valerie with Samya’s permission participated as a learner in PHYS-105. As much as possible, Valerie completed the coursework required of regularly enrolled students and positioned herself as a co-learner with the undergraduate students (n=14), all of whom were of traditional college age. Approximately half of the enrolled students were from majors other than physics. While Valerie participated and took most of the quizzes and received feedback on the physics content from Samya, she was not enrolled and her work was not graded.

It was possible to carry out this inquiry because Valerie was on sabbatical and able to commit time and effort to being a student. Equally important, Samya was welcoming and generous with her more limited time, always open to the vulnerability inherent to self-study.

Framework

This study was grounded in the principles of collaboration and reflection fundamental to self-study research (Mena & Russell, 2017). Collaboration is essential as it enhances the integrity of research and researchers (Loughran & Northfield, 1998; Mena & Russell, 2017). Working with an important other promotes more genuine transformation of practice by discouraging the educator/researcher(s) from rationalizing or justifying actions and thoughts. By initiating this collaborative self-study inquiry between colleagues from dissimilar academic fields (physics and education), we have as Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) asserted, intentionally invited alternative or oppositional perspectives. Aligned with Inch and McVarnish (2003) and Samaras (2014, 2011), we believed working in a transdisciplinary partnership engaged in self-study had the potential to lead us to transformative understandings of our own pedagogies. We understood that, “Collaboration does not mean harmony. Interactions may cause the individual to question his/her position or those of others as they develop new understanding” (Kosnik, Samaras, & Freese, 2006, p. 159). While we hold one another in high regard, we valued the opportunity to honestly consider our weaknesses, as well as our strengths. Within S-STEP research, collaboration is valued for improving trustworthiness. It provides an avenue for considering divergent perspectives, thereby, enhances inquiries’ validity (Loughran & Northfield, 1998; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009).

Tidwell and Heston (1998) asserted that collaborative reflection involves working with another to interpret, challenge, and understand data, a process that encourages multilayered impact on teaching practice. Schön’s (1983) discussion of “reflection in action” and Brookfield’s (1995) definition of “critical reflection” informed our reflective journal practices and our discussed with one another. Reflection in action is the process “by which practitioners sometimes deal well with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict” (Schön, 1983, p. 50). In this study we have operationalized critical reflection in contrast to technical/rational reflection by the motivation to question and challenge our practices and thoughts seeking to disrupt what is efficient and/or easy at the expense of what might be more effective and meaningful.
Methods/Data sources

Each week we wrote personal reflections about our experiences as teacher and student in the course, recording notes about how each class period unfolded and our feelings and attitudes in the moment. We endeavored to make connections between our class experiences and our prior understanding as a teacher educator (Valerie) and physics instructor (Samya). Nearly every week, we met informally to compare and contrast our individual perspectives. These meetings ranged from a few minutes at the end of class to much lengthier conversations (i.e., exceeding 90 minutes).

Discussion topics ranged from the lighthearted musing about funny moments in class to much deeper discussions about teaching strategies, philosophies, and their consequences for both ourselves and our respective student populations. Particularly at the beginning of the semester, our after-class meetings often involved Samya tutoring Valerie on concepts and skills presented in class. Our meetings frequently included each of us recalling for the other our “reflection in action” (Schön, 1983) during pivotal moments of the most recent class. Following our face-to-face discussions, we routinely recorded additional thoughts about both the class and our discussions.

In addition to our personal journals and notes recorded following post-class discussions, we analyzed data gathered from the enrolled students in the course. At mid-term and end-of-term, the students were solicited for anonymous feedback on their perspectives and attitudes about the course’s effectiveness, their engagement, and their learning. Finally, we analyzed students’ completed course assignments and tests in order to interrogate whether students’ and our perspectives of students’ learning progress aligned with these measurements. An analysis of students’ data is beyond the scope of this study but will be utilized in subsequent reports and follow up studies.

As the semester progressed and data accumulated, we read through and analyzed it in an iterative process. Our ongoing analysis and discussion in some instances led to adjustments in Samya’s instructional practices and to Valerie’s learning efforts and positioning in the class. Additionally, we noted in our reflective journals instances when our perspectives aligned with one another’s, as well as with students’, and when they were distinctly dissimilar. At semester’s end, we re-read our journal entries, notes, students’ anonymous feedback, and the compiled measures of student learning (coursework and tests), coding and analyzing for themes following a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Results

Valerie:

My journal captured my initial feeling of insecurity in being positioned as a learner in a discipline I found intimidating. I felt conspicuous in class meetings as someone much older than other students and unfamiliar with rudimentary practices in college science courses. Although it was an entry level course open to students from all majors, it seemed my classmates were somehow more seasoned or adaptable to expectations.

I was right to feel intimidated and scared about my first day. I should have been more scared!... The lab required I work with two other students, Will and Jason, both first year physics students, to find the standard deviation in a toy car’s speed. There was an incredibly complex equation written on the lab sheet and the sparsest of instructions. I stared at it hoping someone in my group or another group would say something (anything) so I had a clue how to begin. (Valerie’s Journal, August 29)

Throughout the semester I often found myself observing and thinking about class sessions as I would have in my role as a teacher educator. I wondered if I gravitated to this perspective in order to protect myself from internalizing the ineptitude I often felt as a physics student. Nevertheless, in my journal I often recorded observations of Samya’s instructional practices. For example, “Samya kept emphasizing that she wasn’t going to be helpful, but she was. She asked helpful questions and provided hints to keep us moving in the right direction.”
Our after-class discussions were frequent and serving multiple functions. Particularly at the beginning of the semester, these meetings allowed me to ask Samya questions about the concepts presented in the labs. I found the largest obstacle to my full participation in labs was my insufficient math skills. The course required Algebra skills I had not used in more than 30 years. Beyond providing me with needed math support, our discussions focused on Samya's instructional design and practices. Utilizing my background in educational literature and theory, I was able to provide insight as well as encourage and guide Samya's reflection on her practice:

After class, Samya and I talked about the class and how it works from my perspective as an educator. The parallels between Gee's (2009) discussion of the learning principles found in video games and Samya's structuring of the course struck me. I described some of the parallels I noted. Samya seemed to see the connections between her own experiences playing video games and what she had done in setting up and carrying out the class. I think it was an “aha” moment for both of us. (September 1)

Motivated by my own struggle to be successful in the class, I brainstormed with Samya strategies I might use to be better prepared for lab activities. The week before, I had independently viewed some YouTube videos I had found related to the Conservation of Momentum, the concept central to the lab that week. I felt the videos had helped me be more prepared for the lab because I had pre-learned some of key vocabulary, symbols, and equations used in the lab. As a result of our discussion, Samya decided it might be beneficial to the other students and me if she provided access to related teaching videos she had previously prepared as part of an online course. The following week I noted the consequences of that decision:

The unit on waves does seem to be more straight forward, but also having the teaching videos on Blackboard, even though they aren't directly connected, served to pre-teach the fundamental concepts. They make the labs less intimidating by having something to hook learning the new concepts to. (October 12)

My journal noted not only changes in my comfort and confidence in the course over time, but also the evolution of the class's dynamics. My earlier journals had described what appeared to be team members not working well with one another and individual students who seemed overly frustrated. By mid-semester most of the teams seemed to have found their equilibrium and, with the exception of two, students were consistently productively engaged in lab activities.

There has been a change in the students’ tolerance for the labs. The atmosphere isn’t generally tense anymore and most students appear to be having “fun.” Just a few exceptions. (November 14)

Samya:

Initially, I expressed trepidation about Valerie's presence, fearing the course or my teaching methods may not be sophisticated enough with respect to Valerie's knowledge in the education field. Since I had no data to support the effectiveness of a course such as PHYS-105, I was exceptionally nervous. Most of my initial notes described only my instructional planning, teaching enactments, and ongoing assessment of students' progress.

However, I found discussions with Valerie very useful in thinking about my pedagogy and methodology. Hence in later journal entrees I noted developing self-confidence in my own teaching pedagogy and was able to note instances when I assessed the course as being effective. I also explained how I altered instruction when it did not have desired outcomes.

After the first lab, Valerie had noted that she recognized pedagogical elements present in the class that were articulated by Gee (2009) as effective/best practice in teaching. Seeing parallels between effective video game design and the way in which I had structured PHYS-105, Valerie gave me the Gee text. Reading it was a real eye opener. I realized I was using a lot of techniques.
mentioned in the book but was not aware of this fact. This led to deep and long conversations between Valerie and me. We both started to see the course through the lens of the book, and it provided a mutual language and a vocabulary for discussions. Below is a conceptual map (Figure 1); it represents my vision of the course. My role as an instructor is to strike a balance between support vs. crutch and over-telling vs. guidance. The down flow arrows represent my vision of what the learners should experience from understanding through expertise and all the steps in the middle.

PHYS-105 includes problem-based inquiry, the intentional absence of guided lectures, with the inclusion of minimal facts. Even when facts are provided, they are strategically presented so as to facilitate just-in-time learning. This leaves a lot of students initially panicked and confused as most of them have never experienced a class such as this before. Unit 1 of the course not only is a novel physics learning experience for students, but it can be stressful as they realize the need to develop critical problem-solving skillsets.

There are three basic kinds of incoming students:

1. Sometimes they come in with over inflated self-images and are unpleasantly surprised, “I was great at physics in high school. What happened?”
2. Some have underinflated self-images and are pleasantly surprised, “Wow I know more than I thought!”
3. Some are like Goldilocks. They have the just-right mindset, “I need to learn …”

The class needs to cater to the needs of all three. Self-knowledge hopefully leads to self-discovery which leads to self-development. (Samya’s Journal, September 10, 2017)

During our discussions Valerie suggested adding an oral component to the class, in which students share with each other their personal experiences in completing the labs. I was excited about this idea but was not sure on how to incorporate it as a part of the course. It took a few iterations of discussions and a long thought process for this to come to fruition. In the last unit, the evaluation method was changed from individual quizzes about labs to oral presentations by the groups. This worked well as end-of-semester evaluations revealed.
Some other things that came under discussion were the design of the teams in the class. The first day of class I usually divide the class into teams of three students, making sure each team has at least one physics major. The teams remain stable for the rest of the semester, and students work in their teams for labs, write-ups, and the oral component of labs. During the discussion sessions, Valerie and I repeatedly discussed the pros and cons of keeping the teams intact through the semester. We agreed that some teams didn’t function optimally and changes would be prudent to make but couldn’t resolve all the potential ramifications of altering teams and the dynamics that might playout in the class as result.

Ideally, everyone should feel like they contribute in some way to their team: Either in experiment setup, problem-solving issues, leading the write ups, explaining logic/physics concepts, or calculations. (October 20, 2017)

Valerie pointed out at the end of the semester, and I agreed, that being upfront with students about the expectations in the class would be useful to alleviate students’ initial anxiety about the class’s structure. One way we agreed this could be achieved is by playing a simulation-based video game with the students on the first day of class and leading them in thinking through how their experiences playing a challenging video game will be mirrored in being a student in PHYS-105. I plan to incorporate this the next time I teach the course. The video game experience will serve as their first lab and write up thereby providing them with an opportunity to develop the journaling skills required throughout the course. I expect these changes will be useful in setting up course expectations.

Finally, Valerie’s novice understanding of physics required me to explain my teaching in finer details. Among other consequences, this led to me to being more conscious of conceptual gaps non-science majors might have and to consider strategies for differentiating my instruction.

Discussion

This study was beneficial to us as educators dedicated to our continual professional development. It resulted in significant learning and prompted us to think about our work through new lenses. In Valerie’s case, she increased her understanding of fundamental physics and mathematics vocabulary and concepts and has greater capacity to relate her methods course instruction to science and mathematics disciplines. Experiencing an exemplary model of inquiry-based learning has enabled Valerie to more effectively encourage teacher candidates across all disciplines to adopt similar practices. Additionally, Valerie noted heightened capacities to observe pedagogical nuances in science and math student teachers she supervises. Valerie feels her coaching of STEM student teachers has been improved. This perception is something she would like to explore in a follow up study.

Interestingly, observing Samya heightened Valerie’s awareness of the limitations of some observation protocols used for teacher evaluations that tightly dictate teacher practice (i.e., instructor is accessible and responds promptly to students’ questions). It was common for Samya to step out of the lab to limit students seeking her assistance. When asked questions, she often did not provide an answer but rather responded with a question.

More broadly, being a learner in Samya’s course caused Valerie to reflect upon aspects of her instructional practices and interactions with students. Valerie admired Samya’s ability to encourage students to engage wholeheartedly in problem-solving activities and students’ growing capacity to do so without extensive direct instruction/lecture or affirmation. Over the semester, Valerie observed students became more comfortable with Samya’s approach and took on more and more responsibility for their learning. They did not expect Samya to provide them with answers or to make the learning activities less challenging. Instead, Samya effectively facilitated her students’ learning by monitoring their progress on tasks, asking thought-provoking questions informed by her observations, and offering suggestions when students or teams were at impasses. Over the course of the semester, Valerie observed students became more adept at problem-solving, at
transferring concepts across contexts and tasks, at working productively with team members, and at evaluating their own learning. These are skillsets/dispositions indispensable to physicists, but are also ideals all educators should be striving to develop in their students. Lastly, Valerie noted and hopes to adapt in her practice, Samya’s stance of managing hers and students’ workloads. Samya’s course did not include reading assignments or other homework beyond studying for quizzes. In class, students were active and cognitively challenged; consequently, they were seldom absent, rarely left class, and often appeared to lose track of time. Valerie sees a need to move toward a lighter homework load, fewer graded assignments, and more active in-class engagement in courses she teaches.

Samya benefitted from having an insider’s perspective of her teaching efforts, an invested but dispassionate observer/participant. Through engaging in systematic reflection and through discussion and readings prompted by Valerie, Samya developed a theoretical framework (e.g., Gee, 2009) she employed in thinking about her teaching. She is able to identify and analyze key variables that contribute to learning activities’ success or failure. Samya more frequently modeled through thinking aloud her reflection in action (Schön, 1983), allowing insight into an experienced educator’s processing of pedagogical content knowledge. This might be particularly beneficial to those learners who someday become teachers, either in secondary or post-secondary classrooms. It allowed them insight into how an expert, an experienced educator, carries out her work.

Some benefits of this study extended beyond an interrogation of our pedagogies and content knowledge. By spending extended time with one another and through Valerie becoming a regular presence in previously unfamiliar physics classrooms and work spaces, collegiality across our departments has been enhanced. We can imagine future collaborative ventures possibly including colleagues from other disciplines. Ultimately, we hope we have made a lasting dent in our campus’s academic silos.

Future STEM teachers and current college instructors (including teacher educators) may benefit from this study. Too often academics carryout their professional responsibilities insulated from colleagues in different disciplines. This is to the detriment of students’ and our own continual growth (Inch & McVarish, 2003; Samaras, 2014). We and students stand to gain the most when we open ourselves up to exploring our beliefs and our practices informed by divergent perspectives. PHYS-105 disrupted Samya’s students’ preconceived notions of physics because it challenges them to think outside the box and requires them to develop mastery without prepackaged answers and strict procedures. Likewise, in our collaboration we required ourselves to step away from the safety of our silos and entrenched views of our roles and practices in the institution. We opened ourselves up to being vulnerable and grew through the collaboration.

References

Chapter 50: Student and teacher: An interdisciplinary collaborative self-study


Co-teaching as pedagogy: Negotiating pedagogical spaces in university classrooms

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The policy environment of teacher education in Australia encourages greater collaboration between schools and universities in pre-service teacher education programs. In an Australian government report (TEMAG, 2014), it stated that “providers, working with schools, will be required to establish structured and mutually beneficial partnerships” (p. xiii). This report identified weak links between theory and practice in many initial teacher education programs and argued that closer relationships between schools and universities were necessary to improve the quality of teacher education. The report claims that “one potential benefit of closer partnerships is for providers to maintain the currency of their knowledge of school operating environments to inform program design” (p. 25).

In response to this policy agenda, and the perception of pre-service teachers that academic staff lack current knowledge of practice in schools, the Faculty of Education at Monash University initiated a co-teaching program in which classroom teachers are released from their schools to teach alongside teacher educators in university classrooms. As part of this program, teacher educators Judy and Zane co-taught two third year undergraduate units, Advanced Pedagogy A and Advanced Pedagogy B with Fiona, a school teacher. Fiona co-taught a total of 15 workshops – seven with Judy and eight with Zane. Judy was a primary teacher for 25 years before becoming a teacher educator 15 years ago. Zane began her teaching career in a remote, central Australian Anangu (Australian Indigenous) School 28 years ago. Since that time she has taught in schools and universities and now works in pre-service teacher education, focussing on the pedagogies of wisdom that are informed by regional ethno-cultural traditions. Fiona is a former school teaching colleague of Judy’s, and has taught in a primary school for approximately 30 years. This co-teaching arrangement provided a rich, if complex, opportunity to reflect on our own pedagogies while teaching pre-service teachers about pedagogy.

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The aim of this collaborative self-study was to explore how we each experienced co-teaching, and how we negotiated the sharing of pedagogical spaces in the university classroom. The research questions for this self-study were: How did we each experience co-teaching? How did we negotiate the sharing of pedagogical spaces in the classroom?

**Literature review**

While there is some research available on co-teaching in various contexts (Enfield & Stasz, 2011; Garbett & Heap, 2011; Graziano & Navarrete, 2012) there is relatively little about school teachers who teach in university classrooms alongside teacher educators (Bacharach, Heck, & Dalhberg, 2008; Buczynski & Sisserson, 2008). A review of the literature revealed that co-teaching provides significant benefits and challenges for the educators and for their students (Ferguson & Wilson, 2011; Graziano and Navarrete, 2012; Henderson, 2010; Stang and Lyons, 2008). Garbett and Heap’s (2011) self-study about their experiences of co-teaching revealed that they were “forced…to reframe preconceptions that centre on the simplistic and misleading idea that teacher education is the modelling of exemplary practice” (p. 246). Co-teaching transformed their practice by encouraging them to make explicit the implicit thinking behind their pedagogical decision-making, so that their pre-service teachers could better understand the complexity of the teaching process. Although much of the literature focuses on the models and experiences of co-teaching, there are relatively few attempts to explore the conceptual understandings.

Anderson and Speck (1998) took a constructivist perspective, in which they argued that collaboration and multiple perspectives on teaching, learning and content were essential to the whole idea of a pedagogy in which two or more educators teach together. Taking a different philosophical stance, Cobb and Sharma (2015) explained that their sense of social justice emerged during what they describe as “courageous conversations centred on empowerment and culturally responsive dialogue” (p. 45). Enfield and Stasz (2011) took a sociological perspective, in which they saw university education as a community of practice, where they shared more openly with their students their personal reflections and co-teaching strategies. They believed that “engaging in [co-teaching] requires a willingness to take risks, to be fearless, and to make oneself vulnerable” (p. 114).

While all these perspectives were valued by us, the conceptual frame that best underpins our self-study was presented by Martin and Dismuke (2015) when they combined ideas of constructivism and sociology, and identified the social constructivist understandings of their self-study. They argued that teacher educators need to work collaboratively to learn about their content area and about their pedagogies. They stated that “collaboration of teacher educators through co-planning, co-teaching, and co-reflection-on-practice is a way for individuals to work across boundaries of their own knowledge, skills, and dispositions in dealing with the complexities and challenges of teaching” (p. 5). During their co-teaching, they found that they moved from a highly structured approach to a more free flowing pedagogy, and “this flow of collaboration was interwoven with the fluid shifting of roles” (p. 8). Although there was much collective endeavour, Martin and Dismuke still found time and space for individual practices, which allowed them to individually contribute to the teaching ‘jigsaw’. They characterised this feature of their co-teaching as “one of agency with rather than power over [others]” (p. 10). This reflects our experiences of co-teaching in the current study, in which our classroom interactions and self-study conversations enabled us to collaboratively explore our shared experiences, but also facilitated individual and personal learning gained from the collaborative processes.

**Methods**

*Data collection*

For this collaborative self-study, we adopted a narrative stance as both data collection and reporting (Creswell, 2012). We each documented our experiences and thoughts over the period of one year in individual written and shared oral narrative texts. Each researcher kept a journal.
Data analysis

We approached these data as being able to offer us some foundational understandings of a relatively under-researched area, finding the collaborative self-study methods particularly useful in bringing to the forefront our individual and shared responses to the co-teaching arrangement. In order to address our first research question: How did we each experience co-teaching? we each reviewed the transcripts of our conversations and our journal entries. We identified two or three key ideas that emerged for us personally in our experience of co-teaching. Personal narratives were then constructed, and shared with each other. Important to note, we were not seeking to find ‘common themes’ at this stage of our analysis, but were more focussed on understanding our individual experiences together.

In analysing our data for the second question How did we negotiate the sharing of pedagogical spaces in the classroom? we followed a similar process of each reviewing the transcripts of our conversations, and our journal entries. We then reflected on how co-teaching had influenced how we shared the pedagogical space of the classroom, and we included this in our final narratives.

Trustworthiness

Multiple data sources, several stages of individual and collaborative data analysis and links between the findings and data contributes to the trustworthiness of this collaborative self-study.

How did we each experience co-teaching?

Judy: I learned that co-teaching is not ‘business as usual,’ but an opportunity and a challenge to do and see things differently. I had assumed that my classes would proceed in much the same way as before, the only difference being Fiona’s input at various times. However, I soon found out that this assumption was flawed as we negotiated the pedagogical space in the classroom, and became increasingly mindful of how our respective input could be woven into the fabric of the class. Although an experienced primary school teacher, Fiona was new to teaching in the university context, so I was very aware of the need to scaffold and support her as she made this professional transition. I sometimes struggled with how I would actually do this, as I didn't want to throw her into the deep end, but I didn’t want to side-line her either. It was not only me who was concerned about how we shared pedagogical space. In the unit evaluations, student comments included: “One teacher overpowered the other which is ok but not when we related better to the teacher who was being cut off and wasn't getting a say.” “If co-teaching is happening the lecturer needs to give the current teacher equal say and respect.” These comments, as well as my own documented concerns about Fiona’s positioning within the classroom, made me re-examine how to share the co-teaching space more equitably. There was a clear tension between taking the lead and scaffolding Fiona’s learning about teaching in this new context, and knowing when to step aside and allow her to lead, and to feel comfortable in that position. I wrote in my reflective journal after the first workshop: “We need to work out how we interact and bounce off each other...it may be that [Fiona]was also feeling a bit uncomfortable about when to talk, and when to not. I need to work out how to include her in a more substantial way.”
It was clear from student evaluation comments, and discussions in the workshops, that the students highly valued Fiona’s practical knowledge and input. This challenged me to think about the value of my knowledge and experience compared to that of Fiona. I still think of myself as an experienced primary school teacher, but I am not sure that the students perceived me that way. One student commented that “Fiona’s perspective was really insightful, as she’s come from a school setting.” Is there a limit to a teacher educator’s ‘currency’ of experience – how long out of the school classroom is too long for a teacher educator? Why do we even need a practicing teacher in the university classroom, if the teacher educators themselves are experienced teachers? Although I have not taught in a primary school for around 15 years, I still believe I can contribute relevant knowledge of practice and perhaps even more importantly, use my pedagogical skills to help pre-service teachers unpack their practice to gain a deeper understanding of teaching and learning. One of those pedagogical skills that I neglected to utilise in the initial workshops was allowing for free flowing discussions of ideas, questions and pre-service teachers’ concerns. Having Fiona in the classroom provided opportunities for greater discussion based on her current experiences, but in hindsight, I didn’t take those opportunities as much as I could have. However, my final journal entry began: “I have tried very hard during the final few weeks of semester to engage in professional conversations and to focus on the process of discussion and listening, rather than just trying to cover the content. While content is important, I need to…let the conversations flow. I think I was able to do that, and I felt more relaxed in each workshop”.  

Zane: When we had the opportunity to become involved in co-teaching with Fiona, I really had no idea what to expect. I was interested to get inside the ‘currency’ versus ‘theory’ debate about teacher knowledge and to see how much we could use the co-teaching arrangement to equip our students with the best of both worlds. I hoped that the co-teaching opportunity would help me to address concerns raised by students in previous years that our classes were out of date and irrelevant to the demands of modern teaching, and that we had to get real teachers into our classrooms to make them meaningful to the students. I don’t accept that I am ‘out of touch’ and I felt a bit resistant to the whole idea of Fiona being the practical one, and me being the theoretical one. I expected that it might be a bit bumpy to start because Fiona and I had very different professional backgrounds. I knew Judy and Fiona had been friends for years, and I thought I was going to be just a ‘third wheel.’ There were all those ‘human things’ to anticipate. My main concern was whether or not Fiona and I would be able to work together in a way that would help the students in their learning, and to work out our different styles. In our second reflective conversation, I shared that “I was eager to see how it would work, so I was very open to the idea… We’re so under observation by the students, and they’re very sharp. They’re education students, so they’re also prepared to put their critical minds to what we’re actually doing, so we’re sometimes under scrutiny, sometimes mistrusted, sometimes they project on to us stuff that’s got nothing to do with us”. I wasn’t quite sure how they’d deal with having this strange dynamic, that is, having a ‘real’ teacher in the classroom, and how that positions our knowledge as academics. However, we were able to turn that to our advantage by enabling professional conversations, with us treating them as colleagues rather than as ‘students’, inviting them to reflect with us about what worked and what didn’t in our co-teaching practice.

The experience of co-teaching taught me one of the most valuable aspects of the learning process. We get caught up on theoretical arguments and professional debates such as whether our pedagogy is teacher-centred or student-centred and I’ve actually come back to understanding that it’s about the learning process. Co-teaching was a great opportunity to create vibrant professional conversations with our students, and enabled us to articulate not just the ‘how to’ of teaching, but the thinking behind the ‘how to’. In our second reflective conversation, I said that: “I’ve rediscovered this feeling of learning-centred [classrooms]. If we’re all learning in the classroom, it’s more relational than if I’m just looking at teacher-centred methods, or learner-centred, or learner-focused methods. I think it’s not either of those things; it’s that dynamic interaction, and I think we created it over these last few weeks”.  

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Fiona: It is easy to become complacent in teaching and stop taking risks and rely on pedagogical methods that have worked in the past. Developing pedagogy is a learning experience that unfolds over a period of time. I will walk away from the co-teaching experience understanding that ‘The more you know - the more you know you don’t know.’ It was a completely different situation from having pre-service teachers in my own classroom at school. It made me look at how I was teaching and how I was presenting at the university as opposed to my teaching in the primary school classroom. In our reflective conversation early in the first semester I stated that “it makes me go home and question what I think is important in schools...It is about getting back to what I think is important in teaching...”

Teaching and learning are effectively about collaboration and about the personal growth of teachers of all ages and experience. I was very aware that I needed to follow the lead of educated professionals who had been leading pre-service teachers as a career rather than just for a few weeks, like me. I think the first task in co-teaching is to clearly define our roles and responsibilities. Initially, I felt that Judy should take the lead in providing instruction while I supported the students. I thought that while one teacher would deliver instruction, I would observe student learning. As the semester progressed, however, I hoped that we would both eventually teach the content at the same time, in tandem or ‘tag team’ fashion. So, the first challenge I had was to figure out how much of a presence I needed to develop in the co-teaching situation. I shared with Judy and Zane that “I think that you need to find your rhythm though I don’t think you could ever just step into it.” Co-teaching also allowed me to gain another person’s perspective on how instruction might be improved, how students might be best assessed, what resources might be used, and so on. Sometimes this means I had to put aside my favourite tried-and-true strategies and try something different.

It’s important to ask for feedback from pre-service teachers and I didn’t want them to perceive any problems within the co-teaching relationship. Initially, I believed that the pre-service teachers were not engaged in the classroom activities as they made little eye contact with us and engaged with their devices. However, when I asked them to provide feedback on our teaching I was forced to recognise that they learn and engage in a different manner to what I expected. I now recognise that you need to be cognizant of your demeanour, tone, and body language. Students are quite perceptive and can easily spot trouble.

By co-teaching, how did we negotiate the sharing of pedagogical spaces in the classroom?

Our experiences of co-teaching also enabled us to explore our collaborative pedagogies, and to ask questions about our personal practices and beliefs in the face of differing perspectives held by each of us. We found that for all of us, even as experienced teachers, we needed to re-evaluate our pedagogies in this unfamiliar teaching context. As Judy wrote in her final narrative,

After co-teaching for seven workshops...Fiona and I became better at sharing the space and taking the lead in teaching activities and discussions. We found that negotiating this relationship takes time, and that we became more comfortable during the second semester of co-teaching. I wrote in my journal at the end of the year: “I tried to scaffold [Fiona] earlier in the year...but maybe it did come over as ‘controlling’... The challenge...is to support the new person, without appearing to take away their authority and expertise. I think that the last workshop was casual and flowed fairly evenly, but it really is just the beginning of a co-teaching relationship.”

We each had to work out what co-teaching actually meant, and how we could share the classroom space. We came to see it more than merely ‘sharing the stage’ but involving trust and creative risk-taking to integrate what each person brings to the classroom. Our sharing enabled the classroom to become a community of learners, and we came to see that the pre-service teachers were as much a part of the teaching as the learning. In her final narrative, Zane commented that:
There is a creative space between the enduring aspects of pedagogical practice…and the
current aspects of pedagogical practice that are experienced daily by Fiona. This has created
powerful opportunities for us to engage in professional conversations about the very core of
teaching practice in the art and craft of pedagogy. Through this co-teaching experience I think
we have rediscovered the learning-centred classroom which is more relational, and a dynamic
interaction between professionals.

Likewise, we were learners in the classroom too, so that gradually, the hierarchy of status
as ‘knower’ was questioned and we entered a more collaborative space where, through our
professional conversations between ourselves and with our students, we were all learning with
and from each other. Fiona reminded us that:

*Teachers who have different styles of teaching have to work on their interaction and examine
how they can engage with each other to bring the commitment they feel for education and
learning. Zane and Judy were a joy to collaborate with, and we developed a good working
relationship - a ‘same but different’ pedagogical approach that was by no means perfect,
especially at the beginning. Sometimes we disagreed about literature or philosophy. However,
we nurtured the co-teaching relationship and, in time, found a rhythm that worked for us—
and for the students we served.*

Conclusions and implications

Like Martin and Dismuke (2015), we learned that co-teaching takes time, and is about finding
a collaborative space that allows for learning about and enacting of our evolving pedagogies. Just as
Enfield and Stasz (2011) experienced, co-teaching became a way for us to explore our pedagogies
through reflective dialogue, between ourselves and with our students. Our co-teaching experiences
also fostered discussions about the ‘theory-practice divide’ between schools and universities,
and how to bring Fiona’s extensive classroom teaching knowledge into the university classroom
appropriately and respectfully, in tandem with Judy and Zane’s experience as teachers and teacher
educators. Co-teaching also raised issues about the currency of the school teaching experience
of teacher educators, and to what extent this matters when teaching pre-service teachers about
pedagogy.

Our experiences of co-teaching taught us that despite the challenges, we gained new insights
into our pedagogy. Fiona found that it made her think more deeply about how she adapts her
teaching to suit new teaching contexts. Zane learned that teaching doesn't have to be student
or teacher-centred, but rather, a learning community in which all participants are both teachers
and learners. Judy learned about the importance of making time and space for professional
conversations, with pre-service teachers and with teaching colleagues. These conversations are
a rich learning opportunity, and need to be prioritised, even when there is pressure for time and
space in the curriculum. We not only learned from co-teaching itself, but from the reflective
conversations we had as part of this collaborative self-study. As we are all pressed for time, it is
likely that many of these in-depth conversations would not have happened if not for the collection
of data for this self-study.

As universities attempt to build relationships with schools, co-teaching is one way in which
schools and universities can come together for the benefit of pre-service teacher and teacher
educator learning. If co-teaching is to be a feature of teacher education courses, then it needs to be
well-planned, resourced and researched. We also believe that it is important to make co-teaching
explicit in teaching about pedagogy, and to unpack our collaborative practices with the students.
While this can be confronting, we see the value of this as part of our and the pre-service teachers’
learning. As this self-study has shown, it is important to not just practice co-teaching, but to
research it. There is a paucity of literature about teacher educators and school teachers working
together in university classrooms. In order to create a pedagogical space in which the contribution
of both kinds of knowledge and experience are accessed, understood and valued, more research
into this particular model of co-teaching is needed.
References


Does the practicum supervisor know her pedagogy?: Insights gained through critical friendship

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The authors have many years of experience as supervisors of the pre-service teacher education practicum and are strongly committed to the central importance of that practicum within an overall pre-service program. We have modified personal supervisory practices many times, from fine-tuning to trying significant changes. Neither of us has ever probed deeply the assumptions that underlie our supervisory practices, but we are committed to the importance of doing so. This self-study of the pedagogy of a practicum supervisor (Andrea) is an opportunity to probe those underlying assumptions. The study is conducted in the real world of action, not in the wisdom of hindsight. During a six-week practicum, we met weekly to document moments of surprise and uncertainty.

This self-study was inspired by earlier research on the quality of practicum learning and the importance of the practicum to teacher candidates who consistently describe their practicum placements as the most important component of their teacher education program. Additionally, conversations about the epistemology of practice (Russell & Martin, 2017) inspired Andrea to focus on learning from experience:

- What does learning from experience entail?
- How is it different from learning expressed in propositions?
- What is the impact of an alternative mode of learning?
- How can the quality of such learning be determined?

Our focus is on patterns, tensions and uncertainties, and exploration of assumptions as they were identified in weekly meetings, field notes and journals. Attention is given to both supervisor and critical friend (Tom) in terms of insights gained and problematic assumptions identified.

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Chapter 52: Does the practicum supervisor know her pedagogy?

Aim

Four questions drove this self-study of a practicum supervisor’s pedagogical moves:

1. What were the basic patterns of the supervisor’s pedagogy with individual teacher candidates before, during and after each lesson observation?
2. What were the basic patterns of the teacher candidates’ responses to that pedagogy?
3. What underlying assumptions were revealed, particularly when the supervisor was uncertain how to proceed and when the teacher candidate responded in unexpected ways?
4. What was the contribution of conversations with the critical friend in identifying underlying patterns and assumptions?

Perspectives

We work from a perspective on effective learning (Argyris & Schön, 1974, p. 98) that we find particularly appropriate to judging whether or not supervisory practices encourage productive learning:

Effective learning (1) is based on personally caused experience, (2) is usually produced by expressing and examining dilemmas, (3) values individuality and expression of conflicts, (4) must be guided by an instructor who has more faith in the participants than they may have in themselves, (5) who recognizes the limits of participants’ learning methodologies, (6) whose idea of rationality integrates feelings and ideas and (7) who can encourage spontaneity.

Point 4 in particular seems to highlight one of the challenges inherent in practicum supervision focused on effective learning. Point 5 recognizes candidates’ uniqueness and their varied paths to becoming a teacher.

Method

Participants and data sources

Eighteen teacher candidates in six elementary (primary) schools were observed in the last five weeks of a six-week practicum placement in October-November 2017; the first week of the practicum involved classroom observation by the candidate for purposes of orientation. In addition to studying her supervisory practices in schools, Andrea was also teaching the same 18 candidates in an on-campus course focused on teaching and learning in the practicum. In the four classes preceding the six-week practicum, she began to form relationships with each of the 18 candidates. While Tom was not currently engaged in formal practicum supervision, in the same six-week period he was invited by five students from his own classes to observe them in their placements in local secondary schools; these visits had supervisory overtones and also extended his teaching relationship with those students. Tom worked to ensure that we met weekly, starting before Andrea’s first observation. Tom also has extensive supervisory experience and Andrea was aware that he has recently changed several patterns of interaction during his observations of his students.

Triangulated data included field notes taken during and immediately after supervisory discussions with candidates, transcribed recordings of weekly dialogues between researcher and critical friend, tracking sheets and both participants’ journal notes throughout the data collection period. Tracking sheets provided a helpful initial frame for studying supervisory practices. Initial categories included familiar responses, unexpected responses, familiar interactions, uncomfortable moments, central issues discussed, supervisor’s unusual pedagogical moves, supervisor’s risks taken, relationships issues in the practicum, and the tension between being forthright and making statements that destroy candidate confidence.
Data analysis

Data sets were analyzed for patterns and emerging themes. These were then triangulated across the three data sources to corroborate responses to the four questions driving the self-study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Goals of the supervisor’s intended supervisory pedagogy included fostering metacognition and developing a deeper understanding of how professional learning from practicum experiences is verified and can subsequently inform classroom experiences at the university. Typical challenges of supervision include: (1) building a trusting relationship with each candidate, mentor teacher and school, (2) candidates’ reluctance to probe deeply the events of the observed lesson, (3) supporting candidates in making sense of what happened in the lesson, (4) helping the candidate listen to the children in the class, and (5) moving from the initial focus on self to the learning that has or has not happened (Nolan, 1989; Schön, 1983).

The supervisory pedagogy was studied in action to assess the extent to which it succeeded in addressing these issues to the benefit of the supervised candidates. “Practicum must be seen as a time to both practice theory and theorise practice, so the participants must understand the reciprocity of each partner and be prepared to challenge and be challenged” (Ussher & Carss, 2014, p. 250). Andrea was attentive not only to candidate vulnerability but to her own:

Managing one’s own vulnerability is essential to creating the conditions and providing the kinds of support and challenge needed to assist a beginning teacher learn to manage his or her own vulnerability, to get beyond self concerns, to become or remain teachable, and to maximize growth. (Bullough, 2005, p. 37)

Problematic aspects of supervisory pedagogy, reciprocity, and vulnerability are explored whenever possible, using familiar principles of self-study methodology (LaBoskey, 2004).

Findings

Our findings are organized in terms of the four questions driving this self-study.

1. What are the basic patterns of the supervisor’s pedagogy with individual teacher candidates before, during and after each lesson observation?

Data show that the supervisor gave greatest attention to her pedagogy after each lesson observation. Preparations for and note-taking during the observation did not change. Andrea continues to make it clear to her candidates that she will observe a complete lesson, not a portion of one. In the context of this self-study, she changed her approach to the debriefing conversation. Rather than opening by asking how the candidate personally assessed the observed lesson on a scale of 1 to 10, she asked, “What has been the greatest challenge that you have experienced?” and “What has been the greatest surprise?”

This shift appeared to propel the dialogue into an examination of issues from which we could move forward to the attendant relationships between the issues and the particulars of the observed lesson. My impression is that this approach leads to a more intense and deeper self-reflection on the lesson. Also, it seems to lead to an increased ability to answer the question: What would you do differently if you were to reteach the lesson? Teacher candidates are now providing a rationale without being asked directly. (Andrea, Journal Notes)

Changing the structure of the debrief, opening with big-picture questions that were more open-ended, also meant that candidates could more readily address problems that had arisen that were not directly related to the lesson per se, e.g., the student teacher-mentor teacher relationship.

2. What are the basic patterns of the teacher candidates’ responses to that pedagogy?

The qualitative change in candidates’ responses was immediately obvious to Andrea, who had recently completed a self-study of her efforts to be a responsive listener (Martin, 2017). Gone was the previous initial focus on specific aspects of the lesson, such as “I should have said X” or
“I didn’t provide enough explanation about Y.” In contrast, candidates took time to think and appeared to step back to look at the lesson in a new way. Rather than “I didn’t” or “I shouldn’t,” the candidates began to speak about the learning of the children during the lesson. Thus there was a shift from a primary focus on themselves to a greater focus on what was happening as they were teaching.

The full-day kindergarten class is so busy and I was so busy thinking about my lesson plan and what I should do next. Now I have to think about it more from the standpoint of the kids! I have just been thinking about me. I got it backwards! (Teacher Candidate Comment to Andrea)

From a candidate in a challenging early primary class who was struggling with classroom management:

I have been losing patience and getting frustrated with some of the children because they don't listen, distract others and my lessons keep getting derailed. I can't get through everything that I had planned. I guess I have to start thinking more about why they are doing it and less about my feelings. It's not really accomplishing much if I get angry at them. (Teacher Candidate Comment to Andrea)

Often candidates would reference their own school experiences, particularly when they were dramatically different from their practicum classrooms: “This class is so different from my experience in school. I never anticipated that it would be like this.” Being able to draw comparisons appeared to move them forward in acknowledging that their own school experiences as students would, in all likelihood, never approximate the realities and challenges faced by and posed by children in today’s classrooms. In these instances, candidates needed to consider themselves and their own experiences before embarking on the shift to looking more closely at and understanding what was taking place as they were teaching.

### 3. What underlying assumptions are revealed, particularly when the supervisor is uncertain how to proceed and when the teacher candidate responds in unexpected ways?

Lesson content and classroom management are first-order issues for virtually every teacher candidate. Second-order or big-picture issues for supervisors include relationships (candidate-supervisor and candidate-students) and vulnerability. The perspective of Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) emphasizes the imperative of a supervisor’s attention to vulnerability and personal identity:

Being a teacher and in particular being a “beginning” teacher implies far more than a merely technical set of tasks, that can be reduced to effectively applying curriculum knowledge and didactical skills. The person of the teacher is inevitably also at stake in these professional actions . . . . When one's identity as a teacher, one's professional self-esteem or one's task perception are threatened by the professional context, then self-interests emerge. They always concern the protection of one's professional integrity and identity as a teacher. (p. 110)

The supervisor must always make judgement calls about whether and when the candidate is able to confront challenges, implications, and possibilities for change. Intensity arises for the supervisor from the need to balance support and challenge according to candidates’ readiness and willingness to learn more about teaching and more about themselves as teachers.

For example, an unexpected issue appeared when Andrea asked one candidate “What has been the greatest challenge that you have experienced?” Aware of her status in the classroom as a guest, and aware of the mentor teacher’s desire that she follow her leads, the candidate saw her greatest challenge as her relationship with her mentor teacher. Once she had unpacked this challenge with Andrea, she was able to move forward to address issues such as classroom management and “new teaching ideas.”

This self-study has enabled us to identify a range of assumptions on which we see ourselves moving from a supervisory stance with traditional overtones expected by our students to alternative stances focused more on the quality of each candidate's learning. The contrast between
transmission and interpretation put forward by Barnes (1976) proved helpful in describing the trend in these shifting assumptions, as in Table 1.

The Transmission teacher sees it as his task to transmit knowledge and to test whether the pupils have received it. . . . For the Interpretation teacher, however, the pupil’s ability to reinterpret knowledge for himself is crucial to learning, and he sees this as depending on a productive dialogue between the pupil and himself. (p. 142)

**Table 1. Identifying and challenging assumptions about supervision**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transmission stance</th>
<th>Interpretation stance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The supervisor’s primary purpose is to explain how to improve the lesson observed.</td>
<td>1. Teacher candidates will always have uncertainties and the supervisor must identify them and lead the relevant discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Supervisors should use the same pattern for conducting observations and discussions with all assigned candidates.</td>
<td>2. The structure of observations and discussions should be adapted to the unique characteristics of each candidate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Post-lesson debriefing should identify all the teaching behaviours that should be improved in subsequent lessons.</td>
<td>3. Post-lesson debriefing should help candidates take the time to realize they are starting to think like a teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Even if floundering, at least teacher candidates can talk about their teaching. They already have a rich understanding of teaching.</td>
<td>4. Candidates do not necessarily know what they don’t know. They can unexpectedly become defensive and find it quite difficult to admit the extent to which they are floundering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The sense of feeling overwhelmed by the complexities of teaching should decrease over time.</td>
<td>5. If the complexities of teaching do not become more obvious with experience, then the candidate is vulnerable and the supervisor must respond appropriately.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While we have never subscribed to the Transmission stance, this self-study has enabled us to better understand why. This study has also enabled us to clarify the alternative assumptions characterized here as an Interpretation stance to practicum supervision. Self-study has shown us more clearly that standardized patterns for lesson planning and observation checklists tend to be associated with a transmission stance toward supervision.

4. *What is the contribution of conversations with the critical friend in identifying underlying patterns and assumptions?*

Andrea initiated the self-study project and requested Tom’s participation as a trusted colleague, experienced in practicum supervision, who has shared years of conversations about teacher education. Tom encouraged Andrea to look at her actions more analytically to answer questions such as “Why am I doing this?” Tom helped Andrea consider the level of mutual engagement between candidate and supervisor and encouraged Andrea to be less directive, with a focus on listening to each candidate’s account of dilemmas of practice. Tom’s questions also encouraged Andrea to re-think the structure of the lesson debriefing. Once candidates developed a bigger picture and began to judge the quality of their students’ learning, then the conversation could turn to deconstructing the lesson. If and when candidates asked for recommendations, she could suggest to candidates questions about the likely effects of a particular action: “If I were to try this, then I could look for that…”
As Tom engaged in the role of critical friend, he also considered his own assumptions about the role of supervisor. He recently learned from a former student, now an experienced teacher, that she still remembers the criticisms he offered 20 years ago as her practicum supervisor. This reminded him of the potential impact of the supervisor’s words when the candidate has such limited experience of teaching and attaches such significance to the perspective of someone who does have experience. This is one reason why he made significant changes to his debriefing strategies when he moved from formal to informal observations of candidates: focusing less on offering corrections and suggestions and more on showing faith in candidates by inviting them to explain what they learned by teaching the observed lessons (Russell, 2017).

The experience of serving as a critical friend also reminded Tom that when the supervisor is a full-time member of faculty who also teaches on-campus courses, there is much more to practicum supervision than the observation and debriefing. Visits to schools and observations and discussion with candidates provide background and context that inform the supervisor’s on-campus teaching in terms of what and how candidates have learned from firsthand experience. Supervisory experience also highlights the profound differences between learning from experience and learning in classes (Russell & Martin, 2017).

Additional perspectives

Listening and voice

Cook-Sather (2002) emphasizes the need for teachers to listen to students, and by extension for supervisors to listen to those they observe.

Authorizing student perspectives can directly improve educational practice because when teachers listen to and learn from students, they can begin to see the world from those students’ perspectives. . . When students are taken seriously and attended to as knowledgeable participants in important conversations, they feel empowered . . . and motivated to participate constructively in their education. (p. 3)

This is exactly what should happen when the supervisor authorizes the candidate’s voice and moves a critique into a conversation. Richert (1992) argued that teacher education programs need to create opportunities for voice to be projected as an integral part of learning to teach:

Voice is a vehicle for reflective practice which results in ongoing learning in teaching. . . . Programs of teacher education must have a structured expectation of voice; they must provide ample opportunity and a safe and supportive environment for the voiced conversations to be exercised. (p. 192)

Listening to a candidate’s voice generates opportunities to identify the effects of the supervisory dialogue, to guide each candidate’s further development and to re-examine how one is doing that. As Andrea focused more closely on encouraging the candidate’s metacognition, she became more metacognitive about her own supervisory practices.

Tensions and uncertainties in supervision and self-study

Teaching is rich in tensions and uncertainties and much the same can be said of the work of the supervisor (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Cohen, Hoz, & Kaplan, 2013). This self-study reminds us that the supervisor often has little or no evidence of the immediate or long-term impact of each observation-debriefing episode. When the supervisor’s role includes exposing issues requiring attention in the activities of the teacher candidate, there is risk and uncertainty as one also works to avoid doing damage.

The experience of following the methodology of self-study adds yet another dimension to the work of the supervisor. For example, Andrea was driven to ask if she had become complacent over time in how she approached supervision and its many intensities. In the second interview, Tom challenged Andrea with the following statement that drew heavily on their mutual respect: “You are telling me about the content of what you are doing, but you are not talking about your
“After a long pause, Andrea replied, “I am trying to test my perception that candidates are going deeper more quickly and I am trying to understand why my perceptions are qualitatively different.” Despite mutual respect constructed over years of shared experiences, Andrea became increasingly aware of the vulnerability and anxiety that come with feeling more exposed. Andrea quickly realized, in this nodal moment (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 16), that she needed time to consider privately the questions, “Am I thinking deeply enough?” and “Am I really doing my job well enough?”

**Trustworthiness**

We have been guided by the following views of trustworthiness set out by Mishler (1990, p. 419):

> The essential criterion for such judgments [of trustworthiness] is the degree to which we can rely on the concepts, methods, and inferences of a study . . . as the basis for our own theorizing and empirical research. If our overall assessment of a study's trustworthiness is high enough for us to act on it, we are granting the findings a sufficient degree of validity to invest our own time and energy.

Shenton (2004) indicates that trustworthiness should be addressed in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. This self-study’s credibility is enhanced by multiple data sources and the perspective of a critical friend. Transferability and dependability must be judged in terms of the reader’s ability to identify with the experiences and assumptions presented. Confirmability is enhanced by multiple passes over the data drawn from numerous supervisory experiences and by our meetings’ consistent return to the identification of assumptions. We will judge this self-study as trustworthy if other practicum supervisors report that this analysis has served as a basis for their own “theorizing and empirical research” (Mishler, 1990, p. 419)

**Outcomes**

While this self-study was not without its moments of tension, discomfort and uncertainty, it has been powerfully productive in terms of understanding more fully the assumptions underlying the patterns in our previous and current supervisory practices. Framing the contrasts between transmission and interpretation stances has shown us the need to be vigilant in challenging our assumptions. Our collaborative inquiry has also deepened our understanding of what it means to learn from experience and what it means to help teacher candidates do the same.

**References**


Shedding light on our practices: Four assumption hunters on a quest

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Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won’t come in.


We are an international collaborative of self-study researchers who have begun work together to identify and challenge assumptions that underpinned our practice as teacher educators. Assumptions are the underlying biases that define how pedagogy is enacted. Seeking out and challenging assumptions helps to discover the unconscious biases that define and mediate a practitioner’s actions in the classroom. Assumptions by themselves are neither good nor bad things, but rather are the tacit beliefs that guide a teacher’s decision making. As Brookfield (1995) states, “informed actions…are based on assumptions that have been carefully and critically investigated” (p.80). By using this as the starting point for self-study, the objective is then not to eliminate assumptions from our teaching practice, but to better understand and analyse those assumptions through a process of rigorous self-inquiry. Such inquiry empowers us to assess the impact of our assumptions on our professional practice.

Method

We began our studies individually and each collected data in our own contexts using a variety of methods, including personal reflective journaling, discussions with students and colleagues, and freewriting about our emerging understandings (Lowe, Prout & Murcia, 2013). We then analyzed our own data using qualitative approaches, including thematic analysis (Gibson & Brown, 2009; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). Throughout this process one of the key characteristics identified as critical to self-study research (LaBoskey, 2004) was the ongoing “interactivity at...”

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one or more stages”. Each of us interacted with our students and discussed our learning with them explicitly. We also came together to discuss our ideas and shared them with the broader international community at a conference in Spain. This enabled us to examine and re-examine our understandings gathered from our data and explore the under-examined assumptions that underpinned our beliefs and practices.

The next step was to examine our findings collectively to uncover common and contrasting themes that led to revelations about our practices as teacher educators (Schuck & Russell, 2005; Davey & Ham, 2009). Collaboration was crucially important to the study as it was only through collective reflection and sharing that our assumptions became clear to us. This process surfaced prior knowledge and unmasked new understandings. Discussing these themes and the incidents that sparked reflection and realizations about our individual taken-for-granted ways of teaching led to a deeper level of knowledge about the power of assumptions and to a greater understanding of our roles as teacher educators.

Assumption hunting

When we initially came together to share our individual projects, the enormity of the task was immediately obvious. Not only was there considerable diversity in the topics and assumptions but each project was grounded in the immediacy of the individual’s own teaching context. Here we each identify and share one key assumption that was core to our initial investigations.

Robyn’s assumption: Teacher educator and student assumptions can be identified, challenged and changed using a custom-designed, multi-faceted approach.

My research was conducted with two cohorts of pre-service teachers completing as stage 2 methods course (Semester 1, 2017; N= 42). During Week 1, pre-service teachers identified three assumptions related to learning and teaching mathematics and these were reviewed during Week 11, 2017 to ascertain if the assumptions had been supported, challenged or changed. My assumption - that teacher educator and student assumptions can be identified, challenged and changed using a custom-designed, multi-faceted approach - underpinned my practice. Throughout the course, students prepared and presented group tutorials and received written and oral feedback; they completed ‘freewrites’ related to their experiences in the course; they received focused teacher feedback following tutorial presentations and in doing so, maintained a critically reflective conversation.

The conversations and feedback prompted explicit discussions of pedagogical assumptions. The analysis presented here relates directly to the students’ written feedback collated at the conclusion of the semester. The assumptions data for Week 11 was tallied and frequencies/mentions were reported with the outcomes suggesting that: Supported (42); Challenged (22) and Changed (24). The students’ assumptions that were supported included “you need to be able to understand maths to be able to teach it”; “you need to have multiple strategies to teach maths well”; “maths is used in everyday life” and “student engagement is vital” and as a student concluded, “Maths should be a fun and engaging subject consisting of a variety of teaching methods to enable students to develop mathematical skills”. … An example of an assumption that was challenged included “Maths is difficult and complex to teach”. Reflecting on this initial assumption, a student reported at the conclusion of the semester that “It is about making the connection to what they already know and (knowing) how to link new information and processes with materials used”. Linking new knowledge to that previously learned was a learning outcome. As Brookfield (1995) suggests, it can be difficult to change the assumptions that underpin beliefs and practice as learners and teachers. Yet the outcomes of this research which focused on an explicit approach to identifying and examining assumptions throughout the learning and teaching course can lead to change. Changed student assumptions related to the role of direct instruction in mathematics; the “naturally good at maths” individuals and the belief that maths is ‘boring’.
Identifying and challenging my own assumptions as a teacher educator means I must be prepared for surprises, avoid being complacent and acting habitually, and continually reflect and evaluate my pedagogical choices. My next challenge is to address the following feedback received from one student who stated that the classes “focused too much on teaching and not enough learning” and “there was more teaching from peers than the teacher”. As Shandomo (2010) suggests, reflective teaching, which for me has foundations in assumption identification and ‘hunting’, prevents teacher educators from unquestioningly believing that students can accurately interpret intentions and only when teaching and learning are researched will these misunderstandings be addressed and lead to change.

**Alan’s assumption:** Enacting a form of criticality in teacher education pedagogy is fundamental to creating socially aware teachers.

I believe that a range of pedagogical strategies, including having students as co-designers of courses, negotiating individual grading contracts, utilizing peer-marking panels, and peer-to-peer evaluation creates a learning culture that is significantly different from a lecturer-focused, transmission approach. I enacted these beliefs with students enrolled in a 4-year Physical Education Teacher Education degree programme. The students in this programme are immersed in the nature and content of physical education from day 1, with pedagogical studies an important aspect running alongside, and sometimes within, the broader course work they undertake as part of the degree. My aim was to structure my courses within this programme as a locus where the role of being a student is not to simply to learn a body of pre-determined knowledge in a passive way from someone positioned as an expert, but rather to unpack, examine, and consider how the knowledge they bring from prior experiences shape their actions and problem-solving as teachers of physical education. Written anonymous evaluations at the end of the course demonstrate that students experienced the pedagogy of these courses as a process that disturbs the status quo and displaces them into a place of possibilities. As they commented, 

I was just like, yeah, very overwhelmed with kind of like, what exactly … I think it was more because I was asking myself what are you asking of me, instead of what am I asking of myself.

So you are so used to being told what to do, you know, you have a professor and they tell you what the structure is and so for the first time it was kind of like, the onus was on me, I get to decide. It was just like whoa, okay.

As Rancière (2010) argues, the normal pedagogic logic is one of positioning students as ignorant and in need of instruction. As these comments suggest, the students became a lot more aware of the responsibility and agency they could take in respect to their own professional learning. They were challenged to think about the meaningfulness of the work they undertook and were more oriented towards engaging in work that linked to their own needs as young professionals. An example of this can be seen in the range of coursework negotiated to undertake as part of their assessment contracts. Whereas in the past students were directed on what coursework was to be done (e.g. an essay or article review), the evidence shows that students engaged in a range of activities (such as a self-study, a unit design, or a leadership task). Many continued to choose “traditional” options such as writing essays if they felt these had value. Negotiating coursework options broadened the means through which students could engage with developing professional knowledge.

While the evidence suggests that critically-oriented learning culture was supported, I suspect that it was confusing for students to work across courses and within a programme that was still largely structured within more traditional transmission style pedagogies. For example, one colleague commented, “Can you tell students that they can only negotiate assignments in your course and not ours?” Therefore, a key insight in respect to the assumption is that enacting a form of critical pedagogy appears to involve attending to the creation and sustenance of social systems operating at different levels of the education system as much as it does on using particular methods and strategies in teacher education lessons.
Lynn's assumption: The practicum can be seen as a complex site for learning that offers students multiple opportunities for risk taking, introspection and growth, but it is also a contested site where all of the different people involved in the practicum operate according to their assumptions about what is expected, what is appropriate and what their particular roles are.

Student teachers have extensive prior experience in classrooms and have generated a broad range of assumptions about teaching and the role of the teacher that affect how they learn to teach (Lortie, 1975). Their understandings of the relationship between theory and practice may be conflicting (Segall, 2002), and lead to assumptions about how to enact the knowledge they have learned in teacher education classes. Beck and Kosnik, (2002); Cuiffetelli-Parker and Volante, (2009); Gardiner and Lorch, (2015) and Zeichner (2010) have all noted that many visiting lecturers do not teach in university programs, and that few tenured university professors are actively involved in field supervision. This creates a disconnect between what happens in university classes and the learning that takes place in schools. It also sets the stage for unchallenged assumptions about what to expect from students and how best to mentor them into the profession.

In terms of my own practice as a teacher educator who is actively involved in organising practica within our program as well as attempting to create connections between practicum experiences and learning and my courses, I am now aware that I have my own assumptions about what students, mentor teachers and visiting lecturers should know about what and how novice teachers learn from practicum experiences, how to foster that learning, and what the expectations of the overall program are, as well as some of the constraints faced by university-based programs for learning to teach.

I began my individual self-study by taking apart and examining my own assumptions through re-examining and reflecting on my responses to and reflections on working with the interview data of a larger study that looked at learning on the practicum from the perspective of students, mentor teachers, visiting lecturers and teacher educators who were not actively involved in the practicum but who taught courses to students. Following discussions with colleagues, I continually re-examined my findings in terms of my original assumptions, while redefining my understandings of what and how students learn while on practicum. I was then able to integrate these understandings into our program and my own courses, leading to more explicit exchanges with students as well as with colleagues about practicum learning and how it contributes to learning to teach. For example, students are now invited to frame initial observations and reflections about teaching in the form of assumptions when they begin the practicum, and are supported in their analysis of these in their teaching seminars. Mentor teachers have been provided with much more detailed information about what students have learned in coursework, and therefore what they can expect from them.

Some of the main assumptions that I have examined as a result of this study include the following:

We all learn by doing and reading, thinking and reflecting about what we are doing. We need to deliberately break down the components of teaching and provide scaffolded experiences for student teachers to learn about teaching in stages, along with providing opportunities for them to explore what they are learning through discussion and reflection. This assumption underpins my understanding of the practicum experience as a site for students to learn about aspects of their profession that are not so easily explored in other situations. Teacher education in my program is competency-based, meaning students learn to do things such as lesson-planning, creating activities and presenting them in their coursework, but the context remains hypothetical and abstract because the practicum comes after the coursework so they do not see the connections between the activity and the needs of the pupils until the course is over.

When we assume that student teachers can directly apply what they have learned at the university in the classroom, we have not taken a large number of factors into account including the needs of individual pupils, the mentor teacher’s approaches and beliefs, the materials available, the need for continual adaptation and adjustment.

The word practicum to me is about practice and I assumed that students were practicing teaching while they were on their field experiences. However, from a student perspective the
practicum is a performance where they must show a substantial level of expertise from the beginning because of the high-stakes evaluation associated with the field experience.

**Dawn’s assumption:** *Teaching about teaching is more complex than I admit to myself and my students, but more importantly, I have a vested interest in making it look simple or complicated.*

Often my students seek answers to what they see as major problems in teaching. These problems are, from my perspective, simple or complicated ones rather than complex (Snowden & Boone, 2007). They ask “how” to teach a process, or “what” to do if a student swears in class but rarely do they ask complex questions such as “why” you would establish a positive learning environment. Simple and complicated problems can often be solved through following standard recipes or guidelines. School students are expected to respond to teachers’ actions in similar ways and the outcomes predicted with some degree of certainty. It is alluring to consider my role in such simple or complicated problem solving scenarios as a competent and experienced guide. However, I believe that in reality teaching is complex rather than simple or complicated. But, if I am going to make my complex teacherly decision making apparent for my students’ to unpack then I have to be prepared for unintended consequences - and often (to my chagrin) I am not in such a position.

An example was a scenario that I thought would demonstrate the importance of creating an inclusive, positive learning environment. I had adopted the role of an authoritarian teacher when my students returned to the university from practicum and was in the process of taking an attendance register (not standard practice). Two students arrived a little late to class. They apologised and hoped to slip quietly into their seats. However, I subjected them to a stern talking to. I expanded my chastisement to include everyone with a sweeping statement that an Associate Teacher had rung me to complain about someone’s unprofessional attitude while on practicum. I asked them what they thought constituted unprofessional practice and told them to write me a list of 5 things, in silence. After a few minutes, I asked them how it felt to be back at University. Had they put into practice anything they had been taught about behaviour management techniques? I had anticipated a discussion about professional attributes which would lead onto setting a positive tone in the classroom, being organised, knowing students’ names etc. … but there was no response until a tentative hand went up. “Did someone really ring you?” they asked. “Was it about me?” At that point I let the façade drop and said “No, of course not. No one rang me” The relief in the group was palpable. We did have a productive discussion about how it might feel to be a student in a class where the teacher made sweeping innuendos and was perpetually grumpy. I told them how I felt being negative and authoritarian. We discussed how I could have improved my practice and debriefed their practicum experiences. By the end of the session the students were comfortable with one another again but I still felt unsettled. Students comments on their Get out of class tickets (Brookfield, 995) confirmed my unease “I was frantically combing my memory to try and figure out how on earth I’d apparently forgotten what you were really like” and “I was very confused, uncomfortable and almost upset myself.”

I worried about how long it would take me to regain their trust. I also worried about the student who had thought her Associate Teacher might have rung me. As I delve deeper into understanding my teaching practice through self-study I realise that I have a vested interest in keeping “problems” in the simple and complicated areas and presenting myself in the role as an experienced mentor. Venturing into the complex reality of teaching about teaching is fraught.

**Collaborative discussion**

When we met as an international team, the key problem we encountered was how best to talk across these projects without reducing them to a single or representative case. In other words, how could we respect the individuality of each setting while also gaining some insights that would go beyond that immediate site? We were encouraged by the fact that teacher educators often discuss their work with colleagues and that such discussions were seen as valuable in supporting individuals. At the same time, we wanted our collaborative discussion to be more than sharing our experiences with each other and instead focus on the deeper meanings that identifying assumptions could provide.
In this respect, Brookfield (1995) became useful in as much as he suggests there are, at least, three different types of assumption. The easiest to uncover, are prescriptive assumptions, (assumptions about what we think ought to be happening in a particular situation,) and causal assumptions (assumptions about how different parts of the world work). In contrast, Brookfield suggests the assumptions that are the most difficult to surface are the paradigmatic assumptions (structuring assumptions we use to order the world into fundamental categories). Using these categories it was possible to argue that our individual projects were useful in surfacing prescriptive and causal assumptions. The value of our collaborative discussions then, would be on helping us to uncover our paradigmatic assumptions.

In our case, the collaborative discussions helped to identify several insights that are worth highlighting. Firstly, our shared experiences support the notion that pedagogical issues are highly situated and emerge from the particular pressures, constraints, and situations practitioners encounter in their daily teaching. These situations are unique to the individual and setting, and as such require unique solutions. Secondly, and connected to the first, the shared experiences also reinforce the deeply layered, nuanced and interconnected nature of teaching. Understanding the issues each practitioner encounters requires a contextual understanding of how such issues become issues in the first place. While it is alluring to believe that the issues share some global commonality, it appears folly to believe in generic solutions. This leads to our third insight, that there are deep connections between assumptions and pedagogical decision making. There are benefits from being able to see how they emerge and become mediated by the constraints of one's individual setting in order to challenge and refine them.

These insights would suggest that a core aspect of paradigmatic assumptions relates to the complexity of practice, which suggests pedagogical situations and problems emerge from the unique socio-material networks of power that constitute them. Framed in this way, our prescriptive and causal assumptions have developed over time as effective ways of acting within our immediate contexts and help guide our actions as competent adapters and managers of the situations that we encounter in our particular contexts. As a paradigmatic assumption, acknowledging the complexity of practice also means seeing teaching as an intensely human activity in which generic solutions seldom work.

With that in mind, we take from our collective research that hunting out assumptions is a valuable and necessary exercise if our practice is to remain authentic, relevant and dynamic. This research represents various contexts and countries, curriculum disciplines, practicum experiences and assessment practices. We contend that a further criteria of self-study research is that it has catalytic validity i.e. that we act upon our findings and transform our practice in measurable ways (Loughran, 2006). We acknowledged that even when uncovered, assumptions require considerable focus and fortitude if they are not to slip away to impede our practice again. Shedding light on assumptions leads to “powering up” pedagogical approaches and improving practice, a fundamental aim in self-study research, but we must be ever vigilant in ensuring that the windows remain clear and the light continues to come in.

References


At the top of every syllabus: Examining and becoming (critical) reflective practitioners

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In this paper, we explore what it means to become a reflective practitioner in the field of teacher preparation. We are two new teacher educators working at different universities in the Northeast United States. One is a mid-sized private university in an urban area, the other a mid-sized public university in a rural area. In our positions, we prepare, teach, and supervise undergraduate and graduate students as they work to complete state certification requirements to teach in early childhood and elementary classrooms. Both of our programs utilize (at least nominally) a reflective practitioner model for teacher preparation. Over the course of one semester, we engaged in the dual-level process of collaboratively examining what it means to become critical reflective practitioners (Brookfield, 1998; Larrivee, 2000; La Boskey, 2004) while also preparing social justice oriented pre-service teachers.

The reflective practitioner model originated with John Dewey (1933), who described reflective thinking as a process that involves experiencing and questioning very practical problems during learning. This framework was formalized for the field of teacher education by Donald Schön who defined reflective practice as the continuous and cyclical process of examining both one’s own actions and the context and values which influence those practices (1983, 1987). The reflective practitioner, according to Schön, aims to connect theory with practice, using inquiry to explore the challenges a teacher faces when working with students in the classroom. Over the past thirty years, Schön’s work has become widely adopted by teacher education programs across the United States (Loughran, 2002; Richert, 1990; Valli, 1993; Zeichner, 1987). This “reflective teaching movement” emerged as a way for programs to answer the call for teachers to become more adept at understanding their students’ complex social, cultural and political learning contexts (Liu, 2015, p. 137). But, for many teacher preparation programs, the grounding concept behind reflective practice has become disjointed with the practice of preparing teachers, with multiple, unclear definitions of how to engage in reflective practice (Zeichner & Liu, 2010).

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Additional critiques of the model have identified the lack of a critical lens and examination of power during the cycles of reflection. Brookfield (1998) described how practitioners (in this case, health professionals) need to be more “aware of those submerged and unacknowledged power dynamics that infuse all practice settings” (p. 197). We must go beyond the inward reflection of our own decisions and critically examine the broader contexts, biases, and assumptions evident in our practice (Loughran, 2002).

With these critiques of the model in mind, we began this self-study focused on the following research question: How do we, as new teacher educators, engage in critical reflective practice? And, what challenges do we face when engaging in such work?

Objectives and theoretical framework

In order to investigate our own learning as teacher educators, we draw from social practice identity theory (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Lave, 1996), which conceptualizes learning as deeply personal, non-linear, holistic, and complex. Identity theory understands learning as situated within particular contexts where individuals use the cultural tools available to them to construct understandings of themselves and the world around them. Our analysis purposefully examines the figured worlds we occupy (that span universities and PK-12 schools), the cultural artifacts and tools within these worlds (i.e. accreditation requirements, common course syllabi, and the reflective practitioner model), and the ways we make sense of ourselves and our work within these spaces. We recognize that these culturally and socially constructed worlds provide both opportunities and constraints, and this self-study explores how to intentionally develop our identities as critically reflective practitioners by examining our experiences within these constrained worlds and seeking out places where we can have the greatest sense of agency.

While most examinations of identity development investigate others (Alsup, 2006; Holland et al., 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Olsen, 2008), we are combining identity theory with reflective practice in order to investigate our own learning as well as the learning opportunities provided to our students. This works well for a self-study, because it provides a set of conceptual tools that directed both our reflective journal writing and our analysis.

Methods

In this self-study, we were the primary participants: two full-time tenure-track teacher educators, one in her first year as a faculty member and the other in her second. During the course of this project, we both taught undergraduate education courses and supported students in their field experiences. Over the course of the year, we engaged in periodic journaling about our experiences as teacher educators. On average, we wrote 1-2 page journal entries two or three times per month. These journal entries focused, by design, on how we conceptually understood what it means to be a critically reflective practitioner. Our journal was kept on a shared Google doc, so each of us could read and respond to the entries at all times. The journal operated both as a personal reflection and a dialogue, as we continually responded to issues that were previously raised. In the comments section of that document, we tracked the major themes that were emerging in the study. In addition, we spoke on the phone about once a month, to further identify and discuss these themes, connecting them to our understanding of critical reflective practice and our developing identities as teacher educators. We analyzed our journal using an online qualitative software, each of us individually coding the journal for the major themes and topics that emerged from our writing, then discussing how those themes related to, or even transformed, our conceptual understanding of reflective practice.

Findings

At the conclusion of this one year self-study, we found space to question the model and practice of reflective practice. In questioning that model, we also focused on the ways that our students
were challenged by the reflective aspect of teaching, and saw teaching as a performance instead of an opportunity for inquiry and collaboration with their students. Below is a description of these findings, along with a proposal for how teachers and teacher educators can begin to engage in more critical, in-depth, and collaborative reflective practice.

**Questioning the model and opportunities for change**

The first finding of this self-study emerged early in our discussion, as we discovered a lack of clarity on what counts as reflective practice, even within our own courses and programs. While both of our programs nominally employed a reflective practice model, there was no clear explication of the model; it was simply included in the syllabi template for each course. When one of us asked our students how familiar they were with the framework, they stated that it was simply: “at the top of every syllabus.” We reflected together on how we hadn’t discussed the model with our new colleagues, nor had we spent time examining how it related to our teaching practice: “I have never had a discussion about reflective practice with any of my colleagues… Why is this?” While the syllabi contained vague representations of Schön’s concept and definition, there was no pedagogical discussion about how this might translate into work with pre-service teachers in either a general way or in relation to our local contexts. Moreover, the simplified representations of reflective practice we found in our syllabi lacked any real attention to the critiques that have been made about the model including an emphasis on the individual over broader educational contexts, and insufficient attention to issues of educational equity (Zeichner, 2008).

Despite this lack of clarity about the model, we also discovered that multiple times throughout the project, we wrote about opportunities we had, especially as new and junior faculty, to question this model. We found opportunities during our department and program meetings to discuss the model, raising our questions and critiques:

...during this meeting I brought up our current conceptual framework on reflective practice - noting that it felt dated ...and I thought this was a perfect time to re-imagine what our conceptual framework could or should be - something more critical that examines aspects of power, social justice, and collaborative meaning making for our students. Our university has encouraged all programs to think more broadly about the process of critical thinking.... multiple people in the department, including the department chair, said that they encourage this kind of re-thinking and are excited about doing this work.

We found that our colleagues were open to the idea of re-examining the reflective practitioner model, acknowledging that this framework needed to be revisited. We came to realize that by bringing the conceptual framework to the forefront of our own practice we, in turn, were able to think about how to revise, or even transform, the concept of reflective practice for our students. However, as tenure-track junior faculty, we also realize that this kind of work takes time, support, and collaboration, most of which may not be recognized as important endeavors in our paths towards tenure appointments. We asked one another: “is reflective practice a component of our research, service, or teaching?” The more we discussed this kind of conceptual work, we believe that authentic critical reflective practice could, and perhaps even should, serve all three areas of our profession, acting as a bridge between them.

**Lesson planning and teaching as performance**

We found that much of our writing concentrated on the focus of skill-building in teacher preparation and the tension this posed for us and our students. The teacher education literature frequently describes teaching capacity as a combination of knowledge, skills, and dispositions (McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright, 2008), however this framework has been critiqued as being overly technical and failing to account for the holistic development process of becoming a teacher (Buchanan, 2017). One of the ways the technical emphasis surfaces was around lesson planning, which overwhelmed the students and constrained our broader work of inquiry and
Students struggled to navigate the demands for lesson planning from their methods courses, the expectations of their cooperating teachers, the curricular constraints in schools (including material, pacing guides, and accountability demands), and their own goals as developing teachers. We struggled with the connection between lesson planning and critical reflective practice, as the typical cycle of planning, teaching, and reflecting on the individual lessons didn't match the kinds of broad contextual and critical reflection we were trying to encourage.

As we tried to puzzle through this dilemma of lesson planning, which we felt was a necessary skill for new teachers to acquire (we certainly plan for our classes), we realized that our pre-service teachers had developed such a reliance on the planning templates that their understanding of teaching was planning a lesson (often using a particular format) and then executing that lesson. As one of us wrote in our journal: "I have found that the students have become so steeped in using this template that they appear to see it as the one and only way to plan and implement lessons with children."

This relatively narrow view of teaching seemed reinforced by the typical lesson-observation cycle, where supervisors observe individual lessons in isolation. And we worried that this inadvertently encouraged pre-service teachers to see teaching as primarily technical and perfunctory. We also noticed a trend among our pre-service teachers of only recognizing PK-12 student learning when it was made visible in a written format like an exit slip or worksheet. Both the regular demands for planning activities and the typical lesson-observation cycle implied to pre-service teachers that teaching is a performance, much like a well-orchestrated play being performed from a script. For example, when one of us asked a pre-service teacher how her lesson went during a post-observation discussion, the student teacher kept describing how well she got her point across, focusing on her performance rather than on student learning.

When this experience is embedded within the broader context of education, where performance has become a major part of education reform (Ball, 2003; Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006) the privileging of performance in teacher education can be understood as part of larger technical-rational approach to teaching (Mockler, 2015). We found that this narrow focus ran counter to the kinds of critical reflection that we wanted our pre-service teachers to engage in. We realized that we needed to shift away from a focus on planning lessons to getting our pre-service teachers to think about learning experiences. They needed more opportunities to explore what learning looks like, both inside and outside of classrooms, in order to begin to think of themselves as designers and facilitators of learning experiences rather than performers who script and present a lesson.

One of the major challenges we faced with developing social justice-oriented educators was that our pre-service teachers worked with a host of mentors who were not necessarily engaged in critical reflection. This was due, in part, to the structurally and conceptually fragmented nature of teacher education (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2012). Because of this fragmentation, pre-service teachers received conflicting messages about the purposes of schooling and the nature of teaching and learning. Teacher education programs rarely address these conflicts directly with pre-service teachers, which forced them to attempt to create conceptual coherence on their own (Britzman, 2003). We attempted to address this directly, and felt that much of our time was spent helping them unpack and analyze the limited, standardized, and often oppressive nature of schooling. As we wrote back and forth in our journal:

Rebecca: I talked with [a student teacher] after the lesson, and she felt constrained by needing to use the [required] curriculum. This wasn't the kind of teaching she was interested in, but she didn't know how to get around it. I tried to give her some suggestions with my feedback, but I was left thinking that the best I seem to be able to do in this constrained space is help them see the constraints...which feels like a cop out.

Margaret: I so often feel this way. I wonder if I am bringing too much damage to our conversations when I ask them to critique the practices that they are seeing, or the learning environments, or the discourse being used by their mentor teachers in the fieldwork. At times I feel like I am only pointing out what's wrong.
We began to realize that in order to engage in transformative teacher education, this collaborative reflection needed to extend beyond our own self-study. The space for change that emerged among other faculty members in our department must be extended to include the other kinds of teaching mentors that our pre-service teachers work with. As part of the conceptual and organizational change that has begun in our programs, we believe that collaborative reflective practice requires programs to reframe our partners (teacher supervisors and cooperating teachers) as learning partners with pre-service teachers instead of masters overseeing apprentices. This collaborative reflective process should include the pre-service teacher and all of their teacher educators, and we must engage in the complex questions that address the contextual constraints at work in PK-12 schools.

Discussion

Examining our own identity development through critical reflective practice forced us to analyze the figured world of teacher education and how it manifested at our institutions. We found that reflective practice was a common part of the cultural milieu of this figured world. However, it operated as an empty signifier (Barthes, 1970) – not explicitly connected to theories of learning or teaching and therefore imbued with individual meanings that teacher educators or pre-service teachers applied to it. This made it a difficult model to apply and practice, as it lacked any conceptual coherence. Within this figured world, lesson plan templates served as important cultural artifacts and the act of lesson planning a cultural practice, both of which encouraged our pre-service teachers to take up a rational-technical professional identity. Our findings align with Zeichner’s (2008) argument for why reflective practice has done little to promote “genuine teacher development.” Zeichner argues that teaching has become a “technical activity” (p.4), where a student is encouraged to reflect on their own decisions with the main goal of replicating a lesson plan, curriculum, or method that improves students’ assessment scores. This reflection is a “fine-tuning” process, with incremental shifts in practice towards advancement. It is also an inward process, focused on the decisions and practices of the students and teachers, ignoring the broader social contexts. Our students’ focus on lesson planning demonstrate this fine-tuning. However, we did find that by placing the critical reflective practice at the foreground of our work with students and examining it through journaling, we were able to establish a clearer definition for ourselves, which guided our work with our students. This process provided us with an impetus to reach out to our colleagues about re-examining the frameworks undergirding our programs; we were heartened by the interest and encouragement we received.

Inspired by this work, we propose the following set of questions that both teacher educators and PK-12 teachers, might ask to promote a critical, in-depth, collaborative reflective practice:

1. **Ask who & where:** Who are your students? Where are you teaching? What assumptions are you making about your students? Including: their learning processes, their cultural and social worlds, and their abilities and challenges. What do you know about your students and their families and how does that affect your practice? What are the demands placed on you at the school? What are the available resources? How do the demands and resources relate to your goals as an educator? How is power operating in these spaces to privilege and/or marginalize people, ideas, or approaches? As educators, we need to create space to reflect on who our students are.

2. **Ask how & what:** How and what do you teach? Describe your practice and why you do it. How is your practice and the content altered by the context - the social and cultural worlds - in which you are teaching? Imagine how your teaching practices could be altered, with different ways to connect and communicate with your students.

3. **Ask why:** Why do you teach the way you do? What about yourself, your students, and your understanding of the world influence the way you teach? As an educator, what are you committed to? What do these commitments say about you and your students?
Next steps

Research on teacher educators demonstrates that there is little professional preparation and induction for new members to the profession (Olsen & Buchanan, 2017; Murray & Male, 2005). And our experiences as beginning teacher educators are consistent with these findings. This inquiry-oriented support system intentionally focused on our development as teacher educators (rather than as researchers who also happen to teach teachers). In the next steps of our work, we hope to share our findings from this self-study with our colleagues to open discussion and space for collaborative discussion of our conceptual frameworks. We found the collaborative process generative, and we would like to extend this work to include other faculty members in our departments as well as teacher supervisors and cooperating teachers. Next steps might involve imagining both a process (and a set of resources necessary to make it happen) that allow supervisors, cooperating teachers, course instructors, and pre-service teachers to collaboratively engage in critical reflective practice.

In addition, we aim to further review how our students are understanding critical reflective practice and learning to engage in such work. In this work, we hope to specifically identify which required activities in our programs ask them to engage in deep collaborative inquiry and which activities promote individualized performance. The next phase of our work will do this more explicitly by linking the identity development of pre-service teachers we are working with to our own reflection and instructional practices, which will allow us to trace the trajectory of pre-service teacher learning embedded within a relational understanding of teacher education.

References


Unfolding unplanned teachable moments

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Case

In the foundation course for practicing teachers at the university where I teach, I gave a group assignment on Kolb’s learning styles. The teachers were divided into smaller groups organised based on those learning styles. They worked on the assignment for about an hour. One group, the doers (accommodators), thought the assignment took way too long. Reacting emotionally, I thought: “Oh, they didn’t like it!” I perceived their discontent as a personal failure. Consequently, I was not able to adopt a broader perspective and ask: “Why did it take too long for you? Does it have anything to do with the fact that you are the doers?” Neither could I ask: “What did you learn from this? Did others also learn the same, or did they learn something else?” In summary, I left this learning moment untouched, as I did not recognize it. This experience became the starting point for my self-study research.

Introduction

For five years, I have been a teacher educator in settings including a foundation course for starting teachers in higher education. In my country, this course is compulsory for university teachers, but when they take the course varies1. All participating teachers are faculty of one of the Bachelor or Master programmes at Dutch universities. They have gained university teaching experience but were often thrown into the deep end to learn on the job, leaving them feeling overwhelmed at times. Still, it can take months or even years before university teachers attend the foundation course.

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1 Universities in the Netherlands include research universities and universities of applied sciences.

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The participants’ teaching experience is a major advantage for those who teach them. Their prior and daily teaching experiences are part of their main frames of references. The course focuses on the participants’ teaching practice.

The groups include around 15 practicing teachers (PTs) aged 24–60 years. Typically, I work with a group one day a week for five months (10–12 sessions). This self-study was conducted during the 2015/2016 course.

Some years ago, I started keeping a log to record incidents during sessions that warranted later reflection. This was a way of capturing situations that I had handled well, as well as moments about which I had felt uneasy, thus allowing me to dig in and learn from them.

In 2015/2016, I had an opportunity to join a self-study community of inquiry (Geursen, Berry, Hagebeuk, Peters, & Lunenburg, 2016), which introduced me to the tensions that teacher educators can face, as proposed by Berry (2007).

Based on the aforementioned case from my earlier log, I clearly struggled with the “tension between planning and being responsive” (Berry, 2007, p. 111). When facing unplanned teachable moments, I sometimes get lost in the jumble of this tension. I might not even be aware that a teachable moment is occurring.

The case requires analysis. One of the smaller groups reacted to the assignment in a way I interpreted as judgemental. My interpretation was not neutral: I considered it a personal failure. With this interpretation, I blocked the road to discussing the outcome and missed a teachable moment. In the experience is also embodied that I didn't know how to act, and I didn't have time to think about it for some moments. As a teacher educator, I could not take a time out: at least, I did not feel able and confident enough to do that. Another observation is that the underlying issue that I wished to discuss was what the PTs had learned from experiencing a sequence of course activities (pedagogies). This appeared to be important to me.

**Aim**

This self-study was aimed at investigating how I could become more aware of and flexible in unplanned, teachable moments and how I could learn to use them productively. I was especially interested in unplanned teachable moments that make it possible to ask PTs about their learning experiences: how and what they are learning about their own learning at that specific moment and whether they could use that for their daily teaching practice. My aim was to bring awareness of teachable moments in retrospect, closer to the moment of choice in the actual moment, and to develop my confidence in alternative actions.

**Theoretical framework**

Every teacher educator faces unplanned teachable moments. They are inherent to teaching. In such moments, teacher educators make decisions (Loughran & Berry, 2005). Consider the aforementioned case: Should I draw attention to this moment? What can be learnt from it? How much time can I spend on it, with a view to the overall trajectory? How important is it to do that now, or would it also be an option to do it later? Teacher educators can decide to use such opportunities to transform unplanned teachable moments into teachable moments. The concept of teachable moments merits further exploration.

**Teachable moments**

Hansen (1998) describes teachable moments as “instances in which the learner’s natural defences against destabilizing insights are low so that he or she is willing to consider the need for change” (p. 8). In reviewing the concept of teachable moments in the context of higher education and adult-level learning, White and Maycock (2012) propose “that a teachable moment is a highly subjective-reflective learning occurrence that happens during a pedagogical process or learning event” (p. 323). Their review shows that most definitions of teachable moment try to specify a moment, whether narrow or wider. Teachable moments range from instances, on-the-spot lessons...
and making sense of the moment to occurrences during pedagogical processes or events. The initiator is another element incorporated in the reviewed definitions. Initiators can be either learners or teachers: learners who are willing to consider, who are responsive to being taught or who are made aware of or initiate a spontaneous event, or teacher who respond to questions or interest expressed by learners or who empathetically put themselves in the place of the learner. In the case discussed in this chapter, the teacher is the initiator. This self-study is narrowed down to this premise. Based on the review of definitions of teachable moments, I conclude that teachable moments remain diffuse. The concept of a teachable moment is nevertheless attractive, as it reflects the culmination of a moment.

A further question to be addressed when analysing the case, concerns whether all unplanned teachable moments are difficult, or whether some do not raise the problems described above. From own experience with groups of adult PTs, unplanned teachable moments can also arise with regard to content, concepts or pedagogies.

Unplanned teachable moments relating to content draw on the pedagogical content knowledge of teacher educators, such that ‘subject matter knowledge for teaching is required’ (Shulman, 1986, p. 9). The following is an example of an unplanned teachable moment concerning content knowledge:

Some minutes before starting to explain Bloom's taxonomy, I asked the class: “What are the characteristics of proper course objectives?” One PT answered: “They should be SMART”. We did not elaborate on the answer.

An unplanned teachable moment occurred as I was explaining various levels of Bloom’s taxonomy: memorizing, comprehension and application. I explored the PT’s reference to SMART and demonstrated how subsequent levels in the taxonomy could be addressed by asking: “What does this acronym stand for? Can you apply it to make this example of a course objective SMART?” I was using the answer of the PT to explain different levels of thinking from the taxonomy. It was an unplanned teachable moment concerning subject matter. Such opportunities in class lend themselves well to improvisation.

Putting pedagogy at the centre of attention during class can be a bit more demanding (Hogg & Yates, 2013; Loughran & Berry, 2005). In both articles the authors mention the multilayered character of student teachers’ experiences as a constraining factor.

Focus on the PTs’ own learning experiences

Returning to the case, the aspect that held me back from coming into action was that the incident involved the PTs’ feelings and experiences of pedagogy. Experiences in the sense that Korthagen, Kessels, Koster, Lagerwerf, and Wubbels, (2001) refer to as phronesis. Were the PTs in the doer group bored? Until when had they been intrigued? How did they explain their own learning processes and changing energy levels? The case clearly demonstrates the importance of addressing these experiences on the part of PTs. My underlying assumption is that having access to these processes, this layer of their experiences, is valuable for learning about their own learning processes. The outcomes of this concealed process influence their willingness or readiness to use the same approaches or pedagogy in their own classes. Black and Plowright (2010) refer to this focus as reflection for the purpose of development of practice (on the part of course participants).

As noted above, the topic plays a role when acting on a teachable moment. When pausing a session and taking the step to stop and reflect and think in the moment, my question is, ‘About what should the PTs think or reflect?’ More precisely, I do not focus on the thinking of the PTs, but rather on their experiencing in the moment and in finding words for these experiences. Stop-and-reflect changes to stop-and-experience in the moment. The emphasis is different. The focus shifts from being busy with or thinking about something concerning the course, content or didactical approach to something that the PTs are experiencing themselves. One has to check something in oneself. Hansen (1998) calls this self-assessment. This is a specification of the object of reflection, the PTs have to direct their attention to their own experiencing.
To summarize this deliberation, I am most interested in learning how to act in unplanned teachable moments in which attention is focused on the learning process, in order to bring the PTs’ voices about their experiences into the open. I regard this as a resource for helping PTs to deepen their understanding of their own learning. After expressing their own experiences, they can compare them with those of others and identify similarities or differences.

Mason (2002) states that, although awareness is the first step to noticing opportunities in teaching moments, “awareness alone is not enough” (p. 72). When teachers become aware of teachable moments on the spot, it is difficult for them to stop the processes in which they and the PTs are involved. It is difficult for them to stop-and-think (Van Manen, 1991) or to reflect-in-action (Schön, 1984; Eraut, 1995; Senese, 2016). The second step is to develop alternative actions from which to choose (Mason, 2002; Berry, 2007).

As a teacher educator, I am concerned with missed opportunities, unplanned teachable moments. When I miss such opportunities, however, it does not necessarily mean that PTs will experience a missed learning moment. Teachable moments might look quite different from their perspective. The learning that takes place in the minds of PTs is not visible. To find out about it, teacher educators must ask about it.

**Methods**

My research questions were:

1. **How can I recognize unplanned teachable moments during class and improve my skill in using them by practicing alternative actions and behaviour?**

The second question concerned alternative actions I might take, particularly with regard to focussing my interactions with PTs on their own learning:

2. **Can I direct the PTs to reflect on their own learning processes?**

My participation in a self-study community of inquiry (Geursen et al., 2016) lasted 11 months. The data-gathering period was short (five months in the foundation course), running parallel to the first months of the community of inquiry. Several phases of self-study did not occur neatly in succession. The groups of critical friends during and after the self-study had different formations. One group was the community of inquiry, and the other consisted of my direct colleagues, who were working in the same context and team. Two were also members of the community of inquiry. My co-authors supported my thinking and reviewed my work as critical friends and supervisors.

**Data sets**

One paradox inherent in research on unplanned teachable moments is that these moments are unpredictable and difficult to capture. I therefore decided to build on my experience by making log notes. These notes help to identify the unplanned teachable moments in retrospect. The log notes that I made for seven sessions constituted the first data set. The use of log notes has served as a crucial tool for me. Making log notes soon after a session ensures that I will be able to retrieve the moments in which particular things happened. I write about them so that they do not disappear into oblivion. Bringing up the more critical moments in the session increases my awareness of events. Making notes forces me to wonder what I thought and what I would like to have done with unplanned moments. Missed opportunities rise to the surface.

As I reviewed my log notes, summarizing and comparing the parts about unplanned teachable moments, I developed a grounded theory about types of unplanned teachable moments and formulated a framework for coding teachable moments. As I discussed unplanned teachable moment with close colleagues, they noted that some types of unplanned teachable moments are easy to handle, while others are more difficult, depending on the subject at hand. This reinforced my idea of using the framework to code statements in order to identify their subjects.
As I was not yet able to respond to unplanned teachable moments in-the-moment and on-the-spot, I sought to practice with alternative ways of responding, temporarily in a separate timeframe. How else could I practice my alternative behaviours or actions? Mason (2002) suggests visualising possible alternative actions in one’s mind as realistically as possible. I therefore considered practicing in a retrospect situation a good alternative approach.

I decided to organize debriefings and move the moment of reflection to the end of the meeting. I recognized that, at that point, everyone still had a fresh memory of what had happened during the day. By organizing these reflections as distinct moments, I could video-record them. The debriefings that I recorded at the end of three sessions constituted the second dataset.

These debriefings allowed me to try out my questioning skills, posing questions aimed at identifying the PTs’ learning experiences and made it possible for the PTs to find words to express those experiences.

Data analysis

I analysed the log notes to detect unplanned teachable moments and identify the target moments: those that provided opportunities for starting conversations about the PTs’ learning processes.

From the second dataset, which consisted of 10–20 minutes of video-recordings, I transcribed the conversations verbatim and used the coding framework to analyse the conversations and interaction patterns. Questions and responses were divided into two columns. Each question and each response was coded with one of four numbered labels representing content, pedagogical approaches, PTs’ experiences of pedagogical approaches and PTs’ statements about the applicability of these approaches in their own teaching practice.

Trustworthiness

A critical friend (close colleague) independently coded all of the statements. The original match was 78%. We discussed the differences and decided on definitive codes. I also presented preliminary outcomes to my close colleagues, and all recognized unplanned teachable moments in their own courses. Some were especially interested in how making log notes could be useful. Others wanted to know more about techniques for bringing alternative actions closer to reflection-in-action moments.

Outcomes

To answer the first question “How can I recognize unplanned teachable moments during class?”, I analysed the seven log notes that I had made during the foundation course. In the log notes, I identified five unplanned teachable moments. I was able to resolve two on-the-spot, recognizing them as teachable moments and simultaneously acting in-the-moment.

I found that my awareness of teachable moments during class increased in two ways. First, my preoccupation with unplanned teachable moments made me more aware of them already, as

Table 1: Framework for coding statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Layer 1</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Layer 2</td>
<td>Pedagogy: learning activity or teaching technique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layer 3</td>
<td>What PTs experience about their own learning processes during the session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layer 4</td>
<td>What these experiences mean for their own teaching practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
evidenced in the two occurrences I solved in-the-moment during the session. Second, writing and thinking about unplanned teachable moments sharpened my skill at noticing, observing and unravelling them. Writing log notes proved to be vital in developing my awareness of teachable moments and starting to recognize them in-the-moment.

To answer the question “Can I direct the PTs to reflect on their own learning processes?”, I analysed patterns in the debriefing conversations. I looked for particular interactions (e.g. whether the layers of the question and the answer were generally related). In three-quarters of the questions, the layers of the question and the answer matched. In the rest, the layers were mixed into the answers. Box 1 shows questions of layers 1 and 2 and answers of layers 2, 3 and 4. There was not always a fixed reaction pattern (e.g. a layer-1 question resulting in a layer-1 answer). The different layers that could be distinguished in statements are indicated in square brackets and italics.

**Box 1. Examples of unfixed interaction patterns**

**Teacher educator (TE):** What ideas, events, or parts of the session have changed your opinions about the motivation of your students? [content; layer 1]. When did you learn something about this? [content or learning activity; layer 1 or 2]. What were the moments or things that changed that? [content or learning activity; layer 1 or 2].

**PT1:** What I appreciate about the assignments that you [TE] give is that we can use them in our final deliverables. This is something I’m considering. How can I use it in my assignments [for my students]? Active participation in the session thus saves time. [Experience of an activity leads to use in own teaching practice; layers 3 and 4].

**PT2:** I try out the techniques that you [TE] use, and I notice that it works. I hear that from the other participants as well — maybe with regard to other techniques — and then apply them, and you notice that they work. [Pedagogy and try out in own teaching practice; layers 2 and 4].

**PT2:** So you see that what [TE] is applying is grounded on the things you learn. This lets you make the connection between your [TE] practice and the theory, and you can also connect it back to your own practice. [Use in one’s own teaching practice; layer 4].

**Box 2. Examples of matching interaction patterns**

**TE:** When did you learn something about motivating students? [Experience of one’s own learning; layer 3].

**PT3:** For me, it’s been very valuable to be in the position of [a] student myself. What I don’t appreciate, my students won’t appreciate. ... It brings me closer to the students. I understand them a bit better. [Experiences during the process; layer 3].

**TE:** How does that help you to get them in a more active role? [Use it in own practice; layer 4].

**PT3:** I can make a better judgement: how do I handle this? When I link it to the theory of today, I am more able to change it. [Use in one’s own practice; layer 4].
A second analysis was performed on question-and-answer patterns, focusing on those on layers 3 and 4. In three recordings, half of the questions I asked (18/34) were targeted to these points: what the PTs had learned and how it had influenced their approaches to their students (layers 3 and 4). The 18 questions elicited 33 responses. The following are two examples of these questions.

**Video 2**

**TE:** Looking back on the whole day, how did you experience your energy levels with the different teaching techniques, that you did or didn't like?

**Video 3**

**TE:** You had to prepare and submit a slide about one of these theories. How did you experience the pressure to deliver?

Contextual information: The PTs’ students might experience the same pressure when the PTs decide to give them such assignments.

To answer to the second question in this self-study, my questioning techniques in the debriefings sufficed to bring the conversation to the point at which the PTs voiced what they were experiencing and learning and how it had worked out for them.

**Conclusions and lessons from this self-study**

My study on unplanned teachable moments, as illustrated in the case at the beginning of this chapter, improved my skill at recognizing such moments (awareness). Within the context of this self-study, the analyses of my log notes unfolded several things about unplanned teachable moments in my context. The review of my log notes revealed unplanned teachable moments. Although most became clear to me only in retrospect through my log notes, I was able to transform some into teaching moments in the actual moment. I applied Mason’s (2002) procedure of becoming aware of (Step 1) and becoming able to respond to unplanned teachable moments in-the-moment and on-the-spot (Step 2).

The analysis of the question-and-answer patterns demonstrated that I can initiate the PTs’ reflection on their own learning processes and on how what they had learned worked out in their own teaching practice. The debriefing phase enabled me to develop this skill. The outcomes confirm that I can trust my competence to use questions to direct attention and answers towards the topics that I want to address. This confidence has brought me closer to naturally integrating questioning into my intervention repertoire in-the-moment. After the self-study, I was able to act directly in several unplanned teachable moments in subsequent courses.

For me, it is important to understand unplanned teachable moments better. This involves more than simply becoming more aware of them, as confirmed by Mason (2002) and Berry (2007). Understanding them is closely related to the ability to envision a course of action that makes sense and that I feel able to execute. That is what unfolding unplanned teachable moments is all about.

The question of how PTs perceive unplanned teachable moments, is always just below the surface. To answer this question, further research is needed. I consider it necessary to practice regularly with PTs using reflective questions during the sessions, to practice changing perspectives, to move from an outward-focussed to an inward-focussed view and to ask the PTs how their learning influences their teaching. This self-study has convinced me of the importance of this theme in the course and of my role in initiating these reflections. We have also started to discuss these topics in the team of close colleagues who are teaching the same courses.
Chapter 55: Unfolding unplanned teachable moments

References


Self-coding: A means for crossing the border from reflective educator to early researcher

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Reflective writing is an avenue for self-study and is used extensively as a pedagogical tool for dispositional development in teacher preparation programs (Clarà, 2015; Cohen-Sayag & Fischl, 2012; LaBelle & Belknap, 2016). Educational researchers often use teacher candidates’ reflective writing as a source of data, transforming the teachers’ reflections into the researchers’ data (e.g., Cohen-Sayag & Fischl, 2012; LaBelle & Belknap, 2016). Teacher candidates rarely participate in the data analysis of their reflections, nor directly benefit from the researchers’ work.

As teacher educators, we use reflective writing extensively with our teacher candidates across courses and learning experiences as a tool to encourage candidate dispositional development and praxis. Our shared social justice orientation has led to a long-standing critical friendship (Fahey & Ippolito, 2015) wherein we share resources, reflect and offer each other feedback on our respective efforts to promote the teacher dispositions that lead to inclusive pedagogical practices. In line with the scholarship on teacher dispositions, we define dispositions as the beliefs, values and attitudes that guide teacher practice (Han, Madhuri, & Scull, 2015; Hochstentler, 2014). Necessary to fostering inclusive teacher candidate dispositions, we aim to move our teacher candidates beyond isolated “surface level” teacher reflections (Ryken & Hamel, 2016) to teacher praxis (Freire, 1970) wherein reflection leads to informed pedagogical action (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

As qualitative teacher researchers in the field of teacher preparation, we use teacher candidates’ reflective writing as a source of textual data in research studies inquiring into teacher dispositions and inclusive literacy practices (e.g., Siegel & Valtierra, 2017; Valtierra & Siegel, 2017). Study of student generated textual data has proven fruitful to simultaneously informing our own cycles of praxis and the course of our collaborative inquiry. Our evolving interest in self-study led us to inquire into next steps to deepen teacher candidate dispositions for inclusive practices. It is at this juncture of teacher educator and researcher that problems of practice emerge suggesting areas for future exploration.

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Context

We are teacher educators at two institutions of higher education in the United States. Tina works at Colorado College, a small private liberal arts college in the Southwestern United States. Lesley works at Arcadia University, a liberal arts university in the mid-Atlantic United States. Prior to these academic appointments, we met in our doctoral program and then worked closely as instructors in a social-justice oriented teacher preparation program located in the Southwest United States. Our relationship as colleagues, co-researchers and critical friends has spanned the last decade.

The past three years we’ve engaged in an ongoing research collaboration exploring the development of preservice teacher dispositions for literacy and inclusion via role-play and reflective writing activities (Siegel & Valtierra, 2017; Valtierra & Siegel, 2017). As we analyzed teacher candidate reflections from a previous collaboration, two seemingly unrelated problems of practice dovetailed, providing the genesis for the study detailed in this paper.

Our ongoing process of coding teacher candidates’ reflective journals prompted us to examine the ways in which reflective writing is used more generally in our respective teacher preparation programs. Although structurally different, we wondered if the nature of the reflective writing experiences in our respective teacher preparation programs were robust and cohesive enough to develop the inclusive teacher candidate dispositions and ensuing praxis we envision. In tandem with reflective writing serving as a well-documented avenue for teacher candidate dispositional development (e.g., Clarà, 2015; Cohen-Sayag & Fischl, 2012; LaBelle & Belknap, 2016; Ripski; LoCasale-Crouch & Decker, 2011), teacher candidate self-assessment has proven fruitful to encourage reflection and promote dispositional growth (Diez, 2006). Hence, we were looking for an authentic avenue to merge teacher candidate self-assessment and reflective writing to deepen reflection and ensuing praxis.

Our second problem of practice stems from our position as teacher researchers. Like many other researchers in the field of teacher preparation, we use teacher candidates’ reflective writing as a source of data as we aim to shed light on our research questions. Loughran (2004/2007) reminds the self-study researcher that studying our students’ voices must be far more than a source for researcher feedback and accessible data. We had to acknowledge that in our current practice, our students’ voices moved beyond the classroom to our data set, effectively becoming a tool for our own scholarly endeavors and thereby no longer useful to the students themselves.

At the intersection of a lack of depth and cohesion in reflective writing practices and the need for greater student agency in the use of their reflective writing, new ideas emerged for building student centered reflective practices using qualitative research methods. We set out to explore the possibilities of deepening our teacher candidates’ capacity to study their reflective writing by teaching them how to use the process of inductive qualitative coding. We theorized that rather than erect a unidirectional pathway of teacher candidates generating reflective data and researchers analyzing reflections, teacher candidates could be empowered to use the tools of a researcher in their developing practices.

We designed a two-tiered study wherein we engaged teacher candidates in a new process for studying their reflective writing using the tools of qualitative researcher. As we each facilitated the process of teaching self-coding with our respective graduate students we collaboratively engaged in self-study inquiry around the ways in which teaching self-coding impacted our own cycles of critical praxis (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008) as teacher educators and researchers.
Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to explore the following questions:

1. In what ways does participating in self-coding of their reflective writing give teacher candidates agency to engage in new ways to deepen their self-reflection towards the development of inclusive dispositions?
2. How does teacher candidates' use of qualitative coding of their reflective writing aid in their development as self-analytic researchers, eventually informing cycles of praxis?
3. Does teaching the practice of self-coding work equally well at two unlike institutions?
4. As teacher educators, what can we collectively and individually learn through this self-study to inform our own cycles of critical praxis?

Methods

The study detailed in this chapter was shaped by our 2016 pilot study at Colorado College where Tina first implemented our method of teaching self-coding of reflective writing to teacher candidates. Lesley acted as Tina's critical friend throughout the pilot implementation; we connected regularly via phone and email to engage in authentic conversations and problem solving. This culminated with a week together at Colorado College the summer of 2017 during which we reviewed the student data from the 2016 pilot study, Tina's reflections on implementing the process within the overall context of her literacy course, and traced the evolution of our thinking through our communications across the fall 2016 term. Our objective with this work was to refine our self-coding methodology and study design for implementation in our respective institutions the fall of 2017.

As we crafted a study to be implemented at both institutions, we took cues from Dinkelman (2003) who counsels the researcher that self-study requires an “intentional and systematic inquiry into one’s own practice” (p. 8). We embedded a system of regular check-points within the self-coding cycle to engage as critical friends with the intention of evaluating our success, challenges, and make necessary shifts to our study implementation. We worked purposefully to balance the study of our work as teacher educators and researchers with the study of our teacher candidates’ evolving practice. Working with intention kept the objective of empowering teacher candidates to deepen their self-reflection using the tools of a researcher at the heart of our work, as Hutchings and Shulman (1999) remind us that self-study should also investigate into the “character and depth of student learning that results (or does not result) from that practice” (p. 3).

The fall of 2017 we each taught a graduate literacy course to post baccalaureate teacher candidates seeking certification in K-12 education at our respective institutions (CC, N=12; AU, N=13). Along with a focus on the application of literacy teaching methods, our respective courses concentrated on the development of teacher candidate dispositions toward inclusive literacy so that struggling readers and students with disabilities are deliberately included in robust literacy experiences (Siegel & Valtierra, 2017). Because both of these courses have naturally occurring components of systematic written reflection coupled with overarching themes of inclusion and social justice, the courses were a logical launching pad for this cross institutional study.

Within our syllabi, we each dedicated time to teach our students self-coding embedded in cycles of systematic reflection tied to the overarching course themes. We developed the instructional component for teaching the self-coding self-study method together, inclusive of presentation and handout materials.

We subsequently integrated the work on teaching the self-coding self-study method into the curriculum of our respective courses, implementing the stages of self-coding work at three parallel intervals: beginning, middle, end of course. We engaged our teacher candidates in this cycle of reflection, coding, reflection on coding process during the fall 2017 term, culminating in a values coding exercise informed by the work of Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014).
Data collection and analysis

Data from the four-month study consists of three unique student self-coded journal reflections from the beginning, middle, and end of the course, student coding protocols, and student reflections on the coding process. After each exercise in self-coding and reflecting on process, these data sources were collected and transcribed during the implementation cycle. After each implementation cycle we conferred on the process, shared anecdotal findings and leaned on each other as critical friends.

In order to address our research questions, we focused our data analysis on the teacher candidates’ initial and final reflections on using the self-coding process, as we were interested in the effect self-coding had on the ways teacher candidates engaged in self-reflective practices. Teacher Candidates’ initial reflections were independently inVivo coded by the co-researcher at the partner institution and then reviewed holistically to look for emerging themes. The same process was used with the teacher candidates’ final reflections. Then themes from the initial reflections were collaboratively crosschecked with respect to the themes that emerged from thematic analysis of the final reflections (Figure 2).

Following analysis within group, each teacher candidate’s reflections were studied independently to explore the development of individual responses over time. Again, we began this process by trading data sets from our respective institutions. As we analyzed independent cases, we were most interested with the ways in which our teacher candidates’ self-coding and reflection on process developed over time, parallel to our respective anecdotes and reflections around teaching this form of self-reflection.

Outcomes

We both implemented the study design with fidelity, while making slight adaptations to accommodate our institutional contexts to reflect differences such as term length and class structure, leaning on each other as critical friends throughout. Analysis of our teacher candidates’ data across settings yielded themes specific to each program as well as some thematic similarities across our institutions.
From thematic analysis of the CC teacher candidates’ initial reflections on the process of using self-coding emerged two themes, **Metacognitive Practices** and **Change Over Time**. Self-coding served as a vehicle for teacher candidates to revisit and reflect upon their thinking at the time of journal writing, often uncovering new ideas or dispositional traits. Referring to the self-coding process, one CC teacher candidate wrote, “(Self-Coding) shows my thought process at the time and indicates my knowledge/understanding at the time.” A second theme that emerged from the initial reflections was how self-coding allowed teacher candidates to examine the way their ideas change over time.

After participating in multiple cycles of reflection and self-coding throughout the fall 2017 term, analysis of the teacher candidates’ final reflection on the process of self-coding revealed strong consistency with initial themes. At the conclusion of this process, thematic analysis of teacher candidates’ reflection on using self-coding to study their reflective writing again highlighted themes of metacognition and change over time. Half of the teacher candidates saw the process as a way to shed light on their evolving ideas tied to the course concepts. One teacher candidate reflected “by coding and then re-coding all my reflections, it gave me an understanding as to how my ideas of literacy have evolved and become more complex.” This reflection encompasses larger themes across candidates tied to recognizing growth and examining in-depth their change over time. Metacognition also resurfaced as a theme in some of the teacher candidates’ final reflections. Consistent with initial themes, the process of engaging in self-coding of their reflective writing supported the teacher candidates to contemplate their process of thinking and reflecting. Teacher candidates wrote the process of self-coding, “allowed me to step outside my own thinking/frame of reference and critically examine my thoughts,” and named metacognition explicitly, “helped me to be metacognitive.”

In addition to the above themes, noteworthy are the reflections of two candidates who viewed the self-coding process as a potential vehicle for the development of their continued professional learning, “I want to continue to use this strategy to hold myself accountable to learning and growing continuously,” and in the development of their ever-evolving teacher dispositions, “I need more practice at it, but I think self-study in this way will help me improve my personal dispositions.”
Arcadia University

Similar to CC findings, thematic analysis of the AU teacher candidates’ initial reflections on the process of using self-coding to study their reflective writing revealed two themes, Understanding Thoughts and Evolution Over Time. Self-coding served as a tool for teacher candidates to make sense of their thinking, often prompting refinement of their original reasoning. Referring to the self-coding process, one AU teacher candidate wrote, “I feel that as I study my reflective writing it helps me to analyze my thoughts and resolve any ideas that I may not have fully developed. I can also generate new ideas that support my reflections.” A second theme that emerged from the initial reflections was how self-coding could potentially help teacher candidates see their reflections evolve over time.

After participating in three cycles of reflection and self-coding the fall 2017 term, outcomes from the teacher candidates’ final reflection on the process of self-coding were inconclusive. Over half of the teacher candidates either did not respond to the final reflection or their response was off topic. Although final reflections were limited, two teacher candidates found the process valuable in helping them to “gage my comprehension” and as one participant wrote, “Reflecting on literacy gives you a new perspective, as does analyzing writing with research methods. You can see things you might not have seen or noticed the first time around, which can open you up to new ways of thinking.”

Cross institutional outcomes

The CC themes of Metacognitive Practices and Change Over Time corresponded with AU themes of Understanding Thoughts and Evolution Over Time. Teacher candidates at CC tended to use language from the education discipline such as “metacognition” and “disposition,” while AU students were articulating the same message in less technical terms. Cross-case analysis of both institutions revealed that teacher candidates—to varying degrees—viewed this approach to self-study as helpful to reflecting on their understandings and gaging their growth relative to course concepts. Although the language used by teacher candidates differed across institutions, these two themes were salient for both groups.

Implications

We began with the premise that the ways and means of facilitating reflective writing with our teacher candidates was limiting and did not provide candidates an avenue to study their emerging practices and dispositions in a deep manner. Simultaneously, we held that the tools of research should not be proprietary to the researcher, that teacher candidate reflections belong most to them and thinking like a researcher could be another way to reflect upon personal practice in a deep way to encourage sustained and transferable development. Our findings suggest that our self-coding self-study method is promising in supporting teacher candidates’ metacognition and self-evaluation of progress over time. However, inconsistent results between institutions suggest important considerations around the role of context in engaging teacher candidates in this method of self-study. Finally, as teacher educators and co-researchers, we attained valuable insights that enlighten future cycles of critical praxis.

Effect of self-coding over time

Both initial coding of individual responses and thematic analysis show the process of self-coding promotes further thinking and reflection on practice. However, engaging in the process multiple times did not demonstrate noticeable shifts in the ways the teacher candidates thought about the value of the process. Responses indicated that engaging in the process more frequently was beneficial, but engaging more frequently did not necessarily change the ways in which most teacher candidates found it to be beneficial. The AU teacher candidates showed a stronger positive response to self-coding at the beginning of the study, suggesting potential fatigue with the process by the end. Analysis of CC teacher candidates’ reflections did not indicate the same fatigue in that the quantity and structure of the reflections were consistent throughout the process, but the
responses were thematically similar from the beginning of the process to the end, also suggesting a positive response to self-coding, but not one that evolved over time.

**Context and methodological fit**

At the outset of this study, we set out to explore if teaching the practice of self-coding could work equally well at two unlike institutions. This study taught us that “equally well” is not a good metric. Our institutions are quite unlike. During the four years Tina has been at Colorado College and the three years Lesley at Arcadia University we have engaged in many conversations around which components of teacher preparation are generalizable and which are dictated by the parameters of the institution. The graduate teacher preparation program at CC is a compressed format cohort model wherein the first course is focused on action research methods. Conversely, most graduate students at Arcadia attend part-time and take courses at their convenience. Most teacher candidates have not had graduate level exposure to research methods at the time of their literacy course.

In Colorado College’s teacher preparation program, reflective writing has evolved into a practice wherein candidates keep a reflection journal throughout their program and use it across courses to engage with routine prompts, self-analysis and opportunities for critical dialogue. At Arcadia’s program, reflective writing is a common, but not systematic practice, taking place in isolated circumstances, tied to specific courses, assignments, or field experiences. These programmatic differences suggest that context of the institution greatly influences how academically ready teacher candidates are to engage in the work of systematically and independently using self-coding with their reflective writing.

The challenges in implementing the same study design in two unlike academic institutions were made most visible in the teacher candidates’ understanding and skills around research processes. Yet, our outcomes suggest that teacher candidates at both institutions value reflection and saw merit in the self-coding self-study method, leading us to rethink the rigidity of our approach that framed the self-study self-coding process as engaging in “research”, a discipline in which some participants lacked exposure.

**Self-coding self-study future work and collaboration**

Moving forward at Colorado College, Tina hopes to facilitate the self-coding self-study method with the next cohort of graduate students using a program-long disposition notebook. By using their disposition notebook to lead a 14-month bi-monthly self-coding self-study of their reflective writing, it is anticipated that participants will be able to assess and reflect upon their dispositional development over time by using prompts designed to cultivate teacher professional dispositions. Tina will keep her own disposition notebook to support her self-study process and use her responses as examples to model the self-coding self-study process.

Because Lesley’s institution does not function on a cohort model, a structure for embedding the self-coding self-study work is not as readily apparent. Using findings from this study and with Tina as a critical friend to support the process, Lesley will begin the self-coding self-study process in her fall literacy class and then ask for teacher candidate volunteers to continue the process for the following two semesters as the teacher candidates complete their program and move into student teaching. Like Tina, Lesley will complete her self-study work alongside her students and model the process, simultaneously engaging in the development of her dispositions as professor of teacher education.

Adherence to the single study design in two different institutions was an exceptional learning experience and the role of critical friends throughout this process was instrumental in our growth as teacher researchers. As self-study researchers, we tried to navigate the tension of adapting to our respective teacher candidates’ needs while maintaining fidelity to implementing our methodology. Sticking to our study design allowed us to collectively explore innovations to commonly used reflective practices in teacher education while addressing our third research question on the generalizability of such a process. Extensive conversations throughout this process...
shaped our thinking about what it means to think about teacher candidate self-reflection, the role of academic researcher, and how we conceptualized empowerment through student voice. It was only through continued dialog that we were able to deconstruct our assumptions around the value of framing this process from a researcher lens and to more closely examine the value that could be derived from process. As teacher educators, this experience was a strong reminder that just as our teacher candidates must discover that one's classroom context is at the root of effective curricular and instructional decision making, our individual approaches to teaching self-coding self-study should be designed and adjusted for the institutional contexts in which we work.

References

Reflection: From intuitive to intentional

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Although being reflective is an integral quality in becoming a teacher (Finlay, 2008; Glasswell & Ryan, 2017; Loughran, 2017), it does not necessarily come naturally (Senese, 2007). Too often learning to be a reflective practitioner is left to the individual to discover rather than being purposefully integrated into one’s practice (Berry, 2007; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Those who teach teachers about becoming reflective practitioners recognize that “The tension between delineating specifics of reflective thought and preserving its complexity is one with which teacher educators constantly struggle” (Jay & Johnson, 2002, p. 75).

The two authors of this paper, along with many teacher educators, believe that becoming reflective practitioners is vital to good teaching (Dalmau & Gudjonsdottir, 2002; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Russell, 2007). We also believe that we have been reflective practitioners in our combined 70 years of school teaching, but we did not necessarily know where or when in our lives or careers we learned to be reflective. Our intention for this research was to shed light on our own journeys to becoming reflective educators. Self-study was a methodological means for us to look inward for the origins of our reflectivity so that we might apply those results for the benefit of developing reflective practitioners (LaBoskey, 2004).

Objective

For this research, we asked: Where or when in our lives or careers did we learn to be reflective? We investigated our personal journeys as individuals and practitioners in order to shed light on any influences that may have led us to assume a reflective stance as teachers and learners. As retired school teachers, we are still invested in learning about how teachers are shaped in their practice.

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We used ourselves as exemplars because both of us, in our own ways, have practiced educational pursuits to improve teaching and learning with and for our secondary and tertiary students and for inservice teachers. We originally assumed that during our combined 70 years of middle, secondary, and tertiary school teaching, we had developed a reflective stance in teaching. However, before pursuing our research into the origins of our own reflectivity, we needed to problematize and flesh out that assumption. Then we might be in a position to investigate our journey in developing our reflective posture as educators.

Brookfield (2017) suggests that teachers have four lenses through which they can view teaching: students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, personal experience, and theory and research. We measured ourselves against his criteria to validate our self-assessment as reflective practitioners. Our evidence has been documented in our extensive writings about our reflective practices (Cleland, 2000, 2017; Senese, 2005, 2007, 2017b). As with many self-study researchers, “Our collaboration has taught us to trust the authority of our experience” (East & Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 74).

Methods

To pursue the resolution of our question (Where or when in our lives or careers did we learn to be reflective?), we chose to use self-study as a vehicle to discovery because “Self-study methodology is one way of developing a basis of knowing for understanding teaching as a discipline” (Bullock 2009, p. 293).

Because we are both retired educators, our process was retrospective. We collaborated over a ten-month period, writing and sharing journal entries before monthly meetings during which we used Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) model of narrative inquiry to guide our conversations. We did not read each other's journaling until we had completed our own entries. Each journal entry was sparked by a mutually chosen question or area of investigation from the month before. The initial process included exchanging written responses to the chosen prompt and then commenting on our partner's response. Typically, these comments included asking questions, making connections, and naming emerging themes. The original response and our partner's comments provided the entry points for our monthly discussions. New questions emerging from our discussions, notes, and journaling led us to ask if what we experienced as teacher-learners could offer teacher educators insights into qualities, events, or traits that might strengthen reflective teaching if incorporated into teacher education coursework or assist practicing teachers to develop reflective practices.

We applied a process of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to analyze our narratives and prepare for our two-hour discussions. Our analysis was embedded in our data: journal entries, meeting notes, anecdotal data, and critical incidents helped to resolve our questions and lead to new questions (LaBoskey, 2004). We also asked if what we learned about ourselves individually and together could have application to a wider audience, namely teachers and/or teacher educators.

Analysis

As we analyzed our individual journal entries, each other's entries, and our discussion notes, categories emerged that suggested tentative answers as to how we became reflective learners and teachers:

- Life experiences/personal history;
- Education;
- Experiences as teachers within the education system;
- Significant/nurturing adults;
- Students;
- Alternate contexts.
Since we both share similar beliefs about teaching and learning, we entered our collaboration assuming that the separate journey that led each of us to those beliefs would also be similar. Indeed, during the analysis of our data, common themes emerged from our stories; however, the narrative within the theme and the importance of the theme was unique to the way each of us grew into becoming a reflective learner. We arrived at these categories after rereading all our journal entries in chronological order, coding patterns, and discussing our commonalties. In this section we explore the similarities and differences in our two experiences as we moved from intuitive to intentional reflective practitioners. Based on the data, each author constructed a summary of and response to each of the categories that had emerged.

Life experiences/personal history

Janell – This was a part of my process that I had previously analyzed for another project, and so it was an obvious entry point for my early writing. Having grown up in small rural community, entertainment options were limited, especially for girls. Playing school and reading dominated my life to the point that my mother would set a kitchen timer and force me to play outside until it rang. I would escape to my grandmother’s house across town; she celebrated my reading passion, often reading by my side. I was also raised with the strict philosophy that “good” people focus on others not themselves. There was never a question that I would attend college and that I would become a teacher.

Joe – As a school-aged child I wanted to stand apart from my classmates for my intellect because I received attention for doing well in school. I was not an athletic boy, so I placed my energies on academic learning both in and out of school. As an adult, I still wanted to excel so I put effort into my teaching practice so I would be known as an outstanding teacher. Oddly (or maybe not so), my teaching philosophy sprang from the way I learn, not the way I was taught. When I began my student teaching I had no assistance (or even materials), so I took the route of keeping the end in mind: Where did I want these students to be when they walked out the door? Most decisions I made about teaching were based on that question and to this day I think that stance has driven my teaching throughout my career. Apparently, this practice has worked because in each of my positions I was left to teach in unique and unchartered ways.

Education

Janell – My MA in Language and Literacy introduced me to the term “critical reflection” and to the learning theories that supported my intuitive practice. This was a beginning of my shift from intuitive to intentional. Theory became the foundation for planning curriculum and for reflecting on the delivery and success of that curriculum. Reflection through a theoretical lens and through the eyes of my students became the hallmark of my teaching practice. As I received more attention for this reflective practice, I continued coursework and began to attend and to present at conferences. I have no recollection of my undergrad coursework impacting my teaching style or methodology.

Joe – I know that being introduced to systems thinking changed the way I approached my craft and led me to think about teaching and learning in a broader, more global way. My understanding of that theory began with my reading of Senge’s (1994) The Fifth Discipline, but it was widened and encouraged by my reading of Wheatley’s (1992) Leadership and the New Science. I was introduced to them both in my doctoral classes. I honestly can say that I do not believe I applied much of what I learned as an undergraduate to my teaching, but these seminal works did influence how I approached my role as an educator/change agent later in my career.
Experiences as teachers within the education system

Janell – Throughout my career, I was given the freedom to experiment with my practice - not confined to existing lesson plans or curriculum guides. I think there were many reasons for this freedom: I preferred teaching struggling learners and administration was grateful someone wanted “those” students. They enjoyed my class so discipline issues were non-existent, and generally parents were thrilled that their children finally liked a class. With this professional respect/freedom came experimentation and continued learning for me. I was still playing school and I worked long days and weekends out of pure joy (without a timer!).

Joe – From the start of my teaching career I collected data, tested teaching and learning methods, and involved students in their own learning, but I really took off as a reflective practitioner when my administrative position in a high school allowed me to attend interdisciplinary conferences and hear speakers who encouraged me to think bigger than I was used to thinking. These experiences widened my perspective and fueled my thinking. Then I began presenting my own work at conferences, and because of that, I discovered that other educators were actually interested in what I had to say and what I was doing. I was accepted into a wider education community. It is because of the people I met who valued my work that I ended up writing for educational publications. Additionally, I learned to work inside a system and subvert it at the same time. The posture of working within yet against the system guided many actions I took as a teacher and administrator.

Significant/nurturing adults

Janell – My writing revealed that significant adults and students were the primary motivators in my learning process. As I entered a full retirement, what had been daily access to both diminished. I also discovered that the group who impacted, challenged, and nurtured my thinking was quite small – only six living: three were retired and no longer interested in continuing research, one was in the process of moving from Chicago, one was too busy in her current position to collaborate, and one (Joe) I had lost contact with. This discovery explained my enthusiasm for reuniting with Joe for talk and writing after a nine-year lull in our professional relationship.

Joe – I can certainly remember and name individuals who have encouraged me and influenced my learning as an educator. Some of these academic pursuits began with me (especially at the start of my “blossoming”), but then have been stoked by professional associates and communities. Individual supervisors and colleagues have assisted me in becoming a more intentional teacher and leader. I was encouraged to pursue my interest in teacher professional development by a former principal, and the position I assumed as a teacher-leader fed into my interest in helping teachers to grow in their profession. The teachers I worked with in the Action Research Laboratory (ARL) at Highland Park High School were hugely supportive as they offered evidence of how their own practice improved by participation in the ARL (Senese, 2017a). I cannot emphasize enough how S-STEP (Self-study of Teacher Education Practices) colleagues at my first Castle Conference encouraged me, not necessarily to write (at first), but to continue what I was designing for teacher development. As time went on, the S-STEP members valued my efforts and encouraged me to write for professional publications.

Students

Janell – I discovered that students not only fuel the passion I have for teaching but they provide me with the confidence I need to be effective in my role as a teacher educator. When I am confident in my teaching practice, I carry that confidence into my work with colleagues. There is a level of optimism and energy that transfers from my classroom
to my work with teachers. I know this about myself, and when I was offered a district curriculum position, I accepted on the condition that I could begin my day in the classroom with struggling readers. I was/am comfortable sharing both the successes and the struggles of my practice with fellow educators, and I delight in having teachers visit my class and talk directly to my students about what works and what doesn’t work for them as learners.

Joe — Learning how to help students learn has always been the bedrock of my practice. Through all the experiences I have accrued in my work, my writing, and distilling my own learning, I have been able to recognize the parts of me that have become intentional. I, like many teachers, depended on gut reaction at the start of my career. Although being guided by intuition never vanishes, learning to teach well dictated that I become more intentional about my choices. Reflection as a cornerstone of learning offers that opportunity. I learned that there is more than the “what” of teaching; there is the “why.”

Alternate contexts

Janell — I have an obsessive need to write! My writing provides me with a sense of clarity, and it allows me to remain optimistic as I problem-solve and plan next steps in my life – daily, weekly, and long-term. I know where I do my best thinking, with what pen, and in what type of notebook. This solitary activity is closely tied to my identity and by staying grounded through my writing, I am able to live the vision I have for myself beyond my notebook.

Joe — Being an accomplished classroom teacher ended up not being enough for me after a while so I found other ways to effect change. Sometimes it came from my role as an administrator at the high school, but I believe my more lasting efforts took place working behind the scenes because that situation, in small ways, provided opportunities to have a larger effect on the whole system. Getting outside of the confines of a single system gave me myriad opportunities to learn and grow. Interactions with professionals who 1) have alternate points of view from my own, 2) engage in playing with ideas to improve education, and 3) recognize the significance of the work I was doing, have been my most worthwhile learning experiences.

Summary statements

For Janell, making the components of her learning process visible, naming them in writing and in discussion, helped her understand the anxiety she was feeling about leaving the educational setting and entering retirement full-time. The essence of her learning process – the act of creating and collaborating with significant adults and students would no longer be a daily practice. Naming this void by reflecting on her current situation through the lens of her learning process provided the insight she needed to seek out opportunities that would support her love for creating programs and for collaborating with others.

For Joe, the validation that came from sharing his work in larger educational arenas offered him the opportunity to consider bigger issues in teaching and learning. Identifying the components of his own experiences with the strong influences on his thinking and practice allowed him to identify the types of contributions he could make to the field and how to make them. School settings offer opportunities to make these contributions but in limited ways. Understanding that his reflective nature and practices could contribute to the field of education has provided an impetus to push ahead. In the end, discovering and participating in communities of like-minded individuals provided him with the drive to improve his practice through the intentional process of reflection.
Outcomes

One significant common understanding of our reflective practices emerged from the joint analysis of our learning histories: the importance of knowing ourselves as learners as a way to scaffold both our current and our future learning (Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2010). This self-knowledge gave us control and provided a reflective lens for creating contexts and designing next steps in our ongoing learning process. The ability to be intentional in our learning allows us to be proactive about finding contexts and content that keep us renewed and revitalized. In other words, we needed to articulate our learning process in a concise and visible way in order to design the next steps in our teaching practice.

In the end, the categories we derived from our research may have given us ways to articulate our histories as learners and teachers, but in and of themselves, these categories may not necessarily offer a useful framework for others. Although our individual answers to our research question differ, the process of analyzing our learning history illuminated the importance of understanding ourselves as learners as a way to scaffold our reflective practice. This named understanding allows us to move the practice of reflection from an intuitive response to an intentional process. We concur with Sellars (2017) “that all theories acknowledge that teacher reflection is, of necessity, based in experience” (p. 8) and our own experiences have influenced each of us in unique ways to become intentional in our reflection.

References


The enduring characteristics of teacher identity: Narratives from teacher leavers

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Currently, teacher education is engaged in a disaster narrative focused on teacher attrition or as Clandinin, et al (2015) label it, teacher leaving. Statistics report that 20% to 50% of teachers leave within the first five years (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). The overwhelming concern of this literature is not on the value of teacher education generally, but on the drain this poses to education. Teacher educators have not considered the value of teacher leavers taking their learning from teacher education forward into their lives beyond the classroom.

Simultaneously, teacher education research focuses on teacher identity (see Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Bukor, 2015; Laskey, 2005; Walkington, 2005; Zembylas, 2003). Research on teacher identity focuses on teachers acting within the confines of a school setting. Studies argue that it emerges as people decide to become teachers, prepare and then teach. It is conceptualized as having multiple meanings, emerging from experience, and being visible in practice (Zembylas, 2003) and is best explored through analysis of life stories (Bukor, 2015). Akkerman and Meijer (2011) suggest that teacher identity has both enduring and transitional elements.

Pinnegar (2012), in a Narrative Inquiry into teachers who prepared to teach but never acted as teachers asserted that her participants developed a teacher identity which they sought to enact in their lives beyond teacher education. Based on Bukor’s understanding that teacher identity is best explored through life experiences and Pinnegar’s (2012) work, we believe that teacher leavers continue to enact a teacher identity even after leaving teaching and it is evident in the life stories they tell.

This study involved four former public school secondary English teachers who used narratives to examine how a teacher identity was evident beyond their employment as public school teachers. It has value in research in education since it also provided evidence that teacher education impacts the lives of the teachers we prepare even after they leave teaching. Three of the participants were prepared as teachers while the fourth participant, a former teacher, was one of their teacher educators. Each of us assert that our identity as a teacher is still an essential part of our lives.

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Chapter 58: The enduring characteristics of teacher identity: Narratives from teacher leavers

Purpose

In this study, we inquired into how teacher identity was present in the contexts of our lives. We wondered, now that we were no longer public school teachers, is our teacher identity evident and valuable. This study identified the lasting and permanent influence of teacher education on the lives of former teachers and their communities.

Methodology

This study explores our narratives as teachers who have left the profession. With Clandinin and Connelly (2000), we assert that the stories we tell reveal our identity. We sought to uncover the how a teacher identity continued in our lives beyond public school teaching. Therefore, this is a Self-Study of Practice (S-STTEP) using narratives to explore evidence of teacher identity.

The characteristics of S-STTEP (LaBoskey, 2004) are evident in this study. It is self-initiated, self-focused and interactive. It is improvement aimed because it provides evidence of the value of teacher education in the lives of teachers, even those who are no longer public school teachers. We use qualitative methods with exemplar validation. The study uncovers assertions for understanding (Berry & Loughran, 2002) of teacher identity in the contexts of our lives: professional, religious, community, home, and social settings (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). While our individual stories were unique, collectively they represent the multiplicity of plotlines in the stories teacher leavers tell.

Data collection

First, we identified a question to guide initial data collection. Second, we created chronicles (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) through Google Docs responding to the prompt: What stories from our lives reveal the ways we still enact our identity as teachers? Third, we met weekly as a whole group for five months. In these meetings, we systematically and sequentially considered each person’s chronicle. The person whose chronicle was being explored told the story while other participants added similar or contrasting stories. As we shared and responded to the stories, we discussed how our identity as teachers was revealed. As we worked, we kept notes within a Google Doc capturing the stories and our joint analysis.

Fourth, between sessions we responded by posting further comments: clarifying points made, asking questions and inserting related stories. We sought evidence of our teacher identity revealed in our accounts and our analysis of current life experiences. We posed ideas, added support, or responded critically. In this data construction and analysis process we utilized dialog as our way of coming to know (see Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2009).

Fifth, throughout analysis, we sought disconfirming and confirming stories. We identified themes and then based on Maxwell and Miller (2008), we pushed further, to integrate the themes which we represent as an overarching concept. The concept was teacher identity as superpower which included the elements of I bring order, I make do, I bestow knowledge, I propel learning and I don't take crap. Finally, to further support the trustworthiness of our findings, we reviewed and negotiated our understandings with other teacher leavers.

Outcomes

Our teacher identity represents a superpower that we carry into all aspects of our lives. We begin by sharing stories that provide evidence of how our teacher identities are visible in our life contexts: Home, Peer relationships, Teaching in non-school settings, Community, and Professional activities. After telling a story from that context, we identify and describe elements of teacher identity as superpower found in that story.

Our teacher identity was evident in all contexts of our lives. Our stories revealed how it was apparent in our homes: parenting children and interacting with others who came into our homes. Teacher identity as superpower was present in socializing with our peers. It was evident teaching
in other life settings. It showed up in stories of our experiences in our communities and was visible in stories of our professional and work lives. For each context we refer to a kernel story and identify elements of teacher identity.

**In our homes and family relationships**

All of us experienced curriculum making with our children--scaffolding learning to resolve problems. In teacher education, we learned to create and enact learning processes and trust them. Anna shared a story about her son Gideon when she created an experience to help him write a paper. She made do with what Gideon brought to the paper, helping him make it stronger. She bestowed knowledge, propelling his learning. Lana told this story:

*I had a child who struggled with a behavior problem. Unfortunately, she did not recognize she was struggling. My husband and I developed a chart for her to record how she felt. As she recorded her feelings, she became better at identifying them and changing her behavior.*

The chart Lana used was a simple reward system similar to tools she used in teaching. Like Anna's experience in supporting Gideon, these both represented moments of curriculum making that helped their children succeed. Stefinee and Celina shared similar stories. In our stories, we all bestowed knowledge and propelled learning by using strategies or curriculum making both of which we argue are part of our teacher identity.

**In our homes with other children**

We all shared stories where our teacher identity was revealed in our interactions with other children. Lana told this story:

*My son and some neighborhood kids were outside. Ben stopped by. They were just horsing around when an older boy, Josh, yelled out, “Loser!” to Ben who was younger. The whole group laughed. I knew this was a moment of emotional collision. It hurt Ben who was laughed at and it gave all of them permission to act like this. I pulled Josh to me asking, “How do you think Ben felt when you called him a ‘loser?’” Then I asked: “Have you ever been laughed at? How did that feel?” Josh admitted not liking it. I said, “You could help Ben.” As a former teacher I helped Josh be a friend rather than a bully. I could have sent him home and never invited him back. Instead, I became his friend. Josh is a difficult child and gets in trouble for his aggressive behavior. I knew the other kids liked him because he was older. Now, I let him come to my house, but I don't let his behavior slide. I try to help him see his power and I suggest how he can act differently. I don't simply send him home, instead, I help him act so that he became a positive role model for the other children.*

One of the elements of our teacher identity is captured in the phrase, I don't take crap. When Lana took on the bully and stopped him in his tracks, she enacted the identity element. But she also taught him to moderate his behavior. She enacted the identity element: bringing order. Like a teacher, she read the situation, intervened, and developed a routine for working with him. She is an active part of his development. Working to propel his learning, she bestowed knowledge by socializing the bully and teaching him to be a positive neighborhood leader.

Celina responded to Lana with a similar story. In unpacking our interactions we revealed our teacher identity. She said:

*That's Todd, who is rude and unkind to the little brothers at our house. My son sees his actions as funny and cool. One day I was fed up and vowed I wouldn't let him come to our house anymore--a stance most mothers in our neighborhood have taken. I thought about it and decided I would let Todd come but when he did, I had to be more involved in the playing. I intervened, shifting the play toward more positive socialization, explicitly teaching Todd and*
my own children to have better interactions. This led me to feel better about Todd, but it also meant I had to be strategic about when he could play at my house.

Again, like in Lana’s story, Celina enacted the teacher identity element: I don’t take crap. Lana and Celina acted assertively, taking on uncomfortable hard work with a willingness to set standards that reap benefits at home and in the neighborhood. Celina enacted the teacher identity element: I bring order, by limiting play times and involving herself more actively. Like Anna’s story of Gideon’s paper and Lana’s treatment of the bully, Celina put in place a learning process that propels learning and bestows knowledge. In these stories, we focused on learning and socialization using direct teaching and modeling, both strategies learned in teacher education.

With our peers

When we thought of the ways our teacher identity showed up in our relationships with our peers, we had lots of stories about sharing strategies, providing opportunities for learning, and teaching skills on request. We chose our stories about book groups because they represented the way teacher identity showed up in peer interactions. Anna said:

As a former English Teacher, I craved a good book group that focused on ideas. I knew I would have to design my own. I have been part of so many awful ones that seem to quickly devolve into reading stupid books or gossip. Book groups often form because we need relationship talk, but I already have a network for mom talk-- I am saturated with mom talk. And then there’s the girl in the book group who shows up without reading the book but who won’t stop talking and talking. So in organizing my own book group, I sought women who could think. Unfortunately, when my sister-in-law, Sharon, moved to Utah I had to invite her to the magical book club I had bragged about for years. She was a conversation hog--a boor. I tried to help her. I said, “It’s not about acing every serve. It’s about gently passing the ball to everyone in the room.” It didn’t work. She ruined my book club.

In this story, Anna’s decision to start her own book club, invite women who could think and her later attempt to “explain” things to Sharon was evidence of the identity element: I don’t take crap. Her focus on providing an opportunity to learn and to gain knowledge are evidence of the element: I bestow knowledge, and she begins by designing a curricular experience that will be more intellectually satisfying. She did this by bringing order to what can be a loosely coupled and dissatisfying situation if someone doesn’t take charge and create a system with clear rules that promote learning.

In response, Celina told a story of why she stayed in an unsatisfying book group like the ones Anna described. She participated because she wanted to be connected to the neighborhood women who knew what happening in the schools and community. She said:

Earlier in my 20s I started a book club where I attempted to use my teaching skills to help women become better readers--it was a disaster. I learned then that I shouldn’t treat my peers like students. When I joined my current book club, I joined with lower expectations and strong control on my teacherliness. I really liked these women and there are nice snacks. The bossy creator of the group decided that we would go around the room in a circle with everyone saying one point. Every month I wondered if I could stick it out. But when she moved, I’ve been able to make organic adjustments to our form--a subtle influence. Last month when someone spoke “out of turn” and then apologized, I said, “We don’t mind! It’s more interesting when we follow the ideas.”

Like Anna’s experience with her sister-in-law Sharon, Celina’s story demonstrates our teacher identity element: I make do. Celina wanted to be in the group. She assessed her learners and realized if she wanted to be in the group she would have to let go of her teacher knowledge about
improving them as readers and engaging in discussion. When opportunity opened, she quit “taking crap” and moved to shift old patterns, propelling learning gently using her understanding about constructing discussions.

In our teaching in other contexts

We are often asked to teach in other contexts. Lana told a story of teaching in an organization for women. She said:

When I took on teaching the class, I began by looking at the topic and spent time preparing— at least 5 hours. I thought about engaging the women, their personalities and tailoring the content to their needs. When I taught, I began by asking good questions requiring the women to think and analyze their own personal motivation. I made it fun, shook things up and got their attention. I asked them to share personal stories. After class many of the women, in a surprised sort of way, commented about how much they learned and enjoyed the class.

In this story, Lana bestowed knowledge, evident in the time spent preparing and her design for the lesson itself. She took for granted her ability based in her teacher identity to grab attention, facilitate discussion, synthesize learning. In contrast, Anna shared:

I was sitting in a class and the teacher, a very successful white male asserted, “I am so successful because I work so hard. If you work hard like me you will be successful.” I knew people were squirming and I couldn’t take it. “You do work hard. But plenty of other people work hard too and don’t enjoy the success you do. Yes your life is possible because you work hard. But you are lucky and some of the luck you had nothing to do with.”

Anna refused to take crap-- she felt an obligation to others in the class. She used elements of her knowing as a teacher to disrupt and then bring order and assert truth.

Within our community

We all had stories of how our teacher identity emerged in our interactions within our communities. For example, Lana described an experience volunteering:

I was part of a group responsible for creating a campaign to pass an $108 million dollar bond to rebuild new schools. In a tight-knit, fiscally as well as socially conservative school district with a middle-income demographic, this was no small task. Our group designed a fundraising strategy using face-to-face contact. Each person committed to personally invite a specific number of friends. The friends agreed to canvas door-to-door. As a former teachers, I read their hesitancy and realized this needed to feel fun and communal. So before door-to-door canvassing, we gathered, chatted, got to know each other, and reviewed salient points. By doing this, I prepared them to be successful--by connecting neighbor-to-neighbor and providing needed information is what allowed the bond to pass.

Lana’s understanding of classroom dynamics was central in this success--she brought order and bestowed knowledge. Lana knew she could draw on her teacher identity to organize and execute this work. Her story also provides evidence of the identity element: I bestow knowledge. She enacted a strategy others were hesitant about which revealed the identity element: I don’t take crap.

In our work and professional lives

We were interested and startled by the ways our teacher identity showed up sometimes subtly and sometimes blatantly in our professional and work lives. Stefinee told the simple story of
being at a professional meeting where the chair couldn’t get anyone’s attention. While her friend, a former teacher, flicked the lights, Stefinee stood tall, clapped her hands loudly and said, “Hey!” Everyone quieted and she then turned over the meeting to the chair, clearly displaying identity elements: I don’t take crap, I make do, and I bestow order.

Lana, working as a communications specialist, told a story of her work as a fundraiser for a children’s hospital. She planned a weekend telethon with on-air reporters and other hosts who encouraged viewers to give. She wrote scripts for the 30 minute segments. In one segment the host unwrapped a syringe talking about how children with diabetes had to give themselves shots. In the middle of the segment the host realized the syringe didn’t have a needle -- it completely unbalanced her. Lana said: After the segment she came unglued on me because I had sent her on air unprepared. I wondered, “Why is this so terribly horribly wrong? Annoying maybe, but catastrophic?”

Lana’s story clearly revealed the element of bestowing knowledge because she prepared segments that communicated information in interesting ways. She was startled and confused that this experienced newsperson couldn’t adjust and make do like any teacher would. Lana’s response provided evidence of the teacher identity element: I don’t take crap, seeing that this was really not her problem. Her story indicated that part of her teacher identity meant she was quick on her feet, able to improvise and use what was available.

Anna told a story about the confidence developed as a teacher. She revealed that when she was younger, presenting in front of people really scared her. She said:

Fast forward 15 years. I am standing in front of 50 parent volunteers training them how to teach my art curriculum. No sweat. Afterward, the parents flock around, “This is so amazing. I could watch you all day.” But the best was after one day of teaching and a parent volunteer walked up to me and said, “I can’t describe what happened when I taught the art lesson this week. It’s like the kids got smarter. It was magic.” She could do this because I taught her how. Teaching is magic.

Anna recognized that part of her teaching identity was having professional confidence to bestow knowledge and bring order to learning situations. She knew how to organize materials and engage non-teaching volunteers so that they could use the art curriculum she constructed to do the same. What we see in this story is something that showed up in other stories, that we take a teaching and learning approach to the problems we face in our lives in any context. We see problems and challenges as an invitation to orchestrate learning situations.

Elements in our identity

Our multiple stories told from differing life contexts demonstrate that we still hold a teacher identity even though we have left public school teaching. This is evident not only in the stories told but also that these stories provided evidence of what we feel are fundamental elements of our teacher identity: I don’t take crap, I bestow knowledge, I bring order, I propel learning, I make do. As we have shared these stories, we thought of moments in teacher education, student teaching, or formal public school teaching where we learned about and honed each element of our teacher identity. We believe that preparing to be teachers and acting as teachers led us to develop these elements of teacher identity, which we think of as our superpower and are captured in the statement: I am powerful. I am a teacher.

Significance of the work

This work is significant because through developing and subsequently continuing to enact our teacher identities, we make a valuable contribution to the communities in which we work, participate, and volunteer. Developing a teacher identity challenges the catastrophizing narrative currently surrounding teacher attrition. Just because we did not continue as English teachers, the resources used to educate us were not mis-spent. As Pinnegar (2012) asserted, preservice teachers
emerge from teacher education with teacher identities they continue to enact which are valuable to the larger communities to which they belong. This work is significant because it reveals the enduring and useful elements of teacher identity development as they emerge in the lives of those who prepared to teach and the positive influence they bring to the larger society. Our teacher identity is a superpower.

References


Exploring the collaborative in a collective self-study

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This paper emerges from the work of a group of teacher educators, the Developmental Physical Education Group (DPEG), at the University of Edinburgh. Building on the group’s earlier professional learning (Jess & McEvilly, 2015) and self-study (Jess, Atencio & Carse, 2016) research, this current collective self-study is part of a collaborative longitudinal project investigating the potential of practitioner inquiry as an approach to teacher professional learning. The aim of the collective self-study was to investigate our practice to find out how we support teachers to engage with practitioner inquiry and the extent to which our practice contributed to this being a participative, situated, and transformative professional learning experience for us and the teachers. The self-study focus of this research also enabled us to further develop ideas around the collaborative nature of self-study that had emerged from a previous (and still ongoing) self-study (Jess, Atencio & Carse, 2016).

Background literature

Professional learning has increasingly been recognised as enhancing teachers’ feelings of motivation and confidence, together with their capacity to improve the quality of their teaching and children’s learning (Day & Gu, 2007). Correspondingly, and notably at the policy level, the last two decades have witnessed a significant interest in teacher professional learning (e.g. Pedder et al., 2010). However, despite this apparent move towards enhancing teachers’ professionalism through professional learning, questions remain about the quality of the learning experiences available for teachers (Desimone, 2009). There is growing recognition within education literature of a need to challenge ‘traditional’ transmissive models of professional learning to create a context for professional learning that is more participative, situated, recursive, transformative and theoretically informed (Fraser, Kennedy, Reid & Mckinney, 2007; Kennedy, 2014).

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While concerns have been raised about the transmissive nature of teacher professional learning, the past decade has also seen more attention placed on practitioner inquiry as an approach to collaborative and transformative teacher professional learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Wall & Hall, 2017). Thinking around practitioner inquiry can largely be traced back to the work of Stenhouse (1975) who developed the concept of teachers as researchers within the process of curriculum development. Reflecting on the work of Stenhouse (1975) and Kennedy (2014), we view practitioner inquiry as having the potential to contribute to increasing capacity for teacher professional autonomy and agency which can ultimately contribute to transformative practice. However, we argue that developing the collaborative and transformative potential of practitioner inquiry requires not only teachers, but also those leading professional development to reflect on and research their practice (Keay, Carse & Jess 2018).

Given that we aimed to investigate our practice, and with its links to practitioner inquiry, we identified self-study as the best approach for the research reported on in this paper. We also wanted to build on our earlier self-study research, which had highlighted the collaborative aspect to our interactions. Davey, Ham, Gilmore, Haines, McGrath, Morrow & Robinson (2011) explore collaborative-collective forms of self-study, although they highlight that limited self-study literature “empirically documents the specific contribution made by collaboration” (Davey et al., 2011, p.188). Correspondingly, they consider how collaboration through self-study shapes, and is shaped by, group and individual identities. Similarly to Davey et al. (2011), investigating our group and individual identities led us to Gee (2000), who acknowledges that people have myriad identities and illuminates how these are performed in everyday life. His four-dimensional framework – the forces of “nature”, positions within “institutions”, the “discourses” recognised by individuals, and experiences shared in “affinity groups” – explains how an interactive mix of these different strands come to the fore at different times, and in different ways, across contexts. As will be discussed later, this literature underpinned our analysis, providing an insight into how our experiences affected us individually and collectively.

Methodology

As previously outlined this paper explores the experiences of four members of the DPEG as they supported teachers conducting practitioner inquiry projects in schools. Table 1 provides a descriptive overview of each member’s affiliation with the DPEG. Drawing on self-study, this paper presents a deeper understanding of the nature of our professional work as teacher educators. Particularly, the varying degrees to which each of us has influenced the development of the practitioner inquiry project that this self-study is part of and, concurrently, how we have interacted with each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Duration of Membership</th>
<th>Area of interest in primary physical education</th>
<th>Number of teachers supporting with practitioner inquiry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>8 years</td>
<td>Middle and upper (aged 8-12 years)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Upper (aged 10-12 years)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Early and middle primary (aged 5-10 years)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Early and middle primary (aged 5-10 years)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Design

The research design was initially guided by LaBoskey’s (2004) key features for self-study i.e., it was self-initiated, improvement-aimed, interactive, employed qualitative research methods, and was mindful of trustworthiness. Following LaBoskey’s advice, the study was interactive in the sense that we invited ‘critical friends’ – the practising teachers we work with and an international colleague, Tim Fletcher, skilled in self-study – to share ‘fresh’ insights about our work. However, while built on a strong foundation, after two years researching our efforts to support teachers (early-2016 to late-2017), we executed a pause to the study in December 2017. We were conscious that our interaction with others was central to the self-study process (see LaBoskey, 2004), but we were grappling to articulate the ways in which the four of us were interacting and collaborating with each other as teacher educators in the project. The pause in the data collection provided space for us to review how, and in what ways, we were individually and collectively shaping the project.

Davey et al. (2011) proved helpful for us to buttress LaBoskey’s interactive feature of self-study research. Their discussion of “collaborative-collective” self-study provided guidance to consider how we individually and collectively participated in the project. A key distinction was the need to separate out the “Me Identities – the Sense of an Individual Self” and the “We Identity – the Sense of a Collective Self” (Davey et al., 2011).

Methods

To pursue this key interest, data in this paper were captured using the following two qualitative data collection methods: audio recorded conversations and self-reflection templates. The audio recorded conversations document the discussions that took place between the four of us during eight ‘group meetings’ between early-2016 and late-2017. These group meetings were largely unstructured to enable each individual member to share thoughts and next steps for the project. The self-reflection templates were designed to scrutinise our individual and collective experiences of working together after two years of participating together in the study. These templates were completed in early-2018 by each member as she or he revisited the project data and a number of key questions provoked explicit reflection about our ‘Me Identities’ and ‘We Identity’.

Data analysis

Our analysis was flexible, recursive and grounded in the data (Boeije, 2010). Analysis of group meeting transcripts involved the following main steps: individually reading and coding the transcripts; sharing these initial codes at a group meeting; merging initial codes into a shared coding framework and integrating the shared coding framework using insights form existing research literature (e.g. complexity thinking). Through this analysis process and correspondence with our critical friend, Tim, we became increasingly aware of how our efforts to collaborate with each other as members of the DPEG were crucial to the research. Recognising the “collaborative-collective” (Davey et al., 2011) nature of our work sparked a reanalysis of the transcripts from our group meetings using the reflection templates.

Analysis of reflection templates involved two key steps. Firstly, the text generated for each question was reviewed by the principal investigator (Nicola), creating preliminary categories by comparing and contrasting the comments of each person. The second step involved Nicola discussing these categories with each member to clarify individual ‘Me Identities’ and shared ideas that constituted a collective ‘We Identity’.

Discussion of findings

Our analysis highlighted the collaborative nature of our self-study, influenced by both our individual and group identities. Consequently, the remainder of this paper discusses the ‘Me Identities’ and ‘We Identity’ within this collaborative-collective self-study, drawing connections to the work of Davey et al. (2011) and Gee (2000).
A strong ‘we identity’ exists

Analysis of the reflection templates revealed that all of us believed there was a strong ‘We Identity’. At the core this strong ‘We Identity’ was our long-standing history, a shared vision, and a common interest. In the following quotation, note how Mike, in reflecting on our ‘We Identity’ in his template, encapsulates these ideas very clearly:

Our ‘We Identity’ is a part of the bigger DPEG, which has its basis in a pretty long history founded on a shared vision and many shared experiences.

In terms of our history together, Mike and Jan were founding members of the DPEG in 2003, with Nicola and Paul joining in 2009. Summarising our eight-year collective membership of the DPEG, Nicola explained most extensively in her reflection template, a general view that “primary physical education” has been our common interest and “complexity thinking” has been our shared vision.

These findings map onto work from Gee (2000) who claims that affinity groups are constituted by:

…allegiance to, access to, and participation in specific practices that provide each of the group’s members the requisite experiences…allegiance is primarily to a set of common endeavours… [and these] create and sustain the group” (p. 105, original emphasis).

Similarly, our allegiances to two main areas of interest – primary physical education and complexity thinking – can be seen as bonding us together and, subsequently, this has influenced the ways in which we interact with each other when progressing the practitioner inquiry project and how we approach working with the teachers.

The collaborative-collective side of our practice

Analysis of the reflection templates also uncovered the extent to which many of the decisions we made about our practice evolved from a collaborative-collective process. This process involved the interactions that took place between us, as four individuals working together, to make decisions about the wider practitioner inquiry project. It is important to point out that our efforts to work together are not an entirely harmonious experience and, as highlighted by Paul in his reflection template, "there are major points of tension between us in the group meetings".

We all similarly identified a degree of tension during our group meetings and Jan starts to explain further the process of arriving at a shared decision:

I think there’s a real strong sense of us as a collective group… and how we…negotiate and discuss…and share and come to a decision about an action we’re going to take.

This quotation suggests that the collective decisions we make as a group arise from a process of negotiation and discussion whereby members of the group listen to, and challenge, the ideas of others. Indeed, the “collective group” process recognised above by Jan, is best exemplified in the following extract from our group discussion data as we prepared for a forthcoming network meeting with the teachers:

Nicola: I think we want to model the research…the suggestion I have is that we…engage in conversation, using the framework for enquiry planner.

Paul: I just don’t want them [the teachers] to think that we’re trying to get data from them…

Nicola: I guess, my thinking…is that we model…and having a conversation about the research process.

Jan: I understand you want to share…But I agree with Paul, that they [the teachers] are there, because they want to do something…
Nicola: I guess I’m maybe not making it clear. I’m saying, we’re modelling...and we’re putting ourselves in the same process as they’re going through.

Jan: So, would you do it in, like, phases, then, so that you’re gonna share, this is how we’ve got our research question. And then...these are the methods...

Paul: It’s almost like a parallel experience between what we’re doing with the study, and how they’re involved in it...But then, Nicola, you are right, that you don’t want to go in and give them a lecture. So, I get what you’re trying to do, and it’s cool.

(GroupId discussion, September 2016)

This extract typifies how ideas about our practice became a group decision by virtue of a discursive process. There are commonalities between our experiences of working as a group and Gee’s (2000) discourse perspective; that is, we are only capable of interacting in this collaborative way because of how “other people treat, talk about, and interact” with us (p. 103). This discourse identity, and the recognition by each of us that the other participants are “a certain kind of person” (Gee, 2000) with a genuine contribution to make to the project, seems to explain our particular style of collaboration.

Having set out two main findings about our ‘We Identity’ – a strong ‘We Identity’ exists and the collaborative-collective side of our practice – the following section will explore findings relating to our individual ‘Me Identities’.

‘Me identities’ remain

Despite the strong ‘We Identity’ just discussed, further analysis of the group conversations using the self-reflection templates revealed that this did not dilute the ‘Me Identities’ within the group. The two main themes that emerged in relation to our ‘Me Identities’ were that each of us had an identified role within the group and we had our own individual approach to how we interacted with the teachers we were supporting with practitioner inquiry.

It was evident that each of us had identified roles within the group that resonated with our institution, discourse and affinity identities (Gee, 2000). Within this collective self-study each of us is who we are partly because of our position within the education system – we all have a teacher identity which has morphed into a teacher educator identity through our work within the university context. This teacher identity is in the foreground for Jan, as the main part of her work involves teaching within primary school contexts. In contrast, the teacher identity is in the background for Nicola, Paul and Mike, which reflects the demands of their lecturer identity where participation in research projects are central with the university context. This is evidenced in one of Jan’s reflections from the self-reflection template:

Initially, I did not think I would be able to contribute (based on my perceptions and competence on research, compared to Nicola, Paul and Mike). However, reflecting on the first interview I feel and there is evidence of my contribution to the process (whole group) and my role with the teachers I was supporting.

Gee (2000) highlights the interactive nature of the way in which the different aspects of identity interrelate, and this was evident in our ‘Me Identities’. Concurrent with our roles as teacher educators, we also had roles within the group that had been formed through our discourse identities; that is, how we are recognised by others in the group. For example, Mike is seen as leading the DPEG because he started the group in 2003, secured funding to sustain the long-term survival of it, and has led a number of research projects. However, this current project saw a shift in leadership where Nicola took on the principal investigator role. This meant that Mike took a more supporting role and “wanted to make sure that Nicola was encouraged to take the lead in the research from the start.” Although Nicola wanted to facilitate the project, and Paul, Mike and Jan saw her as leading the research, she was not entirely comfortable with the ‘lead’ role, as this reflection indicates:
I am leading this research project so feel responsible for developing it. Not comfortable with the term leader though but want to make the project happen and it needs to be facilitated.

Furthermore, the ‘Me Identities’ also emerged from the ‘We Identity’ discussed earlier – our affinity and experiences as a group. We are who we are because of our shared interest and experiences in relation to primary physical education and complexity thinking that has emerged over time. Through this affinity as Paul recognises “we have a deep understanding of each other’s personalities.” This is echoed in a reflection from Jan, where she states:

*I think that our relationships have a huge impact on the whole process. We know each other well, understand and respect each other’s thoughts and experiences etc. This has enabled each person to speak honestly (as reflected throughout the data).*

These quotations and the earlier discussion of our ‘We Identity’, demonstrate how the relationship we have built over time has created a bond between us, yet has also enabled us to retain our own identities, thoughts and ways of working; this was particularly demonstrated in how we interacted with the teachers we were supporting.

While we planned as a group how to develop the focus of network meetings, we did not specify, as a group, how we should interact with the teachers we were supporting in schools. The main reason for this was that we wanted to be responsive to the learning needs and interests of the teachers we were working with. This also, resonates with our complexity thinking background: we recognise the need to allow for learning to emerge and view individuals as self-organisers in relation to the individuals, environment and task constraints they are interacting with. Consequently, this point of view meant that each of us adopted our own approach to interacting with the teachers in their school contexts to support them to undertake a practitioner inquiry.

This independent thinking in how we worked together within the group reflected, to some extent, our nature identities (Gee, 2000). Nicola’s disposition towards being organised became evident in how she worked with the two teachers she was supporting; for example, in the first conversations she describes how these teachers were already planning their inquiries. Contrastingly, Mike’s laid-back nature was evident in the ways in which he organised meetings with the teachers he worked with where they often met outside of the school context in cafes. While working in our own ways can be seen as reflecting our affinity with complexity thinking principles, in particular self-organisation, it also created a degree of tension between us.

The tension gradually became evident through the re-analysis of the group meeting transcripts where it emerged that each of the teachers were at quite different stages of the inquiry process. For example, the teachers Nicola was working with quickly identified an inquiry focus and one of these teachers was the first in the network to complete an inquiry. Contrastingly, the teachers Paul was working with seemed to be making slow progress and the following quotation from his reflection template shows he found it difficult to meet with them and how this concerned him:

*There are times where I spend a lot of time being defensive about the progress of teacher A and B…the need not to steamroll their ideas…being patient, lenient, and my efforts to push them, and doubts about am I doing a good job?*

Our analysis of the tensions that emerged suggested that our group focus on practitioner inquiry as a process and long-term approach to professional learning had been, to some extent, usurped by our individual thoughts and concerns about how to work with the teachers in their school contexts. In reflecting on how to address these tensions Nicola recognised the need to:

*go with the flow and draw on complexity thinking to remind myself that all of the teachers do not have to be at the same stage in the inquiry process and that we all have our own ways of working with the teachers.*
Our process of self-study and analysis of our practice has highlighted that how we work with the teachers in their school contexts is an area that we need to continue to focus on in our practice, particularly as we move into the next phase of the project.

**Conclusion**

With calls for participative approaches to teachers’ professional learning becoming more common, this paper has its basis in the view that teacher educators will increasingly need to support experiences that are authentically collaborative in nature. This paper represents our first attempt to focus on our collaborative efforts as teacher educators to support a longitudinal practitioner inquiry project with teachers. Placing strong emphasis on collaboration in this study has not only provided deeper awareness of our own teacher educator practices and the decisions we make individually and collectively, but it has also helped us realize the need for the self-study literature to further develop this line of investigation in the future.

In relation to our practice as teacher educators, Davey et al. (2011) and Gee (2010) helped us identify the numerous ‘we’ and ‘me’ factors that influence our work. Our ‘We Identity’ had two interrelated features: our shared vision about primary physical education and complexity thinking together with our collective willingness to explore, negotiate and disagree on key issues as the project evolved. Despite this strong ‘We Identity’, our individual ‘Me Identities’ are also evident in the group’s workings. Building on a collective trust and an understanding of complexity principles, we appear to accept the different self-organising approaches that we take individually to our work, which creates a legitimate place for individuality within the overall collaborative project.

Collaboration had a central role in shaping our teacher educator practices and these findings will inform the next phase of this project, but relatively few studies appear to track the particular contributions made by collective-collaborative interaction (Davey et al., 2011). Bringing attention to the limited number of studies in this area while providing an outline of the frameworks employed to document the crucial impact of collaboration on our practices, provides valuable insights for researchers to actively pursue this line of inquiry in the future.

**References**


Chapter 59: Exploring the collaborative in a collective self-study


Using a pedagogy of knowledge integration to introduce self-study to groups of teacher educators

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Three groups of teacher educators from eight universities in Chile have been meeting at regular intervals for more than one year. The groups were led by three individuals who share a strong commitment to self-study of teacher education practices and the associated promise of improved teacher education. As a team of three self-study researchers, the authors also endeavored to act as critical friends to each other during the study.

Rodrigo and Carolina are national leaders of a modest effort to introduce self-study of teacher education practices to Chilean teacher educators. As the teacher educators began to study the literature of self-study of teacher education practices, pairs of critical friends were arranged to identify focal points for studies of their own practices. This work was supported by a book that makes self-study articles available in Spanish (Russell, Fuentealba, & Hirmas, 2016). This report is a self-study by the three group leaders, who are exploring the potential of a pedagogy of knowledge integration to support the growth and development of self-study researchers in Chile. Carolina coordinates the area of initial teacher training in an international organization and is also a part-time teacher educator. Rodrigo is a professor with 20+ years of experience in teacher education. Tom is a professor with 40+ years of experience in teacher education and many years of work in self-study.

In their roles as teacher educators, the three authors share an interest in new approaches to professional learning, particularly ones that show promise for promoting quality learning in future teachers. Rodrigo and Carolina held face-to-face meetings regularly, while Tom maintained contact through email messages, meetings via Skype and occasional personal visits to Chile. These meetings allowed us to share information, relieve tensions, and identify new perspectives regarding the processes of creating a self-study network at a national level.

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Objectives

Three questions drive this self-study:

1. What challenges have the self-study groups faced and what issues have the groups identified for attention in the context of practice?

2. How does a pedagogy of knowledge integration speak to the early issues of practice identified by the participants?

3. What evidence do the group leaders have concerning the responses of group members to their leadership strategies and to knowledge integration?

We identified a pedagogy of knowledge integration (Linn et al., 2006) as having promise in fostering the development of new self-study groups. While the following quotations refer to student learning, we see these statements about how people learn as equally applicable to teacher educators’ learning and to their analyses of their own practices.

Research has shown that instruction is both effective and durable when teachers use students’ ideas as a starting point and guide the learners as they articulate their repertoire of ideas, add new ideas including visualizations, sort out these ideas in a variety of contexts, make connections among ideas at multiple levels of analysis, develop ever more nuanced criteria for evaluating ideas, and regularly reformulate increasingly interconnected views about the phenomena. (p. 1049)

These ideas are consistent with principles offered by Bransford et al. (2000):

- Integration of metacognitive instruction with discipline-based learning can enhance student achievement and develop in students the ability to learn independently. (p. 21)
- Developing strong metacognitive strategies and learning to teach those strategies in a classroom environment should be standard features of the curriculum in schools of education. (p. 21)

Linn and Eylon (2011) subsequently offered four “metaprinicples and specific design principles for knowledge integration” (p. 103). These are (1) make knowledge accessible, (2) make thinking visible, (3) help participants learn from others, and (4) promote autonomy (pp. 109-115). These seemed appropriate as guiding principles for introducing self-study to teacher educators.

Method

Group meetings were recorded and transcribed for analysis, with particular attention to the research questions that focus on the group’s issues and their responses to interventions based on a pedagogy of knowledge integration. Data analysis included identifying patterns emerging in the discourse, with particular attention to knowledge integration. Each author reviewed and extended the other’s interpretation and analysis in order to generate major themes.

LaBoskey (2004, p. 817) offered an account of self-study methodology that continues to be a productive guide for our work:

*I conceptualize self-study as “a methodology for studying professional practice settings” (Pinnegar, 1998) that has the following characteristics: it is self-initiated and focused; it is improvement-aimed; it is interactive; it includes multiple, mainly qualitative, methods; and, it defines validity as a validation process based in trustworthiness.*

This self-study of responses to a pedagogy of knowledge integration was initiated by the authors and focused on their leadership of the groups. The data collection methods are qualitative and interactive, with a goal of tracking the impact of the leaders on the group’s understanding of self-study. Trustworthiness can be judged by others who have, or intend to acquire, experience supporting a group of self-study researchers.
Outcomes

Data were collected in 2016 and 2017. Our focus is on patterns, tensions, uncertainties, and exploration of assumptions identified in the groups' meetings. Attention is also given to ways that the three group leaders are interacting as critical friends as we try to develop a pedagogy of knowledge integration for the groups. After a year of work as leaders of the self-study groups, we have been able to distinguish two significant stages in the development of the groups. The first stage focused mainly on formation of the groups:

*I see myself as an organizer so that the processes and stages take place appropriately. I arrange meetings, request reports, provide feedback, meet with critical friends to discuss the reports and see what steps to provide next, how to support participants, etc. This is the role I usually perform in the development of my usual work. (Journal, Carolina).*

The second stage focused on what we and the groups were learning:

*It is an opportunity to be able to accompany a process of growth of other trainers who are interested in changing their training practices, and in this way show them the nature of our learning experiences. (Journal, Rodrigo)*

In both statements we see indications of what Schön (1983) discussed in terms of frame awareness:

*Their frames determine their strategies of attention and thereby set the directions in which they will try to change the situation, the values which will shape their practice. (p. 309)*

*When practitioners are unaware of their frames for roles or problems, they do not experience the need to choose among them. They do not attend to the ways in which they construct the reality in which they function; for them, it is simply the given reality. . . . When a practitioner becomes aware of his frames, he also becomes aware of the possibility of alternative ways of framing the reality of his practice. (p. 310, emphasis in original)*

The opportunity to repeatedly share with Tom allowed Carolina and Rodrigo to progressively reorient their own learning processes; one of the moments of greatest impact occurred when Tom redirected them in an e-mail message:

*The work of the teacher is not just “telling them what to do” but helping them understand how their thinking needs to develop. Also, they—the teachers or the students—need to understand HOW and WHAT the others are learning from the experience. (Email, Tom)*

This approach invited us to go deeper to establish connections with the self-study groups, not only to guide them into self-study, but also to generate a second stage, where we can share an alternative view in a collective place, probing more deeply into the relationship between our practices and the lines of thinking that support those practices. Schön (1983) wrote:

*When a practitioner becomes aware of his frames, he also becomes aware of the possibility of alternative ways of framing the reality of his practice. He takes note of the values and norms to which he has given priority, and those he has given less importance, or left out of account altogether. Frame awareness tends to entrain awareness of dilemmas. (p. 310)*

*Once practitioners notice that they actively construct the reality of their practice and become aware of the variety of frames available to them, they begin to see the need to reflect-in-action on their previously tacit frames. (p. 311)*
This second stage had other expressions too, as in the following:

*My own view of the relationship between theory and practice has changed since I think that it is not only about relating theory and practice about teaching, but also about raising theory from practice. The teaching-learning conditions in our schools are very particular, they present their own challenges in a context of profound inequity and social violence, which conditions the cultural task in a different way.* (Journal, Carolina)

In our interaction with the different self-study groups, it was also possible to identify a pattern in which the main questions from the participants related to their initial search for a unique way of feedback. Here are two examples of early backtalk from the groups as they take on ideas of self-study methodology:

*I'm going back to my city with the feeling that I do not understand this approach well. Honestly, the feeling is one of disappointment, as I have become aware that I have been resisting an examination of my own experience. In fact I try to be attentive to the effectiveness of my work in the classroom. I realize that I must make a change, but I don't know how to do it. I feel that it is a challenge shared by the team.* (Transcription, Group 2, October 2016)

*One relies on the word of your critical friend. We take into consideration the word that the other gives us. We have the belief that the other knows more, he questions us a lot. That questioning is very illuminating. One writes with the confidence that it will serve us, because your critical friend said it.* (Transcription, Group 1, November 2016).

For Schön, it is central to understand the difference between feedback and backtalk, where feedback refers to talk about the rules and norms that give the opportunity to follow a way previously set out, while backtalk is seen as a strategy consistent with encouraging more personal responsibility for learning and unpredictable student responses to teachers.

*‘Backtalk’—the unexpected consequences of actions talking back to us... also creates an agenda whereby new issues, ideas, needs and concerns can be introduced and responded to in a respectful way, but, ultimately, impact on the teaching in ways that may never have occurred but for the students’ perspective being sought.* (Loughran, 2004, p. 161)

When analyzing the transcripts of the meetings, after a year of experience, there are indications of changes in the formative relationship with future teachers, allowing for the consideration of different points of view and answers.

*I see that they do not take me into consideration (referring to the class of the previous day)... and I asked them to write an exit ticket about what they stayed with... and they did not keep anything that I had told them about. On the other hand, I changed it completely yesterday. Now I have them participating. I told them “I feel like I’m standing here and I feel that you have to involve and investigate more than I do in presenting.” I proposed a series of topics, they proposed others and then we worked together in the construction of the plan for the course. When I gave them the proposal they, the mood changed immediately. And I was happy, because it is not a topic of others, I also have to learn to listen and make things visible to others.* (Journal, Rodrigo)

As part of the exercise of studying our leadership of the group, the integration of knowledge became a support element to move from a traditional perspective to a position that emphasized processes that allowed us not only to support others, but also to look at our own processes as well, generating opportunities to change our practices as leaders. We turn now to a selection of comments from the participants.
General comments from participants

A continuing tension in our self-study groups concerned the way that Chileans traditionally expect experts to tell others what must be done, even when they have never done it themselves. These comments are from teacher educators at three different universities:

In our first meeting we all looked for a recipe for self-study. After some time we began to share our practices and within our group we began to analyze our own development, asking why and how we do some things and not others. This encouraged us to look more closely at ourselves as teacher educators. However, it was not easy because our professional time is not normally intended for sharing with colleagues. It is assumed that we only apply what we know, we don’t think carefully about it. (Group participant, UCM)

I was convinced that developing self-study among the members of the group had to be a shared experience. It is not enough to have another person observe my teaching or listen to my comments if that person is not having a similar experience. (Group participant, UAH)

Now I see clearly the conclusion that those who were just critical friends but not a participant (just friends to others) did not promote reframing of our assumptions or changes to our practices. In this sense I think that critical friendship must be mutual. (Group participant, UCSH)

Specific comments about knowledge integration

Based on what has been said, we also asked the members of the various self-study groups: “Do you think that the integration of knowledge is a topic in the list that you have been generating from your teaching practices?”

In our regular teaching practice, theoretically it is possible to hear that knowledge integration is something that is present, but when we talk among ourselves and find some evidence, it is possible to read that: “I thought that taking account of the ideas of the students sounded somewhat easy, but it is very common that this opinion in some cases is stronger than our previous ideas about the class.” (Journal, Carolina)

Knowledge integration sounds great, but in my class, it is very demanding, because in the end it is a powerful topic; considering the students’ ideas means understanding that the class is not a space where the teacher educator is the only person who knows something. My first idea was to focus on the right answer, but my surprise was that it is possible to listen to more than one right answer!!!, and some that I never imagined before!!!, but I don’t know if my partner would be interested in working in this way. (Transcription, Group 4)

Participants’ responses led us to create Table 1 to illustrate changes that we were experiencing as we came to understand the challenges of introducing other teacher educators to self-study of their practices.
Table 1. Examples of knowledge integration at different moments in the process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases of knowledge integration</th>
<th>Initial views</th>
<th>Group views</th>
<th>Initial views</th>
<th>Group views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing and adding new ideas</td>
<td>More emphasis on individual experiences</td>
<td>Included ideas of all members of the group</td>
<td>The leader is the person who knows</td>
<td>The group finds meaning in action followed by discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generating connections</td>
<td>The reality is a given situation, we can only suggest actions</td>
<td>Questioning the reality of different viewpoints</td>
<td>Adjust advice to the experience of the leader</td>
<td>Find connections with practices and conceptualizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring progress</td>
<td>Checking only visible actions</td>
<td>Trying to make the tacit explicit</td>
<td>I can disagree, but the leader knows what follows</td>
<td>Using explicit criteria for the decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationality</td>
<td>Theory first</td>
<td>Practice and Theory</td>
<td>Theory first</td>
<td>Practice and Theory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concluding comments

What we learned from the experiences of leading the groups

The most interesting challenge for all involved (leaders and participants) was developing self-awareness of one’s personal practices and ways of understanding their impact on others. Experienced teachers have many teaching habits that they take for granted, having lost memories of their development and now lacking an understanding of the assumptions implicit in those habits. Self-study leads us into the black box of our existing practices for teaching teachers.

Knowledge integration is a formative strategy that encourages acting and thinking in new and unfamiliar ways. The different voices taken into account during our work with the groups generated new insights into the interactions, giving voice and power to others. As participants in this experience, we appreciate how the multiple voices have made more complex the ways that we organize and conduct our classes. Creating a freer space in the groups enriches the relationships among the participants. In this sense, the sequence of recognition of ideas, generation of connections, and monitoring of progress (Linn et al., 2006) has opened a new, unfamiliar but promising space for us as leaders of self-study groups.

In our leadership strategies, we moved slowly to find common points or regularities and tried to be open to listen for different points of view and focus on how every member of a group can find and develop new approaches. One participant wrote that “when we are talking and sharing, we find not only common points, but also more puzzling situations, some shared, others more personal. I think that this change helped me a lot” (Group member). Other evidence from participants concerns making more connections with practices, not just with concepts, as in the following: “[In this group] I learned to make more connections with changes in my own practices, not just to changes my students need to make; professors also need to change. Of course this means we must be more alert to puzzling situations than to the comfortable ones” (Group member). These comments suggest that we are making progress.

We continue to struggle with participants’ adjustment to the differences between self-study research and traditional research methods. Self-study focuses on learning from experience and thus involves generating knowledge that is initially tacit. Moving from an epistemology of practice (Russell & Martin, 2017) to the traditional epistemology of published research proved to be challenging for us and for the participants.
What we learned as critical friends

We shared the following journal entries with each other as we looked back at the three questions guiding our self-study. Engaging in self-study of leading others into self-study is reminiscent of Schön’s (1987, pp. 297-298) model of coaching as a “hall of mirrors.” What they experienced, we also experienced at the leadership level. While the perspective of knowledge integration was unfamiliar and therefore challenging, we now understand in practical ways that it has value for those who are beginning self-study of teacher education practices.

They have never had a space of this kind where people join to share these everyday and fundamental issues about what it means to be a teacher educator, their ideas and their practices. The space is not about assessment or about the quality of their work or for planning. This is a totally different space with much freedom and increasing openness to share their own dilemmas, beliefs, discomforts and other unsolved issues about their work. (Journal, Rodrigo)

In my case, I strongly agree with the need to change our understanding of practice in relation to theory, which traditionally sees practice as a place to apply theory. To seek rapid change without the necessary analysis reminds me of the suggestion by Raelin (2004) that “academic epistemology, interpreted as knowing in advance of practice, can lead to ‘haste in wanting to know’” (p. 4) The process of questioning one’s own assumptions is more complex than it appears when one is involved in changing personal practices. The metacognitive exercise of analyzing the thinking behind one’s own practices is encouraged when dialogue with a critical friend makes evident the contradictions between what one says and what one does. (Journal, Carolina)

While there are inevitable frustrations with knowing the participants and their meeting rooms but not being able to attend many of their meetings, I have come to see the value in being a critical friend at a distance. Distance provides a different stance for interpreting and responding to reports of patterns of behaviour and issues arising from meetings as well as reports of two critical friends experiencing challenges in their efforts to provide leadership. Ultimately, the three of us have strengthened our critical friendship as we sought to introduce self-study of teacher education practices in a new context. (Journal, Tom)

Perhaps inevitably, Tom’s role (at a distance, and with more self-study experience) was that of a critical friend. At moments when Rodrigo and Carolina seemed to focus on the actions and responses of the participants, Tom reminded them that we were conducting a self-study of the leadership of the group, not of the group’s progress in beginning self-studies.

Trustworthiness of this self-study

Trustworthiness involves credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability:

In addressing credibility, investigators attempt to demonstrate that a true picture of the phenomenon under scrutiny is being presented. To allow transferability, they provide sufficient detail of the context for a reader to be able to decide whether the prevailing environment is similar in another situation . . . and whether the findings can justifiably be applied to the other setting. The meeting of the dependability criterion is difficult in qualitative work, although researchers should at least strive to enable a future investigator to repeat the study. (Shenton, 2004, p. 63)

Within the space available, we have tried to provide readers with a good sense of our circumstances in a country with a traditional view of teaching, where teachers talk and students listen. Readers will judge if there are similarities to their own settings. We have attempted to provide details that will enable others to judge how they would approach introducing self-study to other teacher educators, and we have tried to rely more on data than on our own perspectives.
Chapter 60: Using a pedagogy of knowledge integration to introduce self-study to groups of teacher educators

References


Second language immersion: A self-study to bridge personal learning and professional development

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This self-study seeks to draw teacher preparation implications from a short-term language experience in Costa Rica. The study was undertaken less to measure personal success in language study and more to make sense of how the language and cultural immersion should inform my teacher education practice. I describe learning in an experiential cultural context, where new language must be found to describe actions and feelings and beliefs. I suggest that the pleasures and difficulties of such intensive learning are paralleled in the experiences of pre-service teachers as they take on new professional identities and find their own, perhaps new, language for the identity and development of their students.

The idea of “immersion” for learning has its theoretical roots in experiential education, as in Dewey’s (1929) description of education as “stimulation of a child’s powers by the demands of social situations” (p. 293). Researchers across disciplines work to account for learning as it arises or results from experience – especially intensive and sustained experiences, not necessarily bounded by a classroom or school walls. Social science research, literature, and the arts tell many stories of the consequences of being immersed in a situation where one is an outsider, of being judged as deficient because of being “other.” In Lahiri’s In Other Words (2014), learning a foreign language is described as “…the fundamental way to fit in with new people in a new country. …Without language you can’t feel that you have a legitimate, respected presence. You are without a voice, without power. No chink, no point of entrance can be found in the wall” (p. 141).

In these political times, it is impossible to celebrate immersion as a language learning opportunity without considering those who, as immigrants or refugees, experience immersion out of necessity. Jones (2018) writes about moving his family to Italy and celebrates the emerging bilingualism in his children, but he ponders the pressures for assimilation. Jones cites a 1920 study where students who spoke “foreign language in the home” were believed to be mentally retarded.
I teach at the University of Houston (Texas, USA), an urban, public research institution. I lead an instructional team that offers “Introduction to Teaching,” where students first try on the identity of teacher and learn the language of the profession. Our central purpose is to prepare students to meet the Texas Professional and Pedagogical Standards (TEA Rule 149.1001). Two key expectations are relevant here: teachers must create a classroom environment of rapport and respect, with a positive climate for learning; and teachers must utilize effective communication techniques. Houston demographically represents “the exact shift that the rest of the nation will experience over the next three decades” (Ajinkya, 2013) and is 51% Hispanic. The College of Education prepares approximately 400 new teachers every year, and many of my students are multilingual. There are initiatives that utilize the term “immersion” to describe how pre-service teachers can understand schools and communities different from their own backgrounds. Wiggins, Follo, and Eberly (2007) use pre-service teacher portfolios to capture their reflections on immersive experiences in culturally diverse classrooms. They cite Villegas and Lucas (2002) to note that it is insufficient for future teachers to only learn “about” children in diverse communities. As I prepared for the experience of immersion language learning and this self-study, the work of Gutiérrez & Hunter (2012) was cautionary. Their case study of pre-service teachers in a month-long immersion program in Costa Rica described how students struggled with cognitive exhaustion and emotional isolation as they not only learned through teaching but tested their identities as teachers through immersion in a new culture.

There are useful parallels between learning through language immersion and in active approaches to Shakespeare plays, a process I study. I develop and research “play” practices for secondary English language arts teachers, specifically methods that bring theater techniques like creative voice and movement exercises into Shakespeare instruction. Students are able to learn through doing the plays, rather than learning about them. In addition to the powerful active learning that these approaches provide, students gain important insights through these opportunities to embody the characters and imagine themselves into scenes (see for instance Banks, 2015; Thompson & Turchi, 2016a). Traub (2016) writes about capturing “crosscurrents, border crossings, conflicts, and contradictions” (p. 32) in the Shakespeare scholarship of embodiment. Such scholarship in secondary classrooms highlights how students explore identity when they are immersed in different roles and make meaning of the complicated texts (Thompson & Turchi 2016b). The learning comes through enacting texts – establishing the relationships between words and deeds – and an imaginative identification with the perspective of others.

Some English teachers mistake theater games and activities as all fun, not recognizing the cognitive and psychological work involved in playing a role. Such work-in-play is similar to how teachers of “foreign” languages use role play and other approximations of immersion in their classrooms. Play provides a context for improvisation in language, and learning through the different literacies: reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing. Language teachers respond to the constraints of school structures by creating proxies or simulations of immersion. Cenoz, Genesee, and Gorter (2014) describe Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in Europe which deploys immersion strategies for academic content learning. In the US it is typical to find immersion used to describe schools with dual-language programs, and Cammarata and Tedick (2012) criticize programs designed as structured English immersion because the academic structure thwarts more powerful organic learning.

**Aim of the study**

The aim of this research is to translate personal experiences in a Spanish immersion program into professionally useful insights for English language arts teacher education.

**Method**

My goal in using self-study methodology was to know “something important” (Dinkelman, 2000, p. 7) about my teacher education practices. I looked to self-study as a method to help me examine my experiences and organize my reflections on being an immersed language learner,
specifically through analysis of artifacts and reflections and finding new spaces “between self and the practice engaged in” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 15). Even though I do not teach Spanish I do teach the language of professionalism and research to future teachers, and in that sense I position myself as a practitioner. The self-study framework enabled me to work toward a practitioner’s insights, drawing parallels from my experiences as a learner to dimensions that could inform my teaching (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). As a practitioner in a self-study, I assumed my “pedagogical responsibility to continuously monitor” my thinking, and worked to articulate my ideals, reframe my practices, and look for evidence of impact on my students (LaBoskey, 2004). The work of Peercy (2014) is relevant as she identifies meaningful intersections between self-study and practice-based pedagogy, opportunities to account for changes and actions based on new insights.

Data sources from the immersion experience included journal writings, lengthy emails to family and professional colleagues, and Spanish homework: workbook passages and short essays for class. I also corresponded with two friends from Intercultura Costa Rica, an emergency room nurse and a high school Spanish teacher, discussing how the language immersion experience shaped our professional development in our respective fields.

For data analysis I used comparative methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), building charts of excerpted texts. As an axial coding stage I unpacked disparate examples of learning contexts (e.g. formal classes, conversations, social settings) and then sought patterns in these reports about learning. These patterns resulted in categories that described dimensions of identity formation and markers of emergent literacy skills in an immersion learning experience.

Analysis: Identity and disconnected literacies in immersive language learning

My teacher preparation courses are designed so that pre-service teachers explore their nascent teaching identities and interrogate their assumptions about the “others” in their classrooms (and the communities they serve).

As soon as my flight landed in San Jose, Costa Rica, language immersion meant I had a new identity as a student and paying houseguest. Mauricio and his grown son Mau collected me and ascertained I was a Spanish beginner, kindly using basic English to communicate as we drove to their home. I asked for advice about language immersion and Mau surprised me: “No drugs, no drunkenness: my mother will explain everything.” I wondered how he translated the word advice, but remembered that Intercultura enrolled many college students. Jakqueline, my “Mama Tica” (Tico/a is what Costa Ricans colloquially call themselves) did indeed try to explain everything, using gestures, a few English phrases, and a pamphlet from the school. I nodded and smiled and did everything I could to communicate that I was a reasonable person who could be trusted in their home.

Living with a family, I would soon discover how dearly my skills in social niceties (and even appearing sane) depended on language. Coco, a tiny dog, was a babied and beloved part of the household. Coco was fond of biting my toes and I was fond of him as a topic for small talk, an entrance point to the family. In English conversations I know how to listen for the topic of a dialogue and make a relevant remark to join it. My journals reveal how often I attempted to use Coco as a way into the family’s conversation, especially when I heard perro, dog, a word I knew. But there is evidence my English ear was actually hearing pero, meaning but – a frequent conversational conjunction – and so my jumping in to add a comment about the dog must have been baffling.

Such lame interjections seem to have improved over time. One morning late in the stay I had what felt like a real conversation, and I congratulated myself in half-Spanish in my journal.

Had an unexpectedly long and social breakfast con mi familia tica this morning. Talking about “typical food” and food cooked and eaten a la playa, etc. Jakqueline y su esposo Mauricio y even su hija Nathalie, who seemed quite willing to be a part of our conversation because she wasn’t called upon to translate much. And I definitely followed the bulk of it. Even said appropriate things. (7/17/2017)
As a teacher educator who requires students to visit classrooms in the unfamiliar role as observers, I must teach them to read and respond to complex social dynamics. I also need to find ways to increase their sensitivity to students who are marginalized or unable to make meaning in the classroom. These are not just communication skills – they are all part of the language of professional and pedagogical responsibility, and they need to be as important to future teachers as using appropriate Spanish in this context was important to me.

My awkwardness and outright failures to communicate came despite hard work and concentrated effort – both mine and my teacher’s. In private classes at Intercultura, my tutor Samuel began each session asking about the night or weekend before, pulling words and sentences out of me with encouragement and corrections, so that vocabulary could arise from life. My life in Costa Rica was the primary content for grammatical studies, which not only motivated me toward expression but also reminded me of my exhortations to pre-service teachers about the need for students to see themselves in, identify with, their curriculum – even if it’s Shakespeare.

I confess that the structure of more traditional learning was at times a relief. The exercises in the workbook were comfortably bounded by objectives, like the use of modifiers. I could write the words and follow the patterns and the universe of what I did not know was not so painfully obvious. Similarly, reading aloud dialogues allowed me the illusion of fluency: I could confidently launch into sentences without struggling to know how to end them. I made long lists of conjugations in present, past, and simple perfect tenses, although in conversation only the most elementary verbs in the most familiar patterns seemed available to me. I newly appreciated the importance of sight words, making piles of flashcards. In these and other souvenirs of my time in language school there is ample evidence of my perspective as a motivated learner. I sought stems and roots and prefixes and other recognizable patterns that would aid my memory. These pages of notes remind me that I was willing to work hard in the classroom because it meant gaining the fluency and literacy I sought for when I was out in the proverbial real world.

Some of my homework was practicing verb patterns or other drills, but often the assigned work was “simply” to write. Samuel did not specify topics, only vocabulary lists, and I filled many pages with Costa Rican adventures. I described being lost in San Jose with my friend Carys and how long it took us to recognize the numbering system: all streets to the east odd, and all to the west even. I practiced mas – que (comparative) constructions by praising the orderliness of my Casa Tica and the diligence of my Mama Tica in keeping it so. In the interest of using the assigned words I exercised a strange sort of creative power. I could invent anything I wanted about my life in the US, but I was restricted by how little I knew how to say.

I was motivated to learn by more than the immersive necessity. It was a great luxury to have a Spanish teacher focused on only me. Writing home I joked that I was the top of the (one-person) class, but nonetheless it meant a lot for me to do well on the weekly schoolwide exams. In my journal I recounted the first time I faced the page of questions, feeling panic and able to recall few words. I recovered and even tried to be clever in some responses, only to lose points when I made errors in my asides or did not know the idiomatic expressions for what I wanted to comment. I begrudged the points lost for misfired creativity. I wanted to assert my individuality, my identity (in English) as a witty and somewhat irreverent person, but I did not have the language skills to do so – or perhaps to be so.

As a teacher educator, I cannot ignore the social dimensions of learning, and the discoveries that students (and future teachers) must make in and through each other, particularly in informal learning settings. Given my immersion learning, I feel sure that pre-service teachers need opportunities to experience as well as create such settings, witnessing the synergy and unexpected interactions that mark learning with peers. Experiencing difficult as well as successful communications can help them recognize and be sensitized to the winding pathways to all kinds of fluencies and literacies.

An important part of language immersion at Intercultura was organized social activities. Cooking classes required Spanish spoken throughout: empanadas de masa, queso, y frijoles, pantacones, and other “típica tica” treats. In a weekly yoga class, the teacher explained in Spanish
the Sanskrit-named poses and focused on *la respiracion*, such that we held impossible positions for as long as it took us to breathe correctly. In both kinds of experiences my journal notes reveal how pleased I was to be able to do things (cutting vegetables, downward dogs) that did not require me to explain myself.

*Intercambio* was an assigned session for social dialogue across languages. Whereas in the States (in English) I am politically engaged, in these sessions I got a sense of the political world of Costa Rica, from which my beginning Spanish excluded me. One afternoon I played word games with English-learning women from Nicaragua. I was surprised when my Costa Rican family was concerned about this interchange and seemed prejudiced against those “foreign” students. I also reported in my journal on a conversation hour that paired me with a high-school-aged English learner, a native Tico. We talked about “our dangerous times, with Donald Trump and … North Korea.” And I recorded my amazement when he said North Korea was “a big threat because they were to be the first country to have these atomic bombs.” (7/6/2018). The teacher in me was almost entirely muted, yet I worked hard to say what I knew to be sadly true about nuclear proliferation.

I have always been enchanted by word play and textual resonances, and in learning Spanish I aspired to the same kind of literate fluency. I wrote to my family about food words:

*The standard lunch plate (a meat-and-three as they say in Tennessee) is a casado – rice, beans, and plantains with fish or meat or other mysteries in sauces. This is a smile to me because casado is also the word for married. Is it what all married people eat? Maybe. Maybe it’s because of the combination, the “marriage” of the typical foods? (7/12/2017).*

In my Shakespeare work I pay attention to all the dimensions of literacy that should be developed in English classrooms, but I tend to see the combination of reading-writing-speaking-listening as natural. In Costa Rica, while Spanish reading and writing became almost confident (especially as I had tools like glossaries for context clues), I found my listening required enormous concentration and I sometimes panicked when I lost the thread. Speaking was a struggle. I wrote:

*Finished up my third week of Spanish instruction steamrolling through the future tense and finding myself more and more able to read and write Spanish, pretty able to follow a conversation, and weirdly less able to speak. A little knowledge is too much, I guess – trying to say slightly more complicated things leaves me tongue-tied. My teacher Samuel just smiles and says the mantra: Practica practica practica. (7/17/2017)*

My friend Avery, now back in her work as an emergency room nurse, described feeling similar disconnects between literacies:

*I had about 7 years of Spanish classes under my belt, but a lot of what I remembered were the tenses. I learned SO much vocabulary at Intercultura and in Costa Rica … I started at beginner level in speaking and an intermediate level of listening comprehension. By the end of my 8 weeks at Intercultura, I would say I was close to fluent in comprehension and advanced in speaking.*

**Discussion**

In this language-immersion experience I discovered how much my identity as a trustworthy, coherent, politically engaged person – and a good student – mattered to me, and how that sense of myself was impacted when I did not have the language to express what I knew, and wanted, to be true. In a letter to a classical-music friend I wrote:

*Costa Rica for language school is a lot of fun, sort of like music camp is fun - but I wish you were nearby to commiserate and laugh! … It is like playing in our quartet - moments of real accomplishment, moments of despair when you can’t do what you know you’re supposed to do.*
The inevitable experience of both success and failure is perhaps the most powerful way that my immersion in language in Costa Rica echoes the experience of pre-service teachers. Learning language in that experiential context meaningfully informs my practices with pre-service teachers because they necessarily learn to adopt a professional language. This language is one of knowledge, authority, and responsibility, and a new teacher must enact it to be successful. I have new ways to illustrate and explain what future teachers are likely to experience – and what they should recognize in the experiences of their own students. For instance, there is the desire to be seen as reasonable and responsible persons, and the need to gain socially appropriate communication skills, which are as important in school as in life more generally. I can also speak to the value of formal instruction when it is embedded in a meaningful and motivating context. Such a context includes personal connections to curriculum, and appropriate social opportunities in learning through activity. These are all dimensions of good instructional design, and for future English teachers especially, the recognition that literacy is multi-faceted, not monolithic, is key for success with many kinds of learners.

Perhaps the voluntary nature of my immersion, the pleasure I had in experiencing Costa Rica and playing the role of a student there, was too easy. The work was perhaps too comfortable to yield great insights into how pre-service teachers can learn the professional language that embraces difference and honors developing identities. Nonetheless, when pre-service teachers struggle to meet all the professional and pedagogical responsibilities, the difficulty of that work can teach them the school languages of “sorting” and “ability” that are too often toxic to students. I want to remember what one Costa friend expressed about both the motivation for learning and the almost necessary pain that comes with an immersion experience in a new language: You don’t want to feel stupid, you want to feel at home. This is good advice in the creation of any classroom.

References


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Learning a language to promote critical reflection: A self-study

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In this self-study two teacher educators, Dawn and Alan, enrolled in a foundation level Māori language course to learn the indigenous language of their country and asked an experienced self-study researcher and language teacher educator, Lynn, to be a critical friend. Dawn and Alan are experienced and competent self-study researchers and teacher educators and are mono-lingual. They entered language learning confident that it would provide an alternative perspective from which to reflect on their pedagogical practices. With Lynn’s help they used self-study to grapple with issues of adult (language) learning, identity formation and teacher-student relationships and how new insights might impact on their respective teacher education practices.

Theoretical frame

There is general agreement that teaching practices should be responsive to the cultural identities of the students involved. A lack of connection between the pedagogy of an educational programme and culture of the student has been associated with low educational outcomes (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Cothran & Ennis, 2000). For Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, a lack of cultural connection is seen to be related to the low expectations, low educational attainment, and high rates of leaving school early with fewer qualifications than students of Pākehā (European) descent. Whereas traditional educational solutions to disparities continue to involve deficit theorising and remedial programmes that locate the problem in students and their families, a culturally responsive pedagogy entails acknowledging students as culturally located individuals who benefit when teachers get to know students, attend to student input regarding teaching and learning, respect students’ intellectual abilities, and value the identities students bring into school from home. Thus caring for students as culturally located individuals, as understood in the context of this study, goes beyond simple feelings of affect to gaining a level of language proficiency as a core aspect of how teacher educators can enable a more culturally responsive pedagogy.

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Self-study is a form of practitioner research in which the development of personal, pedagogical knowledge is facilitated through a careful examination of one's own learning beliefs, practices, processes, contexts, and relationships (Loughran, 2004; Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015). Self-study researchers share a common set of characteristics that enable their work to be identified as self-study. First, they are part of a professional community of practitioners who share, research, and evolve their own practice as teachers and teacher educators. Second, each takes an inquiry-oriented stance towards researching how she or he thinks, knows, and acts in the contexts in which they practice. Third, by turning the focus of inquiry onto the self, the practitioner researcher reflects a desire to be more, to improve, to better understand and ultimately, to act.

Vanasse and Kelchtermans (2015) suggest that self-study researchers must continually grapple with two main tensions in order to achieve their purposes: the tension between rigour and relevance on one hand, and between effectiveness and understanding on the other. Self-study researchers walk a fine line in having their research acknowledge the personal, contextual, and emotional nature of their work in order to strive for personal growth while also making important contributions to the wider research community through sharing their nuanced understandings and making them available for critique. Self-studies provide the means for enacting a politics of action in ways that are transformative for both knowing in action and for being a teacher or teacher educator.

The landscape of learning is complex, and the landscape of language learning is particularly complex given the connections to communication and identity that are inherent in language learning. The learning of an additional language brings implications for cultural identity transformation among its users. As Lie (2017) writes, “learning and using another language provides us with a channel through which to discover ourselves. Language is a site of identity discovery and transformation” (p. 88).

**Methods**

What stands self-study apart from other forms of practitioner inquiry is the simultaneous focus on understanding self as it enacts practice (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Self-study researchers therefore investigate themselves with the intent to improve personally and professionally (Samaras & Freese, 2006). Undertaking a self-study project on one’s own teaching can be a messy process as it relies heavily on personal interpretations of lived experiences occurring in dynamic, inconsistent university environments (LaBoskey, 2004).

To accommodate some of this messiness, many self-studies are collaborative undertakings in which researchers look to the support of a critical friend in an effort to remain open to alternative and expanded conceptualizations of meaning drawn from the inquiry (Bodone, Gujonsdottir & Dalmau, 2004; Kitchen, Ciuflletelli-Parker, & Gallagher, 2008). Bullough & Pinneagar (2001) explained that their “collaborative self-study became not only a source of critical friendship, but also a way for us to name, interpret, and critique our pedagogical approaches” (p. 13). In other words, approaching the self-study process as a partnership between two or more researchers can enhance outcomes derived from the study related to all members of the self-study team and the profession more generally. Collaborative self-study also presents a form of triangulation as interpretations are drawn from the perspectives of multiple researchers (Russell & Schuck, 2004; Samaras, 2011; Schuck & Russell, 2005.)

**Data sources**

Dawn and Alan enrolled in a foundation level course accredited by Te Wānanga o Aotearoa (a unique tertiary level Māori learning environment institution). The year-long course was run from a community centre in a low decile suburb for 3 hours on a Monday evening. Although there were 30 students enrolled initially, these numbers dwindled to 10 core students who eventually completed the certificate requirements. Further to the regular weekly classes there were five full days combined with other cohorts at the main Wānanga campus. Extensive resources including textbooks, workbooks and CD-Roms were provided free of charge.
Dawn and Alan were also nominated to participate in an 8 week, 18 hour course focused on providing basic competency in te reo (Māori language) and increased knowledge and understanding of the Treaty (our national document outlining the partnership between the indigenous Māori and Pākeha) for faculty - Te Akoranga Kairangi.

Further to this, Dawn joined her students in four informal 1-hour Māori language sessions for additional exposure to the language and teaching approaches.

Their ongoing reflective journals, written after most sessions, serve the purpose of a written narrative of their existential experiences within the language class – and act as the first data source. It is important to note that these journals have been written as personal reflections and as a means to record thoughts, concerns, successes and progress of learning to speak Māori. When shared, re-read, and discussed with their critical friend, these reflections also served as artefacts of being positioned as novice students experiencing and reflecting on the effects of pedagogical practice. The use of these artefacts served as an ongoing stimulus and archive which “can still stimulate the remembering of much more about the situation as [we] initially experienced it than can be read in the archive itself” (Ham & Kane, 2004 p. 114).

When such journal entries are used as “literature of place” (Kelly, 2005), they can be considered as *sui generis* artefacts, serving to remind us of the embodied and situated nature of being learners. Consequently, they act as a form of empathic lens for reflections in- and on- our practice as teacher educators. Ham and Kane (2004) write that self-study is:

> ...that self-conscious attempt to validate one’s own data, and to see one’s participant self through alternative lenses...the iterative and consciously self-analytical reflection on, repetition of, and gathering data about, the purposeful social actions that are the centre of the study (p. 129).

In addition to Alan and Dawn’s journals, the three spent several weeks together as part of an exchange, discussing their language learning experiences. Following this sojourn, Dawn and Lynn communicated regularly by email. Their correspondence was an opportunity for Dawn to recount more learning and teaching experiences, link video clips to expand her explanation of certain protocols for Lynn to more clearly understand the cultural mores and for Lynn to respond with questions, theoretical perspectives and general encouragement. The emails serve as another data source.

As Dawn and Alan incorporated aspects of this project into their teaching they gauged their students’ reactions and responses through exit tickets and informally through conversations with them. This folded back into their journals and reflections.

**Preliminary findings**

The insights generated by reflecting on the challenges of being learners of a second language can be seen as increasing our empathy for students’ experiences in [teacher education] classes and enhancing our awareness of culturally responsive pedagogies.

**Challenges of being a language learner.**

In terms of being second language learners, the study confirms that learning an additional language as an adult is challenging. Grappling with differences in grammatical structure between the two languages, remembering new vocabulary and learning different pronunciation of vowels is difficult. As Lynn pointed out, Alan and Dawn already had a highly sophisticated means of communicating with thousands of words at their disposal in their first language. Giving that up to focus on a few hundred new words that they were not sure about pronouncing or using correctly made them feel helpless and incapable. Communication is part of identity building in that being able to express our opinions and defend our beliefs helps us to define who we are.

While Alan and Dawn were learning a new language their identity in the language classroom was markedly different to their professional personas. As adults, Dawn and Alan needed to go
fast enough in their language learning class to feel that they were making progress and that it was worthwhile, but not too fast so that they felt overwhelmed. This striving for equilibrium in terms of pace of learning was brought sharply to their attention when they attended their first full day at the main campus for along with others from different community groups. In this situation the tutor pitched the sessions at a level of learning that seemed far in advance of their current understanding. Alan reflected positively on the experience – ‘I thought, “Wow, I am going to know this much in a couple of months.”’ Dawn, conversely, was overwhelmed and became despondent.

Learning an additional language as an adult evoked an emotional response for Dawn and Alan. There were moments of euphoria and satisfaction when they managed to make their wooden flutes (Kōauau) make a noise, or when they completed an oral presentation. There were also times of rising panic and angst when they were asked to introduce themselves or answer a question in Māori or when they realised that they were underprepared for a session on Monday night.

Lynn noted that the stages Dawn and Alan went through were typical in terms of language learning, particularly for adults. She was able to relate this experience as a critical friend to her own practice as a teacher educator. Working with Alan and Dawn helped Lynn remember what her students go through as they learn their second language while also learning to teach it.

In second language learning Lynn wrote about the importance of reducing the “affective filter” which can lower motivation, self-esteem and debilitating anxiety (Cohen & Norst, 1989; Lin, 2008).

Lynn writes

> It sounds like your teachers were able to use a variety of techniques to “lower the affective filters” for you, the students, and create positive learning climates where you felt free to participate with enthusiasm and left the weekend with a renewed desire to learn Māori. You write - “Did we learn any Māori? No not really although we passed the “aramatawai” or test as a group but it was so much fun.” I suspect that you did learn a lot of Māori, but the challenge with second language learning is that it is not always obvious what we are learning because we learn on so many levels at the same time... I suspect the kind of learning you did during that event was .... less concrete and obvious, but just as important to being able to communicate. (email 21/06/2017)

This notion that learning a language is more than just the technical competency of being able to speak, read and write correctly was reinforced by an appreciation that te reo Māori (language) and tikanga Māori (customs) are intertwined. Learning te reo Māori gave Dawn and Alan access to te ao Māori (the Māori world) and to Māori world views. The kaupapa for the classes on a Monday night, i.e. the principles and ideas on which the teacher’s actions were based, compared to those of the Faculty supported course, gave rise to the next insights about culturally responsive pedagogy.

Culturally responsive pedagogy

Attending two separate courses during the year was an opportunity to reflect on different approaches. The year-long community based course was promoted on the website as:

> … offer[ing] all New Zealanders, with any level of ability, an entry point to learn our chiefly language and deepen your understanding of our indigenous culture…Learn in a calm, encouraging, stress-free environment that also challenges you to speak and think in the reo. Our experienced and fluent kaiako understand what it takes to help you go from little or no Māori language to a basic conversational ability.

The Faculty course offered

> …a focus on providing basic competency in te reo and tikanga and increased knowledge and application of Te Tiriti within the context of education in Aotearoa New Zealand... This is
a safe and guided journey…a unique opportunity to safely explore in a group what their insights into the Treaty and te ao Māori mean to them, their relationship to ‘things Māori’, and to develop competencies for education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The kaiako (teacher) in the community-based course had no teaching qualifications and theirs was the first course that she had taught. The students in this class had a variety of reasons for learning te reo and only one other couple had tertiary qualifications (a young Māori lawyer and his partner with an economics degree). Ages ranged from 17 to 65 years old. Every session began with a welcome, prayer and song. After the first few weeks, it became the students’ responsibility to take turns leading this and introducing themselves with their family lineage. The teacher responded, first in Māori then in English, thanking them for their contribution and noting some connections she had made to their families. Students were then invited to imagine themselves as competent, confident speakers and learners of te reo through a meditation and relaxation exercise. There were many group activities such as conversing in pairs, playing word association games, and participating in physical activities. Some of the activities were innovative and creative – such as learning the names of the days with hand gestures. Tea and coffee were always on hand and it became standard practice for Dawn and Alan to buy a platter of sushi to share with those who were coming directly from work. At the end of each unit, after our test, we shared a pot-luck meal together while our teacher marked and returned our papers. Everyone was given an opportunity to reconsider any wrong answers. Dawn and Alan always did well on the tests. They used their previous experiences to work out patterns in the questions and answers and an ability to commit to short term memory some of the standard phrases such as asking and telling the time. Despite initial awkwardness participating in a tertiary learning environment that was unfamiliar in so many regards, Dawn and Alan felt relaxed and accepted after a few weeks.

The course in the faculty was run by a Māori elder and an experienced Pākehā primary school teacher. The first hour was taken by the Māori tutor who drilled us in pronunciation and explained protocol. The second hour was taken by the Pākehā teacher and focused on the Treaty and a discussion of scholarly readings about tensions and opportunities in our bicultural society. The dozen staff members sat on the floor in the Faculty’s marae (traditional Māori meeting space) in a circle. Despite some similarities in trying to create a safe and supportive learning environment Alan and Dawn felt alienated and “othered” in the faculty course. Dawn wrote “I found myself objecting to being lumped into the same pot with the majority of teachers [the tutor] claimed knew nothing about our Treaty in schools.” (Journal 8 May 2017) In both courses, the number of participants dwindled markedly as the course progressed. Several students in the community group had withdrawn due to desperate family circumstances. In the faculty group the reasons given were work pressures and other priorities. On reflection, Dawn and Alan looked forward to Monday evenings with the community group and resented the time spent in the Faculty-run course.

Changes to practice

In terms of changing practices in teacher education, this self-study project continues to have an impact on our teaching. We have seen many parallels between our learning a language and our students learning to teach. Being prepared to be vulnerable, to take risks and to be open to learning from one another has been a reminder of what we routinely ask of our students. As a result we are incorporating more collaborative, non-threatening strategies and opportunities for students to feel successful in our respective sessions and supporting students to take risks. We have taken our new appreciation of what it is to be a learner into our own classrooms. As Lynn commented:

We recognised that there are both concrete and abstract or intuitive types of things that teachers need to learn. The concrete things could be lesson planning, knowing the material, understanding certain theories about learning, but we all know that that is not enough to be a successful teacher. We also have to understand building relationships, fostering trust and
...self-confidence, promoting risk-taking etc., in order to help our students learn, and those are more difficult to teach. (email 21/06/2017)

An increasing confidence and proficiency in using the indigenous language has transformed the learning culture of the teacher education classroom and helped normalise the language in everyday use. Alan and Dawn have incorporated Māori language and culture into their teaching. This has not been without its issues, but the connections and growing confidence from learning Māori provided the support to rethink many aspects of their teacher education practices in respect to the cultural diversity and needs of their students.

As Lynn commented, “You have learned SO MUCH cultural information about how Māori people interact and the protocol. … I find this fascinating and a wonderful example of the language-culture connections that are so important in becoming real communicators of another language.” (email 24/01/2017)

Conclusions

Brookfield (1985) suggested that becoming a novice is a visceral route to critical reflection. Certainly, the position and experience of being the student provided an embodied way of disturbing and shifting one's established understandings of teaching and learning. At the same time, learning the language of the indigenous people enabled a powerful means for rethinking and enacting a more culturally responsive teacher education practice.

Becoming a learner interrupted the status quo for experienced teacher educators. As Alan and Dawn noted, they were highly educated people who were extremely articulate in their first language and who were analytical about knowledge in general. They wanted to know details and why something was so. This impinged on their learning Māori as their expectations about communicating meant that they needed to be articulate and wanted to understand why and how and what when they spoke. On reflection, they felt that this insight might also apply to the process of learning to teach. Students of teaching are proficient in their ‘first language’ of schooling but new to the ‘language’ of teaching. Children appear to be good language learners because they are not articulate in any language and are more prepared to experiment and make mistakes than adults. As Lynn remarked, children absorb language for several years before they verbalise with any fluency. Their earliest attempts are met with praise and grammatical errors are overlooked. Framed within university courses and expectations to meet professional standards, the process of learning to teach is at odds with what we know about learning a new “language” and the concomitant risk taking, experimentation and exploration.

This self-study has opened our ears, eyes and minds to rethinking what it is to be a critically reflective teacher educator in an increasingly multicultural and diverse context. We are learning the language of inclusivity and empowerment through our continued study of language learning. Our aim is to foster articulate, communicative teachers who value on-going professional development and respect culturally diverse practices.

References


Pushing boundaries and crossing borders: Self-study as a means for researching pedagogy reflects the fact that self-study is a constantly evolving methodology in which researchers bring their everyday practice into interaction with different forms of inquiry and ways of knowing. This is research from deep within the sense of purpose and passion that drives teachers everywhere to make a difference. The book is imbued with the themes of social justice, thirst for knowledge and civic responsibility. This is research by teacher educators who are pushing boundaries and crossing borders.

In this edited collection, the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP) community share how they have explored and probed their own understanding of teaching teaching. The chapters are loosely grouped around the themes of nurturing a passion for understanding teaching; fostering social justice, diversity and voices; and developing local knowledge for dissemination to a wider audience.

Pushing boundaries and crossing borders: Self-study as a means for researching pedagogy is a text written by international scholars to enhance the conversations and understandings associated with this methodology and to support the 12th International Conference on Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices held at Herstmonceux Castle, East Sussex, England in July 2018.

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