

Brandon M. Butler
Shawn Michael Bullock *Editors*

Learning through Collaboration in Self-Study

Critical Friendship, Collaborative
Self-Study, and Self-Study Communities
of Practice

Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices

Volume 24

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Important insights into varying aspects of teacher education emerge when attention is focused on the work of teacher educators. Teacher educators' observations, explorations and inquiries are important as they offer access to the intricacies of teaching and learning about teaching so important in shaping the nature of teacher education itself. For (at least) this reason, research of the kind found in self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP) is increasingly pursued and valued by teacher educators. In so doing, self-study also encourages others to look more closely into their own practices.

For many, self-study has become an empowering way of examining and learning about practice while simultaneously developing opportunities for exploring scholarship in, and through, teaching. Self-Study allows educators to maintain a focus on their teaching and on their students' learning; both high priorities that constantly interact with one another. This interplay between practice and scholarship can then be quite appealing to educators as their work becomes more holistic as opposed to being sectioned off into separate and distinct compartments (e.g., teaching, research, program evaluation, development, etc.). However, just because self-study may be appealing, it is not to suggest that the nature of self-study work should simply be accepted without question and critique. There is a constant need to examine what is being done, how and why, in order to further our understanding of the field and to foster development in critical and useful ways so that the learning through self-study might be informative and accessible to others.

This series has been organized in order so that the insights from self-study research and practice might offer a more comprehensive articulation of the distinguishing aspects of such work to the education community at large and builds on the *International Handbook of Self Study in Teaching and Teacher Education* (Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey & Russell, 2004).

Self-study may be viewed as a natural consequence of the re-emergence of reflection and reflective practice that gripped the education community in the last two decades of the 20th century (see for example Calderhead & Gates, 1993; Clift et al., 1990; Grimmitt & Erickson, 1988; LaBoskey, 1994; Schön, 1983, 1987). However, self-study aims to, and must, go further than reflection alone. Self-study generates questions about the very nature of teaching about teaching in teacher education (Korthagen & Kessels, 1999) and is important in conceptualizing scholarship in teaching as it generates and makes public the knowledge of teaching and learning about teaching so that it might be informative to the education community in general.

This series offers a range of committed teacher educators who, through their books, offer a diverse range of approaches to, and outcomes from, self-study of teacher teacher education practices. Book proposals for this series may be submitted to the Publishing Editor: Nick Melchior E-mail: Nick.Melchior@springer.com

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Editors

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Critical Friendship, Collaborative Self-Study,
and Self-Study Communities of Practice

 Springer

Editors

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Foreword

Springer's Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices series was initiated by John Loughran. As the founding series editor, John envisioned a companion to the first *International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices* (Loughran et al., 2004) and the journal *Studying Teacher Education* (which he founded with Tom Russell). The first volume in the series, published in 2005, has been followed by numerous others that have helped define both self-study and teacher education more generally. The current volume, which John helped guide to fruition, is the 24th in the series.

John Loughran has been a seminal force in self-study. His own scholarship is first-rate, but it is his ability to work with others in the community that I pay tribute to here. When I was a novice, he encouraged me, along with countless others, to make contributions to the scholarship of self-study. The journal and book series he founded became vibrant discourse communities that published our work. These, along with the Springer handbook, now in a second edition (Kitchen et al., 2020), are critical sources of insight into self-study of practice.

Volume 24, *Learning Through Collaboration in Self-Study: Communities of Practice, Critical Friendships, and Collaborative Self-Study*, continues the tradition of posing important questions and providing rich and thoughtful responses that are meaningful to teacher educators. As co-editor of *Studying Teacher Education*, I have been acutely aware of the need to define clearly "critical friendship" and "collaborative self-study," as well as delineate the differences and overlaps between these terms. As I explain in my contribution to this volume, I have also seen value in employing "self-study communities of practice" when discussing larger groups of practitioners working together. I recall distinguishing among these terms in my editorial feedback to a team of self-study researchers (Appelget et al., 2020) who were being published in the journal. I mentioned to them this upcoming volume as one that would help address the need for in-depth consideration of critical friendship, collaborative self-study, and SSCoP. I also encouraged Butler and Bullock to invite this team of emerging self-study scholars to contribute a chapter on their community of practice.

Editors Brandon Butler and Shawn Bullock have brought together a mix of veteran scholars who have helped define the concepts in the book title, leading practitioners of these forms of collaboration today, and emerging scholars who will shape the future of collaboration in self-study. The editors make a case for clarity in expressing the nature of one's collaborative approach and explaining in depth how collaboration was achieved in the research process. Indeed, as Butler and Bullock note in the opening chapter, "The Complications of Collaboration in Self-Study," "[q]uestions of how one conducts self-study, and the seemingly contradictory notion that self-study is collaborative scholarship, have troubled the field since its origin." This chapter offers an overview of the three forms of collaboration highlighted in this book, as well as consideration of the complication that "many chapter authors may find themselves weaving between two or more forms of collaboration, especially when engaging in long-term self-study collaborations." The introductory chapter acknowledges collaboration, in its various forms, as central to the vitally important interactive aspect of self-study research (LaBoskey, 2004) while making a case for greater precision, depth, and sharing of stories of collaboration in action. The conclusion, "Reframing Collaboration in Self-Study," urges self-study researchers to go deeper in explaining the nature of their collaborations and connecting to other collaborative self-studies. The chapters in this volume will guide self-study researchers in the future by providing stories of practice, insights into collaboration, and a richer vocabulary for discussions of critical friendships, collaborative self-study, and self-study communities of practice. As a reviewer and editor, I will be directing self-study researchers to this book for guidance in explaining their collaborative endeavors.

The first section of the book, *Critical Friendship*, begins with a historical overview of critical friendship in self-study by a leading exponent and practitioner (Russell) followed by a chapter on the continuum of definitions for types of critical friendships (Stolle & Frambaugh-Kritzer). The remaining chapters in the section offer stories and insights from a range of self-study researchers—from graduate students to deans and across languages and cultures—who have engaged in critical engaged in the challenging yet rewarding work of creating, enacting, and sustaining critical friendships. Critical friendship can be narrowly defined, such as offering an outside perspective to a peer or student, and exist in a short period of time. Some critical friendships, by building trust, serve as the beginning of beautiful friendships and ongoing collaboration. For example, Tom Russell's critical friendships with Schuck, Bullock, Martin, and Fuentealba developed into long-term collaborations that have contributed to our discourse community.

The second section, *Collaborative Self-Study*, deals with the more fluid notion of collaboration in self-study. Whereas critical friendship generally suggests a helping relationship (at least for the specific purposes of the research paper), collaboration implies deeper engagement in shared inquiry. Collaboration involving two or more people can serve many purposes from fostering learning among peers

to co-researching shared questions to engaging creatively through play or poetry. The chapters in this section convey the depth of these self-study relationships and the power of multiple voices in delving more deeply into improving practice. Several chapters are by authors who have collaborated for years across multiple research studies. All the chapters delineate methods that support collaborative self-study by enriching the lives of the collaborators and generating richer research through interaction.

The third section of the book, *Self-Study Communities of Practice (SSCoP)*, attends to the collaborative work of larger self-study groups. The opening chapter (Kitchen) identifies eight characteristics of effective communities. The second chapter (Appelget et al.) examines the development of a recent large collaborative group, using the language of SSCOPE to examine the progress of their community of practice. The five chapters that follow offer rich accounts of effective larger collaborative teams. If self-study is to have a greater impact on teacher education, we need to engage larger groups in the work: graduate students, peers in our colleges, and colleagues elsewhere. These chapters offer possibilities for others by sharing stories of creating, enacting, and sustaining SSCOPEs.

In the concluding chapter to the book, "Reframing Collaboration in Self-Study," the editors urge self-study researchers to go deeper in explaining the nature of their collaborations and connecting to other collaborative self-studies. The individual chapters offer rich description and well-thought-out ideas that will guide self-study researchers in the future. Collectively, they provide a language that will contribute to more precise accounts of collaboration and stories of research practice that will help others to engage in this important work.

I am honored to offer a foreword to this most timely and topical book. I am also honored to have been asked to curate the *Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices* series after John Loughran. I rely on you as the creative/scholarly talent to bring forward proposals for future volumes of our peer-reviewed books. Please feel free to contact me with ideas before proceeding to the formal proposal stage. Together we can continue the tradition of books that address at length specific themes, methods, and questions that emerge in the self-study of practice.

Brock University, Canada

Julian Kitchen

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Chapter 1

The Complications of Collaboration in Self-Study



Brandon M. Butler  and Shawn M. Bullock 

Abstract In this chapter, the editors of the book argue for the clarity of collaboration in self-study research, noting the complications that can emerge when self-study scholars provide token acknowledgement to how collaboration was achieved in their research. Questions of how one conducts self-study, and the seemingly contradictory notion that self-study is collaborative scholarship, have troubled the field since its origin. This book and introductory chapter do not attempt to answer the question of how one conducts self-study, but they do provide the reader with a consideration of three ways in which self-study researchers engage in collaboration. This chapter provides an overview of the three forms of collaboration highlighted in this book – critical friendship, collaborative self-study, and self-study communities of practice. Although they may be perceived as three distinct concepts, the editors of the book note that many chapter authors found themselves weaving between two or more forms of collaboration, especially when engaging in long-term self-study collaborations; and offer readers some definitional clarity and suggestions for the future use of collaboration in self-study.

How does one conduct self-study? This question has been asked in various ways by novice and experienced teacher educators alike since self-study of teaching and teacher education practices methodology emerged in the early 1990s. Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) noted that in the early years of the American Educational Research Association’s Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP) Special Interest Group (SIG), newcomers to SIG sessions would regularly ask “What is self-study?” and how to effectively conduct self-study research. Such questions have not gone

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away in past 20 years, even with the publication of two handbooks that highlight the tenets and methods of self-study research (Kitchen et al., 2020; Loughran et al., 2004) and a number of books on self-study research methods (e.g., Lassonde et al., 2009; Mitchell et al., 2005; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009; Samaras, 2011). We believe one response to these questions could be: Consider the role of collaboration in your self-study work. We further acknowledge that this suggestion might seem a bit strange. As Loughran (2005) and many others have noted, the term “self” in self-study does initially bring to mind a solitary venture. Experienced self-study researchers will point out the “self” is a focus, and there are indeed multiple selves one might consider in self-study research: Self-in-practice, self-in-relation to colleague, self-in-relation to students, etc. The beginning self-study researcher should be forgiven, however, for some initial confusion around the seeming contradiction in the phrase *collaborative* self-study.

Although many of the methods associated with self-study research have been well-addressed and clarified over the past 20 years, regular questions emerge from those new to or interested in self-study regarding what LaBoskey (2004) notes are the interactive aspects of self-study research. Self-study is inherently collaborative, with many self-study articles and chapters having two or more authors. Such collaboration provides transparency, validity, rigor and trustworthiness in conducting self-study. However, the ways in which these collaborations are enacted have not been sufficiently addressed in the self-study literature. For example, the three areas we focus on in this book – critical friendship, collaborative self-study, and self-study community of practice – are used to varying degrees in self-study articles and chapters, but often are briefly touched upon only as a frame through which the study was conducted rather than a topic explicitly explored. Sometimes, there appears to be an assumption that readers know what these three terms mean – perhaps this is partially a consequence of the close-knit and long-standing nature of many self-study endeavors. For example, it might seem obvious to authors what they mean when they use the term “critical friendship,” particularly if they have been publishing together for a long time. Few articles or chapters have been published on what the three areas look like from an enactment standpoint – How are these forms of collaboration developed? What tensions or challenges emerge? Questions of these sort are not normally addressed, at least in full, by self-study publications that use critical friendship, collaborative self-study or self-study community of practice as a theoretical or methodological frame, which is why so many scholars new (and experienced) to self-study raise questions about this topic.

The origin of this book came from such questions raised in an S-STEP session at the 2019 AERA meeting, *Learning in and through Collaboration: Communities of Practice, Critical Friendships, and Collaborative Self-Study*, which was chaired by Brandon and attended by Shawn. This mid-morning session was attended by 51 novice and experienced self-study researchers, with many of the novice researchers wanting answers to the questions raised above, in addition to many others. It can be difficult to gain the appropriate answers to your questions when these areas of collaborative practice have received less attention than they deserve, and when such questions are asked at the end of a paper session as attendees move to their next

session. It also seems that, for many experienced self-study researchers, the boundaries between these areas are intuitively fluid.

Let us use critical friendship to elucidate our point here. Although critical friendship is widely noted in self-study publications as a vehicle through which validity and trustworthiness are sought, so few studies have so explicitly explored the idea of critical friendship that most self-study researchers are overly reliant on one self-study critical friendship article by Schuck and Russell (2005). Indeed, it is one of the most cited articles in the flagship journal *Studying Teacher Education* and for good reason, as it provides important ways of conceptualizing what a critical friendship might look like. At the same time, however, we also note that the idea of critical friendship in this article was developed via the context and work shared by Schuck and Russell. It is important for other self-study researchers to develop their own principles for critical friendship whilst acknowledging and developing the work of others (see, for example, Fletcher et al., 2018; Logan & Butler, 2013; Ragoonaden & Bullock, 2016; Stolle et al., 2019). We believe that there is a sense in which critical friendship, and indeed collaboration more broadly, is generally accepted but not rigorously examined. We would make the same argument for the idea of a *self-study community of practice* – an idea with a long pedigree in educational research but one that has not necessarily been consistently interrogated for self-study researchers. What, if anything, makes a self-study community of practice different from the more familiar idea of a community of practice? Finally, we would argue that the term *collaboration* is probably the most fluid and least defined of the three areas of focus for this book. For example, one might ask if there are forms of collaboration in self-study that do not include either critical friendship or a community of practice? Does collaboration require another self-study researcher? What does it mean to have a collaborative ontological commitment to self-study research (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009)?

1.1 Structure and Contents of the Book

We wish to emphasize that this book is aimed at both the new and experienced self-study researcher. We hope it provides catalysts for discussion for all those interested in self-study, because we believe questions of critical friendship, self-study communities of practice, and collaborative self-study are germane to this sort of work. For newcomers, the questions of how a form of collaboration might be used are often most pressing, whereas more experienced colleagues might find it helpful to use these chapters to examine their prior assumptions about long-standing collaborations.

There is a long history associated with collaboration in self-study research, going back to the origins of self-study. However, as we have already noted, how self-study researchers collaborate or what their collaborations look like have not been extensively explored. As such, we felt there was a particular need, given the extensive use of the term collaboration and its associated forms in self-study, for a volume that

explicitly considers collaboration more fully in self-study of teacher education practices.

Chapters in this book focus on one of three forms of collaboration – critical friendship, collaborative self-study, and self-study community of practice – and explicitly address how self-study researchers develop their collaborative groups, the challenges and tensions that exist in their collaborations, and the enactment of a particular form of self-study collaboration. The book is organized into three sections, one for each form of collaboration, with sections consisting of six to seven chapters. Each section follows a similar construct, opening with a framing chapter authored by self-study researchers who were integral to the use of that collaborative form in self-study research. These initial chapters are meant to provide readers with a historical, theoretical and/or pedagogical overview of their respective collaborative form. These introductory chapters are followed by chapters that provide experiences and insights into the initial development and enactment of a form of self-study collaboration, and how these forms of collaboration have been problematized by self-study researchers. The remaining chapters in each section provide readers with varying examples of how self-study researchers use the three forms of self-study collaboration to make sense of their work as teacher educators and self-study scholars, but they also offer new considerations for how particular forms of self-study collaboration can and have been utilized, ranging from fostering and mediation of multi/pluri-lingual critical friendships, the use of games and play in developing a collaborative self-study relationship, to the use of self-study communities of practice to understand and improve sport coaching identity and practice. This organization is deliberate in that we see readers developing increased understanding and expertise in the three forms of collaboration as they proceed through each section.

1.1.1 Critical Friendship

In “Understanding and improving professional practice through critical friendship,” Tom Russell provides readers with background on the concept of critical friendship, framed through five critical friendships he experienced through his career and how impactful those friendships were on his professional practice. Russell revisits seven conclusions related to the enactment of critical friendship, first raised in Schuck and Russell (2005); and concludes with a call to identify trusted colleagues who can serve as critical listeners and observers and help you examine your professional practice.

In the next chapter, “Critical friendship as a research tool: Examining the critical friend definition continuum,” Elizabeth Petroelje Stolle and Charlotte Frambaugh-Kristzer offer readers a deeper exploration of the critical friendship continuum they first shared in Stolle et al. (2019). Here, they expand on their eight descriptors of critical friendship, and provide readers with insights into the complex nature of critical friendship. They acknowledge the growing use of critical friendship in

self-study research, but caution those who use critical friendship to remain critical of how they define and make use of critical friendship in a responsible manner.

Megan Stump and Colleen Gannon, in “Do you have five minutes? An investigation of two doctoral students’ critical friendship,” use critical friendship to challenge the trope of doctoral studies as an often-isolating experience. What started as a personal friendship evolved into a critical friendship and formal self-study research, which provided them with support in four forms during their recent doctoral studies. The critical friendship provided space for emotional, pedagogical, and scholarly support; but it also helped them find success in the dissertation process. Current doctoral students and new faculty will find value in their experiences, as the transition from teacher-to-teacher educator and into academic positions can be experiences fraught with emotion and feelings of isolation and peer competition.

“Problematizing the notion of story through critical friendship: An exploration of reframing dissertation writing through collaborative meaning-making events” sees Elsie Lindy Olan and Christi Edge provide readers with a unique contrast to the previous chapter. Rather than investigate the dissertation experience in the moment, they used critical friendship to collaboratively revisit the dissertation writing process of several years before. Their critical friendship helped them make sense of their scholarly past and to challenge existing narratives of how they experienced writing the dissertation. Of note in their findings are the stories, which may resonate with readers, of how doctoral students can feel voice-less during the dissertation process; but also how critical friendship can be used to challenge those dominant narratives.

In “And you say he’s just a friend: Enhancing critical friendship by actually being friends,” Adam Jordan, Michael Levicky, Andrew Hostetler, Todd Hawley, and Geoff Mills ask readers to consider the friendship aspect of critical friendship and the need for emotional and professional support during trying times. Their critical friendship has lasted over 5 years, but it is their poignant account of 2020 and how critical friendship can sustain professionals, and friends, through upheaval related to teaching and scholarship, but also help persevere through personal tragedy. The experiences laid bare by Jordan and colleagues encourages all of us to look past the scholarly nature of critical friendship and to embrace the human component.

The concluding chapters to the section on critical friendship provide readers with a unique perspective on the creation, enactment, and sustaining of critical friendships. Rodrigo Fuentealba Jara and Tom Russell share the development of their cross-cultural critical friendship over 10 years in “Fostering self-study critical friendships across cultures.” In the chapter, they highlight the ways in which they sustained a critical friendship that crosses culture and physical distance/boundaries. Although they live and work on two separate continents, Fuentealba and Russell used technology to narrow that distance, bringing the other into the courses they taught through video and digital tools while making use of the physical space when one visited the other for sustained periods of time. Of importance in their work is the notion that physical or cultural differences do not need to impede the implementation of long-term critical friendships.

Cécile Bullock and Shawn Michael Bullock author the final chapter of the section, “Mediating critical friendship through language(s): A plurilingual approach.” Their chapter explores the ways in which the languages used in a critical friendship – in this case, French and English – act as mediators of the experiences that are the sources for work in self-study. The chapter uses ideas from sociolinguistics to demonstrate the ways in which their critical friendship offers a space for plurilingual learning and meaning making of their roles as teacher educators. Bullock and Bullock entreat all self-study practitioners, regardless of how many “official” languages they speak, to consider the ways in which they navigate multiple forms of communication within their critical friendship. The development of a shared language, or repertoire, for critical friendship is crucial and merits serious attention.

1.1.2 Collaborative Self-Study

Hafðís Guðjónsdóttir and Svanborg Rannveig Jónsdóttir’s provide the first chapter for our section on collaborative self-study, “Collaboration in self-study to foster professional and personal agency,” which challenges the reader to consider the many ways collaboration might manifest in self-study research. In particular, they focus the ways which certain tensions and problems within collaboration might enable new avenues for growth. Central to Guðjónsdóttir and Jónsdóttir’s argument is the relationship between collaboration as agency, a relationship that requires a shared commitment to framing and reframing knowledge of teaching teachers. Collaboration as agency results in professional confidence; crucial given the sometimes-challenging conditions faced by teacher educators.

“The We-Me Dynamic in a Collaborative Self-Study” analyzes a long-standing collaboration between a team of physical education teacher educators within one institution, Nicola Carse, Mike Jess, Paul McMillan, and their critical friend from another institution, Tim Fletcher. The chapter challenges us to consider how a collective identity is framed, reframed, and challenged over a long period of time and through a shared commitment to a set of interests. Their findings are particularly germane to those teacher educators who work with teachers on longitudinal projects, particularly when collaboration is a theme of teacher educators’ work with teachers. Carse and colleagues analyze the ‘we’ and ‘me’ factors that manifest in the workings of the group and provide a model for considering how individuality retains a place in a collective.

Laurie Ramirez and Valerie Allison shed light on how collaboration might support teacher educators as they shift to different stages in their careers, particularly if such shifts come relatively early in an academic career. In “The value of collaborative self-study in navigating stages of teacher education: Adopting new roles, creating new identities, and evolving our selves,” Ramirez and Allison explain how years of collaboration have resulted in different kinds of growth and change, personally and professionally. The authors invite us to consider the ways in which changes to the collaborative process might encourage new ways of thinking about self-study, as

well as the intersections between friendship, critical friendship, and co-mentoring. Ramirez and Allison make a strong case for centering collaboration at the heart of self-study research.

In addition to being a process for understanding one's self in practice as a teacher educator, self-study methodology offers the change for tangible scholarly outcomes – part of the life of most academics the world over. In “Balancing process and outcomes to further collaboration among teacher education faculty in a self-study learning group,” Christopher Meidl, Jason Ritter, and Carla Meyer explore the tension between the pull of engaging with self-study as a means and the push to engage with self-study as an end. The chapter reports of the challenges and opportunities of collaboration between a large group of researchers within the same department. Meidl and colleagues attend to many of the salient challenges often raised by self-study researchers, including the tensions that can emerge around the “acceptability” of self-study research, which is a particular area of concern for pre-tenure faculty. The authors ask that we consider the ways in which collaborative groups tend to shift focus and membership – and why this “haziness” might be an important way to challenge academic norms.

Christi Edge, Abby Cameron-Standerford, and Bethney Bergh argue that self-study might be considered conceptual text, composed collaboratively, in a public homeplace. Drawing from feminist perspectives and transactional theory, the authors offer the concept of *power-with* as a possible outcome to a longstanding collaborative self-study. Importantly, Edge and colleagues provide the reader with an understanding of how their collaboration changed over time because of sharing writing about critical events, tensions, or artifacts from their lived experiences. Sharing within their co-created public homeplace encouraged Edge and colleagues to change the focus of their self-study from individual practices to the self-study community, more broadly. Their chapter, “Power-with: Strength to transform through collaborative self-study across places, spaces, and identities,” provides self-study researchers with ideas about how we might become more purposeful practitioners.

“Game on! Collaborative research and resistance through play” by Rachel Forgasz and Helen Grimmett juxtaposes the value of improv writing games conducted via self-study against the more widely known, often implicit, games that academics are required to play within the neoliberal university. This conceptual chapter explores some of the ways in which play might sustain collaborative work in self-study. Forgasz and Grimmett draw from their backgrounds as arts educators to demonstrate the ways they turned improvisational games designed for theatre into improvisation games that can be played via writing. The reader is invited to consider the ways in which the use of play in research can be a stance, a sense-making process, a way of learning about pedagogical practice, an attitude, and a relational dynamic. Although one can find considerable research concerning the neoliberalization of the university, there is a paucity of research that suggests meaningful paths forward for researchers who wish to resist these demands. Forgasz and Grimmett show clearly that engaging in play-based, collaborative self-study

research offers not only a way to resist neoliberal pressures and a way of gaining insight into professional roles – it is also great fun.

Finally, Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan and Anastasis Samaras are teacher educators who facilitate transdisciplinary self-study research on two continents. In “‘Risky, rich co-creativity’: Weaving a tapestry of polyvocal collective creativity in collaborative self-study,” they explore how they have used collective creativity to engage a diverse group of self-study learners and practitioners, which they note continues the trend of self-study researchers engaging in innovative forms of inquiry and methods. The use of polyvocal co-creativity in self-study research has resulted in a diverse set of outcomes from the co-researchers, including but not limited to collage, dance, drawing, poetry, and readers’ theater; and they use this chapter to highlight the range of this work and how the reader might make effective use of co-creativity in their own collaborative self-study research.

1.1.3 Self-Study Communities of Practice

“Critically inquiring as community through self-study communities of practice,” by Julian Kitchen, provides readers with an overview of standards and characteristics that define self-study communities of practice as a unique approach to conducting self-study research. Kitchen presents self-study communities of practice as representing a large form of self-study scholarly collaboration, but also as an orientation that explicitly examines the group dynamics and processes of the community, a consideration that separates self-study communities of practice from critical friendship and collaborative self-study. To make this argument, Kitchen frames his identified standards and characteristics through his professional and scholarly experiences and the work of others in self-study who have made use of this self-study approach. He also raises critical questions we should collectively consider as self-study researchers regarding the nature – and future use – of collaboration in self-study, which we touch upon further in the concluding chapter of this book.

The following two chapters provide readers with insights into how a self-study community of practice originates. In “Self-study communities of practice: A traveler’s guide for the journey,” Carin Appleget, Courtney Shimek, Joy Myers, and Breanya Hogue invites readers to follow along with them in their journey across 4 years to create a self-study community of practice, and to highlight some of the ways in which they have sustained their community. Readers will see their experiences in those of Appleget and her colleagues, from the use of community to avoid isolation or to sustain one’s self professionally, to the tensions that emerge when working with new colleagues and collaborators. Of particular importance is their exploration of lessons learned through the process, which readers will find assistive when creating their own self-study communities of practice.

Where the previous chapter took an expansive look at the development and continuation of a self-study community of practice, the next chapter, “The power of

autobiography in building a self-study community of practice,” is framed through one specific experience that facilitated the development of a self-study community of practice. Angela Branyon, Mark Diacopoulos and Kristen Gregory were students in a doctoral course taught by Brandon Butler. Butler tasked the three with writing educational autobiographies, which were explored openly using a critical incident protocol. They found that an explicit investigation of their autobiographies provided a jump start in establishing relationships and building trust among the group, and in identifying shared areas of scholarly inquiry. For those interested in self-study communities of practice, Branyon and colleagues provide strong evidence for the use of autobiographical writing in developing a community of practice.

In “Contributing to and learning through an evolving self-study community of practice: The experiences of two science teacher educators,” Karen Goodnough and Saiqa Azam return readers to a broader consideration of the evolution of a self-study community of practice. Goodnough and Azam were members in a community of practice that consisted of seven educators, but use this chapter to consider their learning within the community in their shared context as science teacher educators. Their dual stories provide readers with unique insights into the roles and responsibilities individuals take within a self-study community of practice, and the tensions associated with engaging with others in the community, and the ever-changing demands experienced that challenge the dynamic of an established community.

Richard Bowles and Anne O’Dwyer, in “Learning in a self-study community of practice: A collaborative journey in coaching and teaching,” consider the long-term enactment of their self-study community of practice, that initially focused on their work as sport coaches, but over time helped them explore the intersection between their identities and practices as coaches and teacher educators. Their contribution focuses on the boundary spanning nature of their work, and the importance of care for others and a willingness to share uncomfortable experiences within the self-study community of practice.

Michael Ling and Shawn Michael Bullock provide the book’s penultimate chapter, in which they offer a slightly different conceptualization of a self-study community of practice (SSCoP) for consideration. In “Forming a self-study community of practice in turbulent times: The role of critical friendship,” the authors explain how their initial critical friendship provided a source of trust that led to the formation of a SSCoP within a large graduate program, in part as a way of dealing with their perception of the increasing neoliberal pressures on their lives as teacher educators. Ling and Bullock offer two metaphors developed from readings they did to sustain their SSCoP – *zombification* and *comping* – as ways of interpreting competing demands on their pedagogies of teacher education with shared responsibilities in a larger graduate program. The idea of forming a temporary SSCoP in response to a problem of practice invites readers to consider the relationships between different forms of collaboration between the same self-study researchers.

1.2 An Invitation to Consider Our Assumptions

Editing this volume prompted many conversations between us about the nature of collaboration in self-study and, indeed whether we had erred in the ways in which we conceptualized our three sections. We were unprepared for the ways in which authors naturally came to each chapter with a framework developed through a relational understanding of these collaborative forms. Readers will find a number of chapters in this volume in which authors weave in and out of two or more collaborative forms. As editors, we too struggled to think about the borders and boundaries between these three types of self-study collaboration, although we eventually settled on the idea that the book was best served through three distinct sections. We fully expect that readers may find considerable evidence for wondering why a particular chapter was placed in a particular section, given that the reader might see a more obvious fit elsewhere.

We note that this book was somewhat “artificially” structured to have authors focus on one of three areas – critical friendship, collaborative self-study, and self-study communities of practice. That is not to say there are not other forms of collaboration in self-study, for instance, Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan and Anastasia Samaras, contributors to this volume, have done powerful work on polyvocal self-study. Perhaps the artificiality of the book’s structure rests in our, Brandon and Shawn’s, familiarity with the three forms of collaboration that frame the book. We have framed the book due to what Segall (2002) refers to as our reading positions, in part developed as relatively longstanding members of the self-study community who began our involvement as graduate students, and indeed engaging with authors and with each other has already encouraged us to reframe many of our underlying assumptions about collaboration in self-study.

In sum, we believe that the editorial tensions we experienced throughout our work on this volume highlight both the value of considering the nature of collaboration in self-study in an edited volume and the ways in which our assumptions shape our work as teacher educators and self-study researchers. Just as Loughran (2005) argued that there was not a single, correct way to do self-study research, so too would we argue that there are not singular definitions or methods of critical friendship, collaboration, or communities of practice in self-study. What we would argue, though, is that the self-study research community would benefit from clarifying the range of assumptions underpinning the use of these terms. It can be far too easy to assume that readers will share a researcher’s conceptualization of a particular term or approach.

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Part I
Critical Friendship

Chapter 2

Understanding and Improving Professional Practice Through Critical Friendship



Tom Russell

Abstract This chapter provides background to the concept of critical friendship in self-study of teacher education practices as an introduction to the chapters that follow. Beginning with definitions of critical friendship and consideration of the role of collaboration in self-study, the chapter continues with discussion of five personal self-study experiences spanning the period 1995 to 2019. These five experiences illustrate the range of ways in which critical friendships can develop, often serendipitously; in such moments, the opportunity to collaborate in self-study may be recognized on the spot. Two of the five experiences occurred with a colleague, while the other three involved teacher educators in Australia and Chile. The ultimate impact of these critical friendships on the quality of my professional practice was profound. Particularly memorable was a critical friendship that generated a number of conclusions about the concept; seven of those are cited and discussed. The chapter closes by recalling the unique nature of both self-study research and critical friendship, offering challenges as well as rewards as two individuals negotiate conversations about teaching. Critical friendships are a way to escape the isolation and loneliness of teaching and ultimately reduce a teacher/teacher educator's distance and isolation from students.

Although it is always before an audience of students, teaching is nevertheless a lonely profession, and teaching individuals how to teach may be even lonelier. We teach in private, despite being so public to our students; teachers rarely observe each other's classes. We may talk about our classes, but such talk is typically selective and free of student comments. Those of us who teach teachers are modelling teaching as we do so, yet we typically do not discuss our teaching with those whom we teach. When a teacher educator sets out to study personal practices in the teacher education classroom, this too can be a lonely exercise.

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Enter the critical friend. Many consider critical friendship to be an essential element of a self-study of teacher education practices. This chapter explores several features of the concept, beginning with definitions. Accounts of five personal critical friendships illustrate the potential complexities as well as the potential long-term impact on my personal practices as a teacher educator. Discussion of seven generalizations about critical friendship draws attention to various ways in which it can help to understand and improve a teacher educator's professional practice. This chapter sets the stage for the reports of critical friendship that follow. The conclusion asserts that anyone conducting a self-study without a critical friend is missing a unique opportunity to better understand and improve personal practice and to generate insights that will be valuable to other teacher educators.

2.1 Definitions of Critical Friendship

The term *critical friend* and the associated role have been discussed by many, particularly by those working in the field of action research and more recently in self-study. There is no perfect definition. A number of sources attribute the term to Stenhouse (1975), who had a powerful influence on the development of action research, to which self-study has obvious similarities. Farrell (2001) introduced critical friendship in these words:

Critical friendship was first discussed by Stenhouse (1975) when he recommended another person who could work with a teacher and give advice as a friend rather than a consultant, in order to develop the reflective abilities of the teacher who is conducting his/her own action research. By way of definition, Hatton and Smith (1995, p. 41) say that critical friendship is 'to engage with another person in a way which encourages talking with, questioning, and even confronting, the trusted other, in order to examine planning for teaching, implementation, and its evaluation'. They argue that it can give voice to a teacher's thinking, while at the same time being heard in a sympathetic but constructively critical way ... I define critical friends as people who collaborate in a way that encourages discussion and reflection in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning. (pp. 368–369)

Kember et al. (1997) also attribute the term *critical friend* to Stenhouse:

The idea of a 'critical friend' or 'critical colleague' was first recommended by Stenhouse (1975) as a 'partner' who can give advice and is working with the teacher-researcher in the action research. Instead of perceiving the role as an advisor or consultant, the 'critical friends' see themselves as the 'friend' of the teacher-researcher. There is a 'dual' or 'overlapping' role to facilitate the progress of research by developing the reflective and learning capacity of the teacher-researcher, in a supportive, cooperative manner. (p. 464)

These comments and definitions provide a useful starting point for discussing critical friendship in the specific context of self-study of teacher education practices.

Each of the two words in the term has powerful significance. In self-study, a critical friendship starts with a *friendship*, ideally another teacher educator who shares some of the researcher's values and who is broadly interested in the improvement of teacher education experiences and programs. The term *critical* is more complex in

this context. Our culture has mixed feelings about criticism, and the role of a critical friend is definitely not to make negative comments or to name weaknesses in the researcher's teaching practices. From a constructive stance, the critical friend in a self-study can highlight features of practice that appear to be successful. Perhaps more importantly, the critical friend can help to identify assumptions underlying practices and also suggest how the teaching practices being modelled to teacher candidates might be affecting those candidates' professional learning. The role of a critical friend is to help the teacher educator studying personal practice delve more deeply and identify significant features the researcher may not have identified for analysis.

As a member of the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP) Special Interest Group since its formation in 1993, I have been privileged to participate in a number of critical friendships, both as self-study researcher and as critical friend. Brief accounts of several of those experiences help to set the stage for the chapters that follow in this section. I describe these not because I think they were done well but to show something of the range of possibilities for working as either self-study researcher or friend in a critical friendship. First, it is important to draw attention to the issue of collaboration.

2.2 The Place of Collaboration in Self-Study

Northfield (1996) offered important comments about self-study in the early years of this research methodology. His insistence that self-study must involve collaboration suggests that one critical friend should be a minimum requirement:

Self-study must be a collaborative activity

All levels of the self-study process would seem to benefit from interaction with others. Framing the problems, gathering data, analysing and interpreting the data and communicating findings *require collaboration if self-study is to be seen as more than a confirmation of existing views and values*. This need to make self-study accessible to others means that those undertaking self-study have to find ways of retaining some of the complexity of the context. The characteristics that make self-study authentic for readers are essential to obtain the collaboration that is needed to achieve the worthwhile outcomes. Ideally, *all stages of the self-study can involve collaboration* – framing and reframing the problem and sharing the knowledge development process. Self study is a learning process with concerns, issues and ideas requiring checking and testing with colleagues. This is one way to answer the suggestion that self study is too subjective and relativistic and sharing findings and interpretations can be regarded as a responsibility for all who engage in self-study. (p. 6, emphasis added)

Only 3 years into the formal existence of self-study research by teacher educators, Northfield provided valuable insights into the importance of collaboration; critical friendship is one of the most obvious ways to collaborate.

2.3 Five Self-Study Experiences with a Critical Friend

In this section of the chapter I draw on personal experiences both as a self-study researcher including a critical friend and as a critical friend to other teacher educators studying their own practices.

2.3.1 *A Self-Study with an International Visitor (1995)*

In the fall term of 1995, John Loughran spent leave at Queen's University and attended every class I taught, one B.Ed. (methods of teaching physics) and one M.Ed. (action research) After every class, we sat together to discuss significant moments and their implications for the next class. Sadly, in those early days of self-study as a named field of research, we did not keep detailed records. John's insights, always constructive, helped me explore several layers of my teaching and the students' learning. My first self-study with a trusted teacher educator opened my eyes to the importance of a critical friend.

2.3.2 *A Self-Study with an Australian Colleague (2003–2004)*

Faced with some unexpected challenges in my teaching in 2003, I invited Sandy Schuck (University of Technology Sydney) to act as a critical friend by responding to email accounts of my teaching experiences over a period of five weeks. Then, when I was invited to visit Sandy's university in 2004, I attended her first four classes in a primary mathematics methods class in the role of critical friend. Among our conclusions were the following:

One problematic issue of self-study concerns the difficulty of assessing one's own practice and reframing it. Personal practice develops in tandem with a practitioner's beliefs and images of appropriate practices and thus tends to be comfortable. It is often difficult to make changes or to ascertain if those changes have improved practice....*It is our shared view that a critical friend is essential* if self-study is to involve critiquing existing practices and rethinking and reframing practice...; a critical friend also provides essential support and maintains a constructive tone. (Schuck & Russell, 2005, p. 108, emphasis added)

Our analysis led us to generate a table of eight ways in which teaching and critical friendship share common features. We concluded our published account of our critical friendship experiences with 11 statements about teacher education, self-study and critical friendship. Seven of those statements are discussed in greater detail below.

2.3.3 A Self-Study with a Queen's University Colleague (2016)

Andrea Martin has been a special colleague in terms of collaborative research and writing for more than 20 years. When *Studying Teacher Education* planned a special issue on learning in the practicum, it seemed natural we should try to contribute self-studies of our supervision of teacher candidates during their practicum placements (Martin, 2017; Russell, 2017). We agreed to serve as critical friend to each other. During a moment in a discussion of Andrea's most recent week of supervision, I found myself puzzled when her response to a question seemed incomplete. I told Andrea: "You are telling me what you did but not why you did it!" Only at our next meeting a week later did she reveal that my statement had a devastating effect on her, leaving her speechless and wondering whether she should have me continue as a critical friend. Fortunately, we were able to analyze the event and continue, but it takes a strong friendship to survive such an unexpectedly challenging moment.

2.3.4 A Six-Year Cross-Cultural Self-Study with a Chilean Teacher Educator (2014–2020+)

Rodrigo Fuentealba and I collaborated to write one of the chapters in this section. Rodrigo, who is Dean of Education at Universidad Autónoma de Chile, has collaborated with me in self-studies since 2014. Our chapter describes a six-year critical friendship in which two teacher educators have shared their inquiries into their own teaching practices through Skype, videorecordings and personal visits. There is little we do not know about each other's teaching and its effects, both positive and negative, on our students (Fuentealba & Russell, 2020). Collaborating across cultural and linguistic differences over an extended period of time has contributed significantly to identifying assumptions underlying our practices and to improving those practices.

2.3.5 A Teacher Educator's Final Self-Study (2018–2019)

My self-study in my last year before retirement in 2019 was in many respects my most memorable and most productive, building on those that preceded it. I invited two of my closest teacher education colleagues to join me: Andrea Martin as internal critical friend and John Loughran as external critical friend (Russell et al., 2020). With ethical clearance from Queen's University, on the first day I met the 13 teacher candidates in my physics methods class (running September to April, 2 h twice a week for 72 h during non-practicum time), I invited them to consider the letter of information and sign a consent form to participate in my self-study. On that first day, I introduced three significant changes: (1) rather than *theory* and *practice*, we

would speak in terms of *book knowledge* and *craft knowledge*, following Cooper and McIntyre (1996); (2) we would stop 15 minutes before the end of each class to discuss what and how we had learned, and (3) all students would be invited to participate in the self-study by permitting their work to be cited anonymously. All students immediately agreed to participate in the study, the term *craft knowledge* was received positively, and the end-of class discussions evolved to follow the students' agenda of topics; some discussions ran as much as 2 h beyond the official end of class. Andrea attended more than 50% of the classes and helped identify the deeper insights that emerged from her first-hand knowledge of the students and events in the class; "internal critical friend" captures her role as a true insider to the study. John was designated an "external critical friend" as someone who knew my teaching well and offered suggestions to improve the preliminary analysis. This was my only self-study in which a critical friend (Andrea) became a regular presence across 36 classes; she was welcomed by the students for her occasional contributions and her contribution of time was remarkable. I urge others to explore the gift of a critical friend's multiple visits to one class. Finally, without two trusted critical friends and without the methods of self-study, my final year of teaching would have been far less productive and rewarding.

2.3.6 The Impact of Self-Study on a Teacher Educator's Practice

I was fortunate to participate in an AERA conference session in 1992 that inspired a member of the audience to suggest formation of a self-study special interest group; I was also present when that group was formed at the 1993 meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Thanks to the suggestions of close friends, in 1996 I was able to organize the first Castle Conference, the international self-study conference held biennially in the UK at Herstmonceux Castle, which is owned by Queen's University. (The proceedings of the Castle Conferences between 1996 and 2020 are freely available at <https://www.castleconference.com/conference-history.html>). Thanks to collaboration with others who also quickly recognized the potential of self-study research for improving teacher education practice, the last 25 years of my career as a teacher educator were transformed.

Choosing a critical friend for different self-studies has always seemed rather effortless, whether the friend has an office down the hall or as remote as a 10- or 15-h flight. Both faculty colleagues and friends made at conferences have been critical friends in my own self-studies. Serendipity has often been as important as deliberate planning in identifying a critical friend for a particular study. Through my own self-studies, I have learned that moments of tension can be as common as moments of insight. Perhaps the single greatest impact of self-study on my own practice has involved learning different ways to listen to my students (Cook-Sather, 2002) and

then discussing my teaching with them openly and directly. Risky? Yes. Productive? Without a doubt.

2.4 Two Critical Friends' Conclusions About Critical Friendship

Schuck and Russell's (2005) analysis of critical friendship (based on our 2003–2004 self-study described above) closed with 11 conclusions. Here I have selected seven of those conclusions to stimulate further discussion of the concept. To distinguish the quoted conclusions from my comments about each, those conclusions are indented and italicized.

A critical friendship works in two directions. It is not solely for the person whose teaching is being studied; the critical friend also expects benefits. (p. 119)

Both members of a critical friendship should expect benefits, and thus adding a critical friend does increase the complexity of a self-study. When a critical friend is participating in a self-study, both research and friend expect to be learning more about the complexity of teaching and learning and about their own teaching practices. Certainly, there is a sense in which the friend is teaching the researcher, helping the researcher learn to see practices from additional perspectives. Simultaneously, the friend is learning from the researcher.

A critical friendship becomes an additional layer of self-study and should be documented and revisited just as teaching practice is studied and reframed. (p. 120)

It seems less common for self-study reports to discuss the critical friendship layer of the research, and I am probably as guilty as anyone of failing to do that. Documenting the experiences of the critical friend and including that data in the analysis could contribute significantly to understanding and encouraging the use of a critical friend in a self-study.

Critical friends need to regularly test the relationship as it proceeds, checking for clues about the level of critical commentary with which each feels comfortable. (p. 120)

This statement reminds us that a critical friend could become overly enthusiastic about a particular perspective on observed events. Situated in a professional relationship somewhere between a casual acquaintance and a marriage partner, the critical friend and the researcher need to monitor constantly for each other's comfort in the ongoing dialogue.

The critiquing aspect of critical friendship needs to develop slowly and sensitively and needs time for analysis and assimilation by the person whose practice is being critiqued. (p. 120)

Here again, we are reminded that being critical can easily develop into offering potentially uncomfortable criticisms. Few of us are happy to have someone else

recommend certain changes. The critical friend role may be more productive when one offers alternative points of view and inquires into overall intentions.

Modifying and extending one's personal teaching practices tends to be slower and more complex than personal memories or lists of best practices would suggest. (p. 120)

Very few teachers can turn on a dime. Teaching practices tend to be driven by personal comfort, by images of teaching shaped by our unique set of previous teachers and by craft knowledge that may have been acquired uncritically. "Genuine innovation begets incompetence" (MacDonald, 1975, p. 11) is perhaps the most succinct description of the challenge of attempting a new practice. The critical friend can be most helpful when sensitive to and supportive of the self-study researcher's desire to make changes and study their effects.

Context is central to understanding of the practice, and discussion of context should precede and support observations and discussions of teaching. (p. 120)

Every teacher educator has a unique professional history that is the context for a self-study of personal classroom practice. At every stage of the research—planning, observing, discussing, analyzing data, and writing reports—the background contexts of both researcher and critical friend should be held clearly in view and recalled when relevant.

Critical friendship contributes by developing and extending each friend's perceptions of the classroom context, yet the friendship can be challenged by the complexity of talking about perceptual differences. (p. 120)

As my earlier comment about the impact of a question I put to Andrea Martin indicates, talking about events in schools is complex, whether observed by the critical friend or reported by the self-study researcher. Each of us has unique responses shaped by our unique set of lived experiences as students and teachers in schools. Critical friendship is more successful when both researcher and friend are sensitive to the potential for misunderstanding and forgiving of each other's misinterpretations. Ultimately, if a critical friend has been part of a self-study, then any report of that self-study should explain the contributions made by the critical friend, the insights gained by virtue of the friend's participation, and the benefits accruing to each participant.

This discussion of seven statements about critical friendship is intended to make more explicit some of the tacit or craft knowledge gained from personal experiences of critical friendship. Every critical friendship is necessarily unique. The statements are not meant as rules but as prompts for making sense of one's own personal experiences as a critical friend or as a self-study researcher working with a critical friend. The element of trust in any critical friendship must never be taken for granted. Even between the best of friends, misunderstandings will arise inadvertently, and miscommunication can occur in a split second. Each partner in the critical friendship must be alert to such possibilities and must be willing to seek clarification and report frustration or discomfort when it occurs.

2.5 Conclusion

Analyzing our own teaching behaviours and identifying their underlying assumptions are not easy processes, nor do they come naturally to teacher educators. Just as one needs time and experience to become comfortable with the unique features of self-study research, so one also needs time and experience to become comfortable with the unique nature of critical friendship. That process begins when someone undertaking a self-study of practice invites a trusted colleague to be a critical listener and observer, ready to offer alternative interpretations and new ways of examining practice. A sense of collaboration is a critical feature of critical friendship in a self-study. A critical friend with personal experiences of teacher education is a unique asset. Critical friendship may have challenging moments, but the rewards can be profound. Most teachers typically work alone at the front of a classroom or lecture hall. A critical friend has the potential to make teaching more collaborative, more open, more challenging, and ultimately more satisfying for both teacher educators and their students. Critical friendship in self-study may ultimately not only reduce isolation from colleagues but also inspire ways of reducing the isolation between teacher and students.

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Chapter 3

Critical Friendship as a Research Tool: Examining the Critical Friend Definition Continuum



Elizabeth Petroelje Stolle and Charlotte Frambaugh-Kritzer

Abstract Critical friendship (CF) in self-study research has become ubiquitous. Thus, this study offers a deeper investigation of CF through the lens of the *Critical Friend Definition Continuum*. Since publishing the *Continuum* in 2019, we have continued to update the literature, seeking more examples and new insights for each descriptor. This chapter offers an expanded definition for each descriptor and exemplars to illustrate our understandings surrounding CF and the *Continuum*. Descriptors include: Close Friend(s)/Stranger(s), Insider(s)/Outsider(s), Expert(s)/Non-Expert(s), Fully Involved/Loosely Involved, Reciprocal in Nature/One Way, Multiple/Single, Productive/Not Productive, and Defined Expectations/No Expectations. Data showed CF is diversely defined and actualized. Thus, each descriptor within the continuum, both on the left and the right, reflects how critical friends can be enacted as evidenced within the literature. We also offer the *CF Definition Continuum* as a research tool, or a frame for analysis. Each descriptor can serve to give voice, or meaning, to areas of success, while also uncovering confusion or uncertainty. Additionally, as many descriptors are inter-connected and influence one another, we call on self-study researchers to dig in and explore the extent to which these descriptors intersect and impact their work, using the *CF Definition Continuum* as a frame for enacting CF.

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3.1 Introduction

In 2019, we offered a *Critical Friend Definition Continuum* (see Table 3.1) in our article, *Investigating Critical Friendship: Peeling Back the Layers* which resulted from our collaborative investigation and analysis of reviewing the literature on how self-study scholars refer to and/or define critical friendships (CF). Due to word space limitations in that article (Stolle et al., 2019), we were not able to fully define each descriptor to the level we deemed necessary. Hence, the purpose in this chapter is to take a deeper dive into the *Continuum*.

In our 2019 article, we also shared that as close friends (personally and professionally) from the United States, we had been conducting self-studies for over 12 years, often employing CF; yet we admitted to not always being responsible brokers of the term. Thus, in the spirit of collaboration, and with the intent of unpacking the complexities of CF, we conducted a self-study to dig deeper into this term, scrutinizing other self-study scholarship, as well as our own previous self-studies (Frambaugh-Kritzer & Stolle, 2014, 2016). From this particular study (Stolle et al., 2019) we noted,

CF is applied most consistently in two areas. The first area surrounds one or more critical friends supporting/coaching the transformation of another’s teaching/pedagogy. The second area surrounds one or more critical friends supporting the trustworthiness of research methods. (p. 308)

We further examined how CF was being described, and even sought to pin down a definition. However, the data implied CF is diversely defined and actualized. Each descriptor within the continuum, both on the left and the right, reflects the ways critical friends can be enacted as evidenced within the literature. However, we emphasize that these terms do not imply value (e.g. critical friends who are close friends are better than strangers, or vice versa), but rather demonstrate the variance in CF as it can be applied.

Additionally, we situated our work within the investigations of other colleagues seeking to make sense of the collaborative-collective relationships that exist in self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP). In fact, Davey and Ham (2009) created a continuum for similar purposes, highlighting: number of people involved,

Table 3.1 Critical friend definition continuum

Close friend(s)	←————→	Stranger(s)
Insider(s)		Outsider(s)
Expert(s)		Non-expert(s)
Fully involved		Loosely involved
Reciprocal in nature		One way
Multiple critical friends		Single critical friend
Productive		Not productive
Defined expectations		No defined expectations

purposes for collaboration, decision-making in the inquiry, participant locations, and intentions for benefit. However, in their work, CF was considered a strategy to facilitate collaboration, just one form of collaboration. Thus, we sought to better understand this particular research tool—CF.

Since we published the *Continuum*, we have continued to update the literature, seeking more examples and new insights for each descriptor. Our original analysis included the 2008–2016 Castle conference publications, however in this chapter we also include a review of the 2018–2020 publications. Although we do our best to unpack these descriptors through the work of our colleagues in the field, we recognize our limitations as sometimes the descriptors are left to be imagined by the reader based on the authors' provision of details. Even still, below we describe each descriptor and share exemplars to illustrate our understandings around CF and the *Continuum*.

3.2 Critical Friend Definition Continuum

3.2.1 Close Friend(s)/Stranger(s)

Many authors described their critical friend as someone they had known for a while (i.e., close), or recently met (i.e., stranger). Our overall analysis showed that CF most often starts with close friends versus strangers. This makes sense given that most definitions surrounding CF promote trust to ensure collegial support (Schuck & Russell, 2005). Still, many critical friends never reveal their CF history. In saying this, we do not propose requiring this history, but given that CF includes the term 'friendship', we appreciate better understanding how the CF emerged. We also acknowledge the dynamic nature of a relationship, thus recognizing that even strangers serving as critical friends can quickly become close friends, specifically due to the vulnerability necessary within self-study research.

In our self-studies we explained that we were close friends personally and professionally (Frambaugh-Kritzer & Stolle, 2014, 2016). But in our 2019 self-study, we worked with critical friends who were strangers to us, explaining how we met and how long we worked together. We found others making their relations clear, as well. For example, Ramirez and Allison-Roan (2014) worked as critical friends, noting their relationship as "friends/colleagues" (p. 174). Fuentealba and Russell (2016) explicitly stated they have been growing their CF for 5 years "grounded in mutual respect" (p. 227). One of the longest ongoing CF we found in our review was Martin and Hutchinson (2016) who reported they had been critical friends for 20 years. Another long-standing CF was Mills et al. (2020). They were critical friends for 10 years and used a posthuman lens to theorize an emerging concept they called "*more-than-critical-friendship*,"—an immanent assemblage of their past and present. We appreciated how they described the additional insights available to them

based on their personal and professional CF. Their study offered a stellar example to show how a ‘close’ CF can impact powerful transformations.

Yet, on the other end of the continuum, Hostetler et al. (2014) started as strangers, meeting in the pub at the Castle Conference IX. Their initial ‘stranger’ conversations led them to engage in a CF grounded in learning more about teaching action research courses. Similarly, Kastberg and Grant (2020) also met at the Castle and then shortly after they created a CF due to their interest in mathematics teacher education.

In another study, Nilsson (2010) collaborated with engineering teachers, serving as a critical friend to support them towards the development of a scholarship of teaching. While never overtly described, we implied that Nilsson did not know the engineering teachers previously, as she described tensions around social gaps, communication, team building, legitimacy, and trustworthiness. We appreciated how Nilsson’s transparency highlighted the additional complications that can arise when CF is situated closer to ‘stranger’ on the continuum. Despite the tensions, her work with the teachers was transformative for all involved.

3.2.2 *Insider(s)/Outsider(s)*

‘Insider’ and ‘outsider’ describe how a critical friend can be positioned as an ‘insider’ to the actual study—fully participating as a co-author or participant embedded in the study—versus an ‘outsider’—an individual situated outside the actual study. We found these terms have been associated with evaluation/judgment surrounding bias, as Crafton and Smolin (2008) characterized self-study collaborators as “subjective insider” to the “objective outsider” (p. 82). However, in our analysis, we simply searched for instances where authors made this participation overtly clear.

Miraglia et al. (2020) worked entirely as insiders. Meaning, each of them were the co-authors and participants in their self-study acting as critical friends. A more complex insider example was in a study conducted by Klein and Fitzgerald (2018). Their inquiry emerged after Fitzgerald served as a junior faculty member on Klein’s dissertation committee. They acted as critical friends to reflect and examine the “confusion, regrets and frustrations” (p. 28) they experienced surrounding Klein’s dissertation events. They were both insiders to the examined phenomenon, as well as insiders to the fully collaborative study.

We identified many ‘outsider’ examples, as well. Ovens (2010) conducted a solo self-study in which he shared his recorded observations and reflections with a critical friend he described as a “colleague outside of the department” and outside the actual study. Similarly, Loughran (2010) sought a CF outside his study that could offer alternate perspectives as an “objective outsider”. Allender and Allender (2010), a married couple, also invited critical friends as outsiders to “provide a foundation of trustworthiness for data analysis processes in self-study” (p. 15). Interestingly, Allison and Ramirez made it clear they were the participants/insiders; their critical friends were Allender and Allender who served outside the study, yet given author

credit (Allison et al., 2016). In most studies, we identified one or the other with this descriptor, rarely both. However, one example we appreciated came from Russell et al. (2020) who named both an “internal critical friend” and “external critical friend” (p. 520).

3.2.3 *Expert(s)/Non-expert(s)*

An ‘expert’ possesses detailed knowledge within a specific content area, research field or institution/context, while a ‘non-expert’ works outside one’s specific discipline or context, or field. Critical friends should be selected based on the specific role they will play and their ability to contribute constructive feedback and alternate perspectives. When we identified the descriptor ‘expert’ and ‘non-expert,’ we noted that some critical friends’ areas of expertise were explicitly stated, while others were not. Although we do not opine to what kind of expertise is needed for a strong CF, we do benefit in the author sharing how an individual’s expertise in a particular area contributes to the study and the critical friend’s ability to be effective.

As previously highlighted, Miraglia et al. (2020) not only worked entirely as insiders, they also worked as experts. The three authors were visual art educators, monitoring each other’s progress as critical friends through dialogue, critique, and sharing of art works and journal entries. Thus, their expertise connected around their discipline and the role they served within that discipline. In another example, Young and Erickson (2010) declared, “we invited a critical friend, a teacher educator who is well versed in self-study and narrative methodology, to read and verify our categories...and verify our themes and findings” (p. 286). This example aligned with our analysis that some critical friends are selected for their expertise in self-study methods; hence CF is used as a research tool.

O’Connor and Sterenberg (2018) offer another example demonstrating the use of ‘expert’ as they explored the role non-Indigenous peoples have in the decolonization of education through land-based pedagogies. They recognized the complexities stemming from colonial legacies, and thus, they brought in a Blackfoot Elder to serve as their critical friend—expert.

However, not all authors described their CF with the same terminology we developed. For example, Thomas and Geursen (2016) wrote in first person from Thomas’ perspective as she embarked on her own study around fostering engagement in her methods course. She named her critical friend, Geursen, as a “specialist in the same subject area” (p. 404) and referred to her as an “insider” to that content. Although we do not refute that she is an insider, for the purposes of our analysis, we believe this example aligns with the descriptor ‘expert’—someone with deep knowledge of the content and context. In another study, Lischka invited two critical friends to assist her in both expert and non-expert ways (Lischka et al., 2020). First, Lischka and Gerstenschlager collaborated as research partners and grant writers previously, serving as experts together. But, in this self-study, Gerstenschlager and Seat served as ‘non-experts’ to both self-study and a practice called “relational teacher

education”, which Lischka used to change and reflect on her assessment practices as a math teacher educator.

3.2.4 *Fully Involved/Loosely Involved*

‘Fully involved’ and ‘loosely involved’ came from our analysis that described the investment level of the CF within a study. Our initial understanding defined ‘fully involved’ as critical friends who participated in both the doing and thinking (every step of the process), while ‘loosely involved’ described critical friends who participated in a particular part of the study or engaged in limited (i.e. loose) ways. In our own work (Stolle et al., 2019), we used a layered approach to CF that drew upon both ‘fully involved’ critical friends—we, the primary researchers and writers, acted as critical friends while conducting the entire study together as a collaborative pair—and ‘loosely involved’ critical friends where we invited two critical friends to provide feedback and insight based on their own expertise in the field. In this way, we highlighted how CF can take up multiple roles in a single study.

We found numerous cases of researchers employing ‘fully involved’ CF in their self-study work. Grassi and Dorman (2020) were fully involved in all stages of their study as the two teacher educators/researchers engaged as critical friends to analyze critical incidents that illuminated their conditioned blind spots as white professors and ability to develop “embodied resilience” to appropriately respond. Strom et al. (2018) also used a fully involved approach to CF as they developed common guiding questions for their inquiry and then met regularly as critical friends to share data collected in their local contexts.

Grant and Butler (2018) offer a nuanced example of ‘fully involved’ as the two authors examined how teacher educators come to self-study through the lens of novice and experienced self-study researchers. They both engaged in the entire study; however, Grant found the collaboration problematic because the sharing seemed one-sided—she felt vulnerable sharing intimately with Butler, a new department peer she did not know well and was “so unlike her” (p. 93). Based on this perceived imbalance of involvement, the authors explained that through dialogue, Butler “vowed to share more intimately” (p. 93), thus reassuring Grant of his commitment to keeping her confidence. Through this study, involvement is seen as a complex concept, as it is not just about the workload, or the *doing*, but involvement also includes the emotional investment required for self-study, and CF specifically. But this example also demonstrates how the descriptors can overlap and inform each other. Involvement was impacted by the critical friends’ limited knowledge of each other, thus exposing the previously noted complications associated with engaging with individuals closer to ‘stranger’ on the continuum.

‘Loose involvement’ is defined as limited involvement, or engaging in a single part of a particular study. However, the descriptors are recognized not as either/or, but fluid and dynamic. For example, Fitzgerald conducted a study in which he invited Heston to serve as a participant observer/critical friend who gathered data

within Fitzgerald's classroom; together they analyzed the data (Fitzgerald & Heston, 2016). Although they explicitly articulated how CF played an important role throughout the entirety of the study—start to finish, we recognized it to be looser on the continuum because Heston was not a participant in the study. Similarly, Taylor and Newberry (2018) explained how Taylor called upon Newberry as a critical friend to help her analyze personal memos within her self-study. Throughout the entirety of the data collection (14 weeks), they met weekly to discuss these memos. We located these two critical friends somewhere along the middle of the involvement continuum—not 'fully involved' in the events of the study, however invested in the analysis, and even noted as second author.

3.2.5 *Reciprocal in Nature/One Way*

We believe all social interactions can be reciprocal in nature—we learn and grow from every conversation, regardless the reason for the dialogue. However, for the purposes of our *Continuum*, we defined these descriptors in the following way. 'Reciprocal in nature' describes critical friends working together to build each other's knowledge and practices. In this way, the CF is interactive and specifically intended to build and grow all participants within the study. For example, Tobery-Nystrom and McGee (2016) engaged as critical friends, as they critiqued and reframed existing practices surrounding their educational beliefs. They equally shared how CF grew their understandings.

On the other hand, we noted some CFs to be more 'one way', meaning the critical friend joined the study to provide objectivity or an alternate lens. This critical friend is not explicitly seeking something from the engagement, but rather the benefit is seen as one directional—the CF assists the researcher. Nyamupangedengu and Lelliott (2016) explained how Nyamupangedengu's experiences were at the heart of the self-study, yet Lelliott served as a critical friend who provided constructive feedback and challenged Nyamupangedengu's interpretations of data. The CF served to validate the findings and facilitate reflection. There was no explicit benefit mentioned for the critical friend as the relationship was one-way to assist the author of the study.

Siegel and Valtierra (2018) described how they built from a one-way model into a study with reciprocity. That is, Valtierra first conducted a pilot study to implement the two authors' co-constructed method of helping teacher candidates use self-coding in reflective writing. In this pilot study, Siegel acted as a one-way critical friend. Based on the pilot, both authors embarked on a new self-study in which they implemented the self-coding methodology in their respective institutions, serving as each other's critical friends in a reciprocal manner. That is, they each adhered to the study design in their individual contexts, and their CF was instrumental in their growth as teacher researchers.

3.2.6 Multiple/Single

Researchers determine the number of collaborators based on various factors such as shared interests, convenience/happenstance, and personal or professional connections. The necessary number of collaborators is often determined by the purpose of the study or the structure of the methods. ‘Multiple’ and ‘single’ simply correspond with authors working with one single critical friend versus more than one.

Harkness et al. (2018) engaged with multiple critical friends by creating a Critical Friend Group after the sudden death of a friend and colleague to make sense of their professional lives without her. Stump et al. (2018) also constructed their study to reflect the use of multiple critical friends. However, to more deeply examine their levels of learning, they employed a layered critical friend approach where they met on a schedule that included both meetings as pairs and the three of them together.

Other scholars choose a single critical friend with whom to work, thus forming a partnership. For example, Fuentealba and Russell (2016) realized a shared interest in the quality of teacher candidates’ professional learning in the preservice practicum, along with similarities in their university settings and years of experience. They developed a CF grounded in mutual trust and a desire to develop new practices related to the practicum. And yet, other scholars may work collaboratively, but draw upon a single critical friend to offer a distinct perspective, like the use of the Blackfoot Elder as expert by O’Connor and Sterenberg (2018).

3.2.7 Productive/Not Productive

The descriptors ‘productive’ and ‘not productive’ specifically address an author’s ability to offer honest reflection around the quality and effectiveness of a CF. We found that outcomes associated with CF were not always clearly presented in the literature. This seems unfortunate, especially as the term CF is often used as a way of ensuring trustworthiness. Still, we examined the level of productivity by attending to the author(s)’ findings or concluding remarks. Sometimes the author(s) overtly circled back to the CF quality, and sometimes we had to infer. The only example we found of authors explicitly naming a CF as unproductive was Allender and Taylor (2012). They first described how their initial collaborative self-study went awry and became unproductive due to academic bullying. Nevertheless, these events steered them to be more productive, resulting in a new focus as they offered recommendations for developing research norms around the rights and responsibilities of individuals within a collaborative study. Although this was the only example we found, we do not suggest that silence around productivity implies a nonproductive CF. Rather, we wonder to what extent CF is productive if the productivity isn’t described/shared.

The following example offers clarity around how CF can productively add to the findings and trustworthiness of a self-study. In the study conducted by

Nyamupangedengu and Khupe (2018), Khupe served as Nyamupangedengu's critical friend as she sought new understandings about teaching in a diverse teacher education classroom. Nyamupangedengu noted how Khupe challenged her interpretations by naming her responses as empathy and care instead of confrontation. Findings highlighted the important role CF played in her professional growth.

In the study by Martin and Russell (2018), Russell served as Martin's critical friend while she studied her own pedagogy as a practicum supervisor. In their findings, they shared specific ways CF helped Martin look at her actions more analytically to answer questions such as "Why am I doing this?" Russell helped Martin to re-think her instructional designs. Russell also grew his own understandings in his role as critical friend, as he had opportunities to reconsider his own assumptions about the supervisor role.

3.2.8 Defined Expectations/No Expectations

The descriptors of expectation came out of a larger dialogue surrounding the burden of trustworthiness in self-study research and the credibility of the CF relationship. While some authors clearly explained critical friend expectations, including how they wanted to engage with their critical friend(s) as teachers and/or in the research process, descriptions of these engagements are on a continuum, as well. It is not always clear if the author(s) made these expectations known upfront to their critical friend, or if expectations were vague and undefined. Our analysis also showed that when expectations were explained, brevity was the norm.

For example, Parker et al. (2016) described that they expected their critical friend to complete photo elicitation interviews using prepared focus questions related to photo diary entries created by the authors. While this expectation was clear/defined, it was brief. In another similar example, Lischka et al. (2020) invited her co-authors to serve as critical friends. She made her expectation clear by asking them "to engage in constructive listening in order to aid in reflection and reframing but also to look for themes and challenge her reflections as the group read and discussed the data" (p.71).

On the other hand, we noted examples where no specific expectations were made clear around the CF other than being visible for 'trustworthiness.' For instance, Beck (2012) and Thomas and Geursen (2016) simply expected their CF to ensure trustworthiness. We noted this lack of expectations in our own self-studies (Frambaugh-Kritzer & Stolle, 2014, 2016).

3.3 Looking Forward with Critical Friendship

The use of CF within S-STEP research has become ubiquitous. Quantitatively, we noted a seven-fold increase in the 2020 Castle publications. Specifically, 67 chapters out of 72 used CF, compared to the 2008 Castle collection where only nine chapters out of 66 used CF. With this uptick, we wondered what pressure now exists for self-study scholars to use, and/or address, CF in their work. Specifically, we noted Richter (2020) named the “absence of CF” (p. 141) as she embarked on a solo self-study. This acknowledgement stood out to us as we questioned in our dialogue journal, “CF seems a bit contrived to satisfy some outside ‘eye.’” That is, often CF is employed as a tool to ensure trustworthiness, but are we actually using it in responsible and productive ways? And, is it always necessary? Richter (2020) explicitly explained how she ensured trustworthiness through rigorous data collection and analysis, thus indicating she didn’t feel CF necessary for the integrity of her findings.

With the ubiquity of CF, we appreciate the description offered by Olan and Edge (2018):

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. (p. 324)

And, in this description, we release again our notions of constraining CF to a specific description or ‘thing.’ We recognize CF as a real idea needing form and structure for use and credibility, but we also embrace the concept as dynamic, malleable, and ever-evolving. Thus, in the proliferation of the use of CF, we appreciate scholars in the field pushing boundaries around CF, assisting us to remain vigilant in understanding the complexity of the concept. For instance, Kastberg and Grant (2020) adapted our *CF Continuum* to explore two new descriptors they named “significant otherness and conversation residue” (p. 676). Although we do not see these as additional descriptors, we welcome the exploration of these concepts as they highlight the importance of understanding positionality and clear expectations within a CF, thus adding to the complexities within the descriptors: ‘close’/‘stranger’ and ‘expectations’/‘no expectations.’

Thomas (2018) also pushes the boundaries as she encouraged self-study scholars to consider textual critical partnerships. Based on Thomas’ own feelings of marginalization as a scholar in the field of teacher education, she turned to text to guide her through liminal spaces of studying her own teaching practices. We found other authors who considered the literature as a critical friend (Garbett, 2020; Haniford & Torrez, 2020). Hamilton (2020) shared an additional way to consider CF. In short, she re-engaged with artifacts from past self-studies as a way of engaging with her past selves as critical friends. Hamilton shared how her use of reflection enabled her

to experience a meaningful and productive relationship with her past selves. Finally, Pinnegar (2020) offered yet another way of considering CF as she reviewed her own data, acting as her own critical friend. She stated, “Acting as my own critical friend, I sought to discern meaning ... by constantly challenging my assumptions about how I felt or the realities of events” (n.p.).

Although we appreciate the boundaries our colleagues are pushing, as seen in these final examples, we do wonder what is lost when CF is so expanded and can encapsulate all relationships. That is, CF has traditionally been defined as “a trusted person who ... takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and ... is an advocate for the success of that work” (Costa & Kallick, 1993, p. 50). Thus, if vulnerability cannot be embraced and trust cannot be established, then perhaps whatever is happening is not CF, but rather something else. Using the *CF Definition Continuum*, we advocate that CF entails actual people embarking on a journey of discovery, together, and informed by the dynamics established within the relationship.

Thus, we offer the *CF Definition Continuum* as a research tool, or a frame for analysis. And with that, the extended definitions of each descriptor can serve to give voice, or meaning, to areas of success, while also pointing out confusion or uncertainty. Additionally, as many of the descriptors are inter-connected and influence one another, we look to researchers to dig in and explore the extent to which these descriptors intersect and impact the study. And, where elaboration may be lacking on why a CF was helpful or not, we can look to the *CF Definition Continuum*, which serves as a frame for critique and a lens for viewing CF. With that, we will continue pursuing deeper understandings of CF, as we build upon this analysis.

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Chapter 4

“Do You Have Five Minutes?”: An Investigation of Two Doctoral Students’ Critical Friendship



Megan Stump and Colleen Gannon

Abstract Doctoral students often experience a sense of isolation that can be compounded during more independent aspects of their programs such as comprehensive exams, proposals, and dissertations. The authors of this study, two doctoral students, also experienced loneliness in their doctoral studies until they developed a critical friendship as a means of support for individual self-studies they were undertaking. Over time, the critical friendship became a source of support beyond the self-studies and impacted the authors’ doctoral processes, specifically the completion of their dissertations. This study examines the importance of peer critical friendship among doctoral students and how critical friendship may sustain doctoral students through the completion of their degrees. Findings indicate that critical friendship among doctoral students can provide emotional support, support of practice, research support, and support in the dissertation process.

Doctoral students often feel isolated as they work toward their degrees (Ali & Kohun, 2006; McNulty & Cuenca, 2014; Murphy et al., 2014), causing them stress and uncertainty as they experience the demands of university culture (Murphy et al., 2014). This feeling of isolation can be exacerbated once doctoral students move beyond coursework into their comprehensive exams, proposals, and dissertations because “this kind of work forces each student to work alone without the support that they received during prior studies and during the earlier stages of doctoral studies” (Ali & Kohun, 2006, p. 26). During our doctoral studies, we experienced this sense of loneliness until fall 2017 when we developed a critical friendship as a means of support for our individual self-studies. Over time, our critical friendship

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became a source of support in other aspects of our doctoral process, especially the completion of our dissertations.

Although we were undertaking separate self-studies with the guidance of the same professor in our department, we each desired more frequent opportunities to process our work with a trusted colleague to ensure we were “doing it right.” Over time, our casual collegial friendship developed into a critical friendship that became essential to our development as emerging teacher educators and self-study scholars. This chapter reports and analyzes how we established our critical friendship and how it expanded beyond the completion of our self-studies to become a major source of mutual support as we embarked on the more self-directed components of our doctoral program.

Self-study researchers often rely on critical friends to help them audit their research process and support transformations in teaching practice (Stolle et al., 2019). Critical friendships extend collegial relationships to a more analytic partnership where each “friend” is invested in the other’s professional growth. Productive critical friendship should be built on mutual trust, a belief in each other’s competence to deliver accurate critique, and an assumption of good intention (Handal, 1999). Critical friends must be able to both affirm and challenge each other’s work (Nilsson & Wennergren, 2018), and should feel comfortable providing criticism that “may be challenging and uncomfortable, yet enhancing” (Swaffield, 2007, p. 206). Critical friends act as sounding boards, push each other to consider their intentions and motivations, challenge each other to clearly articulate and defend their claims, and help frame or reframe events from alternate perspectives (Costa & Kallick, 1993; McAnulty & Cuenca, 2014; Olan & Edge, 2019; Schuck & Russell, 2005; Stolle et al., 2019). Ideally, critical friends are immersed in and fully understand each other’s work, invest in each other’s progress, and advocate for each other’s success (Costa & Kallick, 1993).

To mutually benefit both parties, critical friendships must be built on trust (Baskerville & Goldblatt, 2009; Costa & Kallick, 1993; Schuck & Segal, 2002). However, “threats to trust, such as competing agendas or an imbalance of power positions can be a barrier to communication” and can make the critical friendship less effective (Swaffield, 2007, p. 206). Both the level of trust and the level of threat in the friendship often depends on whether both members are of equal professional status. McAnulty and Cuenca (2014) found that at times the mentor-mentee power dynamic inhibited McAnulty’s (mentee) ability to be completely vulnerable with Cuenca (his mentor) in their conversations, and they conclude that peer critical friendships might provide a more beneficial and less evaluative learning relationship.

In this study, we examine the importance of our peer critical friendship as two doctoral students in a college of education, emphasize the role self-study can play in facilitating the formation of productive critical friendships, and suggest ways that peer critical friendships can expand beyond self-study to encompass broader support in the doctoral process.

4.1 Theoretical Framework

We situate our understanding of critical friendship within the Johari Window framework to capture the “transactional events where new meaning is made” of ourselves and our practice (Olan & Edge, 2019, p. 41).

4.1.1 *The Johari Window*

The Johari Window is a model used to raise awareness about interpersonal relationships. Within medical education, Gordon (2006) used this framework to highlight the importance of interpersonal aspects in critical friendships, and we follow in her theoretical footsteps to do the same in teacher education.

The Johari window consists of four quadrants. Quadrant one represents behavior and motivation known to self and known to others; this is designated as the “open” area. Quadrant two represents those things in ourselves that others recognize but which we are unaware; this is referred to as the “blind” area. Quadrant three represents things that we recognize in ourselves but that we do not reveal to others (e.g., feelings about sensitive matters); this is referred to as the avoided or “hidden” area. Quadrant four is an unknown activity area, where neither the individual nor others are aware of certain behaviors or motives (Luft, 1982).

The more people share about themselves with others, and receive feedback on what they have shared, the more the “open” area will grow and the “blind” area will contract; or, the “hidden” or “unknown” areas may be revealed and then diminished. In groups where individuals may be unfamiliar with one another, the “open” area is often small, but as trust is built and individuals are “freer to be like [themselves],” other quadrants shrink because “there is less need for hiding pertinent thoughts or feelings” (Luft, 1982, np). Sharing and feedback are important in interpersonal learning because how group members “experience” other individuals in the group is often based on what group members see about the individuals that individuals cannot see about themselves. This sharing of information is what helps transform others. As Luft (1982) contends, “To have all of me available to myself, I need your data about me. I need...my truth that you possess, my BLIND area...The more data I give you, the more of me you can share with me” (np, emphasis in original).

Applied to our study, the Johari Window reveals how our communication with one another, and subsequently our peer critical friendship, expanded over time. Although tentative at first, we put our wonderings about our practice and self-studies into the open to be examined by one another. Because we shared our struggles and willingly accepted each other’s critique of our work and practice, our “open” areas of communication gradually expanded as we recognized the benefit of being vulnerable outweighed the discomfort of sharing sensitive information. As a result, our tentativeness around exposing the “hidden” parts of our work faded, and we were encouraged to remain in dialogue. As we leaned into the vulnerability that is often

necessary for self-study, we were able to broaden the scope of our support beyond self-study to include our personal well-being and the development of our professional identities as we worked towards completing our dissertations (Murphy et al., 2014).

4.2 Methods and Data Sources

Data collection occurred in two phases. Phase one occurred during the 2017–2018 academic year. Megan, a second-year doctoral student, and Colleen, a third-year doctoral student both studying teacher education at the University of Maryland, were each undertaking independent self-studies. Megan’s project focused on learning how to do self-study, and Colleen was teaching a class on adolescent literature and her self-study focused on the way outside supports impacted her classroom practice. Throughout the 2017–2018 school year, we met nine times for approximately 2.5 hours each meeting to share our progress in our individual self-study research and to work through issues in research and practice. We audio recorded and transcribed eight of the meetings for analysis; we did not audio record our first discussion because we did not initially realize that our meetings would regularly occur.

Phase two occurred over the following two academic years. After we completed our individual self-studies, we continued our critical friendship as we worked on our comprehensive exams, proposal defenses, data collection and analysis, and dissertation writing. During the 2018–2019 academic year, a change in circumstances altered the nature of our meetings. Colleen returned to work full time and Megan relocated to another state for her research. As a result, we primarily communicated by phone and text. We did not audio record phone conversations because they were often spontaneous, but we did write memos regarding lengthier, in-depth discussions. For the 2019–2020 academic year, we resumed in-person meetings. As we were analyzing data and writing our dissertations, we no longer recorded these meetings because the primary purpose was to hold one another accountable to finishing our dissertations. Instead, we documented our schedules and the individual goals we set on days we met to write.

Across both phases, we collected data in the form of significant text messages and email exchanges. Text messages, written out, produced 33 pages of single-spaced text. Additionally, we analyzed 22 email exchanges that totaled approximately 800 words and focused on the sharing of resources and providing feedback on documents.

In this chapter, the focal points of our analysis are the text and email exchanges and transcripts of face-to-face meetings. We used the constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) to iteratively code the data, beginning with open coding. Our first round of coding was conducted separately. Support emerged as a common thread for each author. We conducted a second round of coding together to compare initial codes. In this round we discussed terms to make sure we were operationalizing them in the same way. We then collapsed similar codes and created four

primary categories: (1) emotional support, (2) support for instructional practice, (3) research support, and (4) support in the dissertation process.

4.3 Findings

Our data illustrate four types of support we provided each other as critical friends: *emotional support, support of practice, research support, and support in the dissertation process*. Initially, our critical friendship was meant to provide a supportive space for our research and instructional practice during our individual self-studies. In this initial phase of our critical friendship, we expanded our “open” areas as we critiqued one another’s research and practice and provided each other with emotional support to work through our struggles. The trust we established while working on our self-studies allowed our critical friendship to deepen and evolve as we supported one another in completing our dissertations.

4.3.1 Emotional Support

When we started meeting, neither of us explicitly expressed the need for emotional support, but as our critical friendship developed, data revealed that our interactions provided emotional support in a variety of ways: accessibility, personal well-being, and encouragement. This emotional support helped us complete our initial self-studies and also sustained us as we moved through the doctoral process.

4.3.1.1 Accessibility

We often asked one another if the other person was “willing to chat later,” “talk about a quick question,” or “help me process something.” Asking someone to sacrifice their time to focus on someone else’s challenges can make the ‘asker’ feel like a burden. However, we felt comfortable reaching out to one another for support because of the reciprocal nature of our critical friendship. For example, after working on her self-study proposal for a major conference, Megan texted Colleen, “Would you have time to have a [self-study] chat sometime soon? I would like to process with someone” (Text exchange, 1/2/18). Asking each other if we “had five minutes” to chat seems like a simple request, yet these requests held deeper meaning because they were implicit expressions of our need for connection.

As our “open” area of communication expanded, the nature of our accessibility changed. In the initial phase of our critical friendship we often asked one another in advance if the other person was available to talk, usually about more technical issues of practice, and primarily during working hours. However, as our comfort with one another grew, we started to call each other without asking, had more in-depth

conversations around our fears, doubts, and concerns, and felt comfortable reaching out at various times of the day. This level of comfort is exemplified in a text exchange that occurred at 12: 12 am where Megan asked Colleen if she was up and if Megan could call with a quick question and Colleen responded willingly (Text exchange, 2/10/20).

As our critical friendship evolved, our investment in one another's success increased, and we made ourselves available to support each other despite our own obligations. For example, in February of 2020, two days before Megan's dissertation defense and three days before Colleen's deadline to submit her dissertation to her committee, Colleen drove from the beach where she had been writing in solitude to Megan's apartment, so she could provide feedback as Megan practiced her defense presentation. After this practice session, Megan texted:

MS: Thank you SO MUCH for helping me today! Especially with your dissertation due. I feel a lot better about my presentation because of your help!

CG: Anytime! So proud of your work! (Text exchange, 2/22/19)

Megan felt relieved after practicing with Colleen and appreciated that Colleen had willingly sacrificed valuable time to support Megan's success and emotional well-being. Two weeks later, when Megan was taking time off after completing her dissertation, she reciprocated this accessibility and went to Colleen's late in the evening to help Colleen prepare for her defense.

These incidents illustrate the strong commitment we had to one another's success. As critical friends, we witnessed one another's struggles throughout the doctoral process, felt invested in one another's work, and were willing to sacrifice to assist one another in the successful completion of our dissertations.

4.3.1.2 Personal Well-Being

As our critical friendship developed and we shared our "truths" with one another, we supported each other in both distressful and celebratory moments, which bolstered our personal well-being, making us feel less alone.

In a course Colleen taught in the fall of 2017, she was unsure of how to handle a situation where several students felt triggered by course content that reminded them of past personal traumatic experiences. Megan listened to Colleen's concerns and offered advice based on Megan's background in Student Affairs. At one point, Colleen expressed that Megan was "becoming the armchair psychologist when we meet" (Meeting, 11/29/17). Though said in jest, Colleen's words reflect her appreciation that Megan took her concerns seriously when she had been unsuccessful in finding support elsewhere.

Conversely, we genuinely celebrated each other's successes because we had witnessed each other's struggles and advocated for each other's work. Challenged with writing her comprehensive exam, Megan often reached out to Colleen for guidance because Colleen had successfully completed her exam the previous semester. When Megan received her results, she texted Colleen:

MS: Passed my comps! Thank you for your help with reading parts this summer and offering feedback!

CG: Congrats! [popping champagne emoji] (Text exchange, 9/19/18)

Megan wanted to include Colleen in her accomplishment because, as a critical friend, Colleen had invested in Megan’s success by providing ongoing feedback. Megan felt emotionally supported by Colleen’s celebratory response, which increased the trust between us, thus strengthening our peer critical friendship. The support of one another’s personal wellbeing was evidenced in the data on numerous occasions, including Colleen responding to a health crisis in her family, and dealing with her advisor unexpectedly leaving the university, and Megan making a last minute adjustment to her committee, and dealing with an unplanned move.

4.3.1.3 Encouragement

Throughout the doctoral process, we encouraged one another as we progressed through the different stages of our dissertations. We helped each other believe that despite the difficulties we encountered, we would successfully complete our degrees. This encouragement is documented throughout our text exchanges with motivational messages including “You are so close! You got this! (strong arm emoji)” (Megan, 12/8/19), and “You can do this (raise it up emoji, strong arm emoji)” (Colleen, 2/8/20). Our ongoing encouragement often intensified when we knew the other person had an upcoming deadline. As Colleen worked to submit the first full draft of her dissertation, Megan acted as a constant source of support throughout the night of January 17th and the morning of January 18th, 2020.

9:40 pm

MS: How’s it going?

CG: About a 3rd through editing.

MS: Great! Getting there! [strong arm emoji] I’ll check-in in a bit. (Text exchange, 1/17/20)

12:07 am

MS: How’s it going? Hanging in there?

CG: ugh – it’s just so long and tedious – I think I have another 2 hours to go.

MS: Ugh that sucks:(you’re getting so close though and then it is out of your hands! (Text exchange, 1/18/20)

10:58 am

MS: Did you get it submitted? Are you asleep for 1000 years?

CG: Sent a little before 3...Glad it is off my plate for now. (Text exchange, 1/18/20)

Megan knew that Colleen was frustrated about how long the writing was taking and nervous that she would not meet her deadline, so Megan provided continuous encouragement until Colleen confirmed she submitted her draft. As demonstrated in this exchange, we felt less alone in the process because we had someone to motivate us to continue working even when we felt frustrated, confused, or overwhelmed. Our appreciation of one another’s support is exemplified in a text exchange after a virtual work session:

CG: Quitting for the night...! Thanks for making it slightly easier to get work done – very truly appreciate your companionship in this process.

MS: Same to you – I would not be where I am without your presence. (Text exchange, 1/14/20)

The emotional support we provided one another throughout our critical friendship demonstrates that to be a true advocate for someone else’s success you should be invested both in their work and in them as a person. Our emotional support developed over time but became the foundation for the other supports we provided one another as critical friends.

4.3.2 Support of Practice

While conducting our individual self-studies, we both taught teacher education courses and frequently sought advice from the other in regard to both technical aspects of teaching, such as when Megan reached out to Colleen to determine how the grading policy worked (Text exchange, 12/14/17), as well as particular problems we were experiencing in our practice. At different points throughout the semester each of us acted as both advice seeker and advice giver. For example, Megan was unsure of how to grade a student whose work was perpetually late, and together we talked through possible ways to handle this situation (Text exchange, 12/6/17).

On another occasion, we addressed one of Colleen’s persistent problems of practice: behavior management of adult students. Colleen expressed frustration that she seemed unwilling or unable to hold one particularly dismissive student accountable for his behavior. Megan helped Colleen work through this situation by asking the tough questions, “Do you think that any of this goes to your value on relational teaching? Do you think any of this is tied to wanting to be liked?” (Meeting, 11/29/17). In this instance, because we had cultivated a critical friendship where we understood each other’s philosophical stances toward teaching and were comfortable confronting each other with difficult questions, Megan was able to help Colleen think about the “hidden” parts of her practice. Having a critical friend, who was willing to offer a different perspective on our practice, helped us work through our struggles, made us each feel less isolated in our work and enabled us to grow as teacher educators.

4.3.3 Research Support

As we worked on our separate self-studies, we supported each other at all stages of the research process from the formulation of research questions, coding and analysis of data, and editing our final research proposals. This support helped us complete our own research and better understand the research process in terms of self-study specifically and research more broadly. In one instance, Megan struggled to identify

the focus of her self-study, and Colleen engaged in a lengthy conversation with Megan to help her narrow her topic:

Megan explains her general idea.

CG: “What I am hearing is that almost everything you are using is looking at the formation of teacher identity.”

Megan does not think this is accurate and attempts to clarify her point.

CG: “Ok, then my question is are you looking at your identity or how you are helping teachers form their identity as teachers?”

Megan further clarifies her focus in response to the question.

CG: “How would you envision using the literature?”

MS: “I don’t know – I don’t know how it works in self-study – should the literature review be on self-study or on the topic?”

Megan begins to orally work through this question as Colleen takes notes that she later reads back to Megan (Meeting, 10/24/17).

This cycle of Megan processing her thoughts out loud, Colleen repeating back what she heard and questioning Megan, and Megan clarifying her thinking continued for several iterations. The exchange helped both of us think more deeply about the self-study process and how we needed to connect our ideas to our practice and a literature base. As a critical friend, Colleen tried to fully understand Megan’s work, challenge her to articulate her thinking, and help her re-frame the claims she was making.

During this same meeting, Megan also spent a great deal of time helping Colleen to refine her research process. In her self-study, Colleen looked at the way outside support impacted her classroom practice, but she struggled to analyze her data in a way that addressed her question. She had begun to thematically code her journal and wanted Megan’s thoughts on these initial themes. After listening to Colleen, Megan asks, “Looking at the emerging themes from your journal a lot of them relate to issues of practice. What do these have to do with your research questions about support? Are you journaling about support?” (Meeting, 10/24/17). Megan’s questions showed she had deep knowledge of Colleen’s work and therefore could hold Colleen accountable when Colleen began to stray from the focus of her study. Over the course of the conversation, Colleen developed a structure for data collection and analysis that would keep her focused on the research questions.

These anecdotes are illustrative of the data collection and analysis conversations we had while working on our self-studies. These conversations indirectly impacted how we understood and conceptualized our work and directly impacted how we enacted, analyzed, and presented our research findings. Together we co-constructed new knowledge and pinpointed areas of confusion and particular questions we had about our research. These types of exchanges solidified for us the benefits of a critical friendship.

At the end of January 2019, we experienced a crucial transition point in our critical friendship. Our original purpose for meeting was complete; we both had finished our self-studies. However, because our “open” area had grown due to the trust and the reciprocal support we had for one another, we chose to extend the critical friendship beyond our self-studies to our dissertation processes. Our prior support of one

another's self-study research had laid the foundation for how we would continue to support one another as we collected and analyzed data and wrote our dissertations.

4.3.4 *Support in the Dissertation Process*

As our critical friendship expanded beyond our self-studies, we discovered additional ways to support one another as we worked through our dissertations: *sharing knowledge of the process* (when one person had already completed part of the process and was able to share her knowledge about it), *sharing resources* (e.g., recommending articles or books, sharing copies of proposals or dissertations), *thought-partner* (e.g., when working through a new concept and wanting to gain more clarity around the concept or our framing of it), *feedback/critique* (e.g. sharing written pieces of our work, so the other person could provide feedback based on a particular question we had posed), and *accountability* (e.g., goal-setting, checking-in). Accountability and feedback/critique were the most prominent types of support.

4.3.4.1 *Accountability*

In spring 2019, after we both had finished dissertation data collection, we created a document detailing our individual dissertation goals and timelines for the summer as a means to hold us accountable to our work. However, during a phone call in mid-June, we lamented that we had made less progress than we said we would during a previous week's phone call. After several minutes of discussing this lack of productivity, Megan stated "Okay, I'm going to hang up with you, work for one hour and then text you at 8:30 with what I got done" (Personal communication, 6/24/19). Colleen replied that she would also work for an hour. After hanging up and before starting to work, Megan texted:

MS: Title for our next paper – "You've inspired me": when your critical friend makes you do stuff you don't want to do but know you should be doing
CG: So accurate (Text exchange, 6/24/19)

And at the end of the hour, Megan noted:

MS: Maybe we should do that from time to time – both sit down for an hour or so and then report back at the end of time
CG: Agree. I totally would not have worked tonight if we had not talked.
MS: I wouldn't have either.

During this work session, we recognized that voicing our goals to one another and personally checking in, rather than using a shared document, was a more useful way to hold us accountable to our work because we would be accountable to each other. This accountability system became an essential support throughout the remainder of our dissertation work. By committing to hold one another accountable

we added an additional layer of connection to our critical friendship and continued to expand our “open” area as we each invested and advocated for the others’ work.

This investment took a variety of forms, such as “power hours” shown above, where we would work alone together and have short, attainable goals, a request from one individual to the other to hold them accountable for a period of time, and longer in-person work days done together. On these longer days we set a strict schedule for uninterrupted writing; a timer was set and we worked side by side until it went off. No interruptions were allowed during writing blocks, but we could ask for help or think aloud during breaks. At the beginning of each writing day Colleen would record our goals, and we would check on our progress each break. Our blocks tended to start off longer and get shorter as our stamina waned. While the goals were not always met, setting them provided us with needed direction to make the most productive use of our time. For example,

Schedule:

Block 1: 12:30pm – 2pm
 Break: 2pm – 2:15pm
 Block 2: 2:15pm – 3:30pm
 Break: 3:30 – 3:45
 Block 3: 3:45pm – 5:00pm
 Break: 5pm – 5:15pm
 Block 4: 5:15pm – 6:15pm

Megan’s Goals:

- 1) Finish Research Question 2
- 2) Stretch Goal = Start Discussion Section

Colleen Goals:

- 1) Questions 1 & 2 for participant #1 (Goal Setting, 11/2/20)

Accountability was a way to speak our “truths” to one another: what we hoped to accomplish, admitting when we did not meet a goal, and asking for assistance with points of struggle. When we made our goals public, our accountability moved beyond ourselves to each other because we trusted that, as critical friends, we would invest in each other’s progress to support the successful completion of our dissertations.

4.3.4.2 Feedback and Critique

Not only did we hold one another accountable to completing our work, we also pushed one another to do our best work. Because we had expanded our “open” areas while working on our self-studies, we felt comfortable showing each other our first attempts that we felt were not ready for others’ eyes. When Colleen was revising her theoretical framework, she reached out to Megan with specific points of concern, and Megan agreed to review the document.

Megan responded the next day with critical, concise feedback that identified areas that she felt lacked clarity:

I think there needs to be more clarity around these theories through your explanations of them and application of them (take with a grain of salt for now because I know that this is your first attempt at getting “it” out). I’m most confused around the common task/common goal (what it is) and the students’ role in how these theories play out because your focus seems to be very teacher oriented/centered. Lastly, are you looking beyond the initiation and maintaining of the relationships to examine what the relationships *do* for your students? I had some clarity issues with that as well. Let me know if you need to discuss in person – happy to do so. (Email exchange, 6/6/19)

Megan critiqued Colleen’s work noting specific places where the framework was confusing and posed questions that pushed Colleen to clarify her thinking. However, her feedback was also supportive because she had tailored it to meet the specific concerns Colleen had voiced.

Similar exchanges happened often, either by phone, email or texts, or during our in-person work days. When one of us got stuck, our first instinct was to ask the other person for help because we were familiar with each other’s work and knew the other person would offer the candid critique we needed to propel our work forward.. We had recognized through the process of being vulnerable with our self-studies that these critiques made our work better, so we sought out this type of critique from one another because we trusted each other and knew it came from a place of support.

4.4 Scholarly Significance

Isolation, a sense of uncertainty, and a decreasing sense of self-efficacy can all result in doctoral students not completing their degrees. When doctoral students do not interact with others around their practice and research, they constrict their “open” areas and allow themselves to be “blind” to their areas in need of growth. Our findings of emotional support, support of practice, and research support align with other studies on doctoral critical friendships (e.g., Logan & Butler, 2013). Kosnik et al. (2011) address doctoral support by looking at how communities of practice consisting of doctoral students and a faculty mentor can support students throughout the dissertation and doctoral process. We add to this type of support by highlighting the role critical friendship can play in support of the dissertation process when more formal institution supports are not available. Doctoral students may be less likely to complete their degrees when isolation leads to frustration and helplessness; critical friendship may be an essential support in breaking that isolation by encouraging growth, supporting one another’s development as scholars, and sustaining each other through the doctoral process.

Previous research shows that critical friendship may help reduce, though not entirely eliminate, power dynamics between faculty and doctoral students (Butler & Diacopoulos, 2016; Richards & Shiver, 2020). However, our experience of critical friendship suggests that, for doctoral students to be fully vulnerable and to allow their “hidden” area to be fully exposed, it is helpful to engage in peer critical friendships where status and power do not undermine trust within the relationship. Trust

is often predicated on existing personal relationships, which can be more common amongst peers than between faculty and students. When critical friends do not have an existing relationship, they must spend time getting to know one another on a personal and professional basis before they can develop a meaningful critical friendship (Richards & Shiver, 2020). We credit the extent of our vulnerability with each other to both our existing personal relationship and our equal status as doctoral students. Butler (2019) remarked on the benefits of formal, semi-formal, and informal spaces of teacher educator learning. We found that our equal status led to a more informal space of learning because such a space “...can truly reflect the participants’ interests, questions, problems of practice, and available schedule” (p. 238). As our data demonstrate, we were able to keep in constant contact with one another and often at late hours because our equal status eschewed professional time constraints, allowed us to raise concerns and doubts without fear of judgment, and made us less timid about overstepping boundaries.

While we were colleagues and friends prior to forming a critical friendship, self-study research was the catalyst for developing a professional relationship built on trust and honest critique. It was through our self-study critical friendship that we shared frustrations and tensions with our research and ourselves as researchers. These vulnerable conversations around our research built a trusting foundation, so we could share more deeply about our experiences as doctoral students and apply our critical friendship to a different type of research and work experience: that of the dissertation.

It is important that both doctoral students and doctoral programs understand the benefits of peer critical friendship, how such friendship can be developed through self-study, and how peer critical friendship can expand beyond self-study to help break the isolation doctoral students often experience in their persistence to degree completion.

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Chapter 5

Problematizing the Notion of Story Through Critical Friendship: An Exploration of Reframing Dissertation Writing Through Collaborative Meaning-Making Events



Elsie Lindy Olan and Christi U. Edge

Abstract In this chapter, we share our experiences of acting as critical friends for each other in two separate self-studies of practice (dissertation writing). We disrupt our notions of story, practice and as gatekeepers of our participants' experiences. As critical friends, we ask ourselves challenging questions as we reframe events during our dissertation writing while repositioning these in our current professional learning experiences. As critical friends, we engaged in meaning-making and making-meaning conversations, a back-and-forth of ideas, and in this back and forth, ideas are revisited, interrogated, refined, discovered and completed. We recognized our ontological stance was situated in our inquiries, explorations and wonderments regarding our teaching and learning. This chapter advances the power of critical friendship when problematizing storied lives. In exposing the rawness, messiness and nonlinearity that characterizes our critical friendship, we demonstrate how collaborative meaning-making critical events shifted our critical friendship from outcomes-oriented goals to collaborative meaning-making that resulted in disrupting notions, interrogating meaning-making, and challenging us to make new meanings together. Implications address tension in story of critical friendship discourse and extend critical friends as co-authors and collaborative meaning makers in self-study research.

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During our doctoral programs, we – Elsie and Christi – had researched teachers’ lived and told stories through narrative inquiry methodology. In 2017, several years after we completed our respective dissertations, 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 several hours of 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. Sharing our experiences and the tensions we had been living in created an emerging sense of trust and intimacy. We agreed to challenge one another as critical friends who could revisit our dissertation inquiries and be proactive in laboring to give these stories life. Furthermore, we explored the tensions which had muffled our voices. We opened our calendars and put down a date to meet via Skype, then Zoom, starting the following week. In pursuit of our self-study, we continued to meet, at least once a week, for three years.

In telling our story, we encourage our self-study community to become insightful of the myriad dominant, prescriptive, silencing narratives that inform, shape and confine our storied lives. We have revisited the notion of critical friendship by repositioning our co-laboring as not just a resource for the completion of a better end product, but as a making, together, which enables an individual to revisit, reignite, disrupt and problematize our past and present storied lives (Olan & Edge, 2019). We agree with Stolle et al. (2019) that, as critical friends, we “recognize the intricate connections between thinking and action and the impact of these connections on a successful critical friendship” (p. 29).

When we remember that, as humans, we are born into storied lives, our existence can be seen as a kind of *text*—intricately woven, a quilt of experiences, pieced and stitched together into meaningful patterns, we can embrace that what connects these experience can be unstitched and restitched (Edge, 2011; Edge & Olan, 2020b). Because of our critical friendship, we have re-imagined, re-invented, negotiated, accepted, and acknowledged that there are events and incidents that inform our lived experiences, even if our voices were silent when these moments occurred.

The purpose of this chapter is to further expound on the power of critical friendship when problematizing our storied lives. We sought to expose the rawness, messiness and nonlinearity that characterizes our critical friendship. In our search to reframe our dissertation writing, we encountered collaborative meaning-making critical events that challenged us, disrupted our notions and interrogated our meaning-making.

5.1 Narrative Inquiry

We positioned our research in narrative inquiry because we focused on our 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. As Webster and Mertova (2007) write, “Narrative is well suited to addressing the complexities and subtleties of human experience in teaching and learning” (p. 1). 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). Elbaz (1991) writes:

Story is the very stuff of teaching, the landscape within which we live as teachers and researchers, and within which the work of teachers can be seen as making sense. This is not merely a claim about the aesthetic or emotional sense of fit of the notion of story with our intuitive understanding of teaching, but an epistemological claim that teachers’ knowledge in its own terms is ordered by story and can best be understood in this way. (p. 3)

Because people often recall life experiences in terms of specific events, people’s memories of past events often lead them to “adapt strategies and processes to apply to new situations,” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 71). They explain that identifying critical events and the details surrounding them is useful for “getting at the core” of what is important in a study (p. 71). For a researcher, holistically studying critical events can be “an avenue to making sense of complex and human-centered information (p. 77). We selected self-study as an approach for exploring and challenging our assumptions and beliefs with the purpose of improving our understanding and practice (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001).

Self-study is rooted in postmodernist and feminist thinking (LaBoskey, 2004), and thus “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). Self-study intends to inform researchers and to generate knowledge that can be disseminated both within and beyond the professional discourse community (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015).

As self-study researchers, we documented our process of being and becoming critical friends as we disrupted and problematized our narrative lives as teacher researchers. We relied on Schuck and Russell’s (2005) description of a critical friend which “acts a sounding board, asks challenging questions, supports reframing of events, and joins in the professional learning experience” (p. 107). During our critical friendship we nurtured our relationship, 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. We sought to understand. In so doing, we discovered and nurtured a bond, fortified by a shared purpose of understanding and ever being and becoming. In co-authoring our lived research, we discovered, authentically, what it means to be and to become critical friends.

5.2 Problematizing the Notion of Story Through Critical Friendship

In the process of sharing stories we validated our feelings, recognized our positionalities and made meaning as we engaged in dialogic meaning-making. In this shared space, critical instances were revisited as our storied lives, narrative inquiry and self-study converged. 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 (Dewey & Bentley, 1949; Edge, 2011; Edge & Olan, 2020a, Edge & Olan, 2020b). Informed by the Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994; Rosenblatt, 1994), a narrative view of experience (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and feminist communication theory (e.g., Colflesh, 1996), we positioned ourselves as collaborative, active meaning makers who could read and make meaning from our lived experiences (Cameron-Standerford et al., 2016; Edge & Olan, 2020a, b; Olan & Edge, 2019). Drawing from individual narrative inquiry and self-study research, we shared a perspective that stories lived and told are a way of understanding experience. To facilitate our collaborative inquiry, we positioned ourselves as critical friends who could disrupt and problematize our narrative lives as teacher researchers.

For this chapter, we examine, re-examine and reposition our initial writings—partial notes/running notes, rambblings, inquiries, utterances, our dialogic interactions where our notions are disrupted and interrogated. We reminisced on our dissertation writing journey while reframing and repositioning critical incidents that defined our current professional learning experiences. As critical friends, we sought to go beyond observing and talking about our behaviors, experiences, teaching and feelings, we immersed ourselves in each other's experiences to make and co-construct meaning. We welcomed spaces permeated by dissent and vulnerability to act and re-enact our learning and teaching from multiple vantage points. Data we collected over time included the stories we lived and told together including vignettes, critical incidents, field notes, and running notes with ideas we jotted down as we spoke or as we listened to one another.

To navigate our positionality, we used a modified collaborative conference protocol (Anderson et al., 2010; Bergh et al., 2018; Cameron-Standerford et al., 2013; Edge et al., 2019) to help one another re-frame an understanding of experience (Loughran & Northfield, 1996). This process included: (1) identifying a critical event; (2) formulating a self-study question; (3) textualizing the lived experience; (4) situating the event in its broader context; (5) sharing one's ideas and insights with a critical friend; and (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 identified thematic findings, and we identified and articulated (8) both connecting and dissenting experiences, knowledge, and ever-unfolding shared understandings from which we made new understandings of research and practice.

In co-authoring our lived research, we discovered, authentically, what it means to be and to become critical friends. We engaged in dialogue 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.

5.3 Challenging Spaces While Embracing Inquiry and Inviting Dissent

Throughout our initial dialogic interaction, we made new meaning by engaging in collaborative meaning-making. In our individual and shared narrative spaces, we struggled within and across tensions. In the spatializing of narratives, temporal tensions surfaced. These tensions surfaced from our professional and personal stories. Tensions that pulled us together while pushing us apart to reflect, ponder and react to what each story made us feel. We recognized we knew more and had grown beyond the tensions and stories surrounding the dissertation process. It was no longer the meaning we were making but had made. We negotiated and re-negotiated our stances about our dissertation while welcoming new inquiries. We relinquished power as sole authors of our stories to welcome the discovery of giving ourselves space to grow beyond and be in the moment, while embracing the wonderment of how our stories unfold and are re-storied in our temporal and social spaces. We acknowledged that these spaces of challenge were the catalysts for us to recognize that it is time to reposition, revisit and rejoice in these spaces of dissent that lead to new inquiries and newfound discoveries.

5.4 Our Journey-Moving Back to Move Forward, Together

Looking back to examine the recursive processes of meaning-making transactions and dialogic interactions in running notes and interim texts, we see the generation of critical friendship evoked from initial connections and then grew through invited tensions of inquiry and dissent as we became critical friends as coauthors. Our discoveries make visible how self-study guided us to disarm the boundaries of our individual selves by disrupting our existing understanding of self in relationship to

our past lived experiences. We crossed into a collaborative space where we were able to co-author our narrative lives through a flexible collaborative conference protocol, and push the boundaries of teacher education practices by transforming our professional inquiries through co-authoring.

In the earliest notes jotted on a running document during our initial virtual meetings, it is evident that we began our work together with an expectation that we could help one another as critical friends. As described by the oft-cited Costa and Kallick (1993), we expected or assumed:

A critical friend, as the name suggests, is a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work. (p. 50)

We also understood critical friendship as an important, if not central, component of self-study of teacher education practices research. "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). Our understanding of "critical friend" was focused on what we could or should do. It did not yet reflect an understanding of critical friendship as embodied, medium, as a kind of story we could co-author as both a medium for and representation of new meanings we made.

The shared Google document we initially began (March 2017) titled, "Critical Friendship Running Document," reflects our early focus on outcomes, on goals, acting as a sounding board, as we took turns speaking and listening while making notes. We nudged each other by pressing for goals and holding one another accountable through our meetings. Evidence of our initial, parallel play-separate, yet together-is evident in the structure of our thinking and the focus of our notes. For example, our initial meeting includes clear turn-taking, use of labels to show whose notes are being recorded and who is recording them.

Christi's Notes from Elsie's feedback:

Teacher Education/Educational Research audience

While the six phases are there, the part that comes after—the "Meanings I Made from Research Events" (page 169–) are what resonated with her.

Make this a conceptual piece.

My notes [Christi's] the "making meaning with Readers and Texts: A Research Story" is what I lived— and what follows is how I navigated these events. I think I still live these stances. Start here.

Christi's goal for next time: (1) make a draft around this section; (2) think about a journal. Elsie's goals: 1) Create a draft of a conceptual piece (page 149 and some methodology) 2) think about the "goal sheet" (audience, journal, etc.). (Critical Friendship Running Document, 3-8-17)

Looking back on these early notes from the vantage point of the present, it is clear that our stance as critical friends was more efferent (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994) in nature; that is, our meaning-making process was oriented toward the "take-aways," on establishing goals, an audience for our writing, and what we might enable each

other to accomplish. Our shared space consists mostly of what we hear the other person saying, what we think about their feedback on what we've shared, and our self-identified next steps.

Initial shifts in our stance toward more of an aesthetic stance, valuing the lived-through experience and conversation together are evident in meaningful questions we posed to one another. Highlights we made as annotations following the meetings indicate we found these questions to be important, provocative, evoking new wonderings that became threads we picked up and weaved together over time and through our social interactions across the virtual space of our video conference meetings.

From the initial parallel play and turn-taking, we began to interrupt and shift from speaking out to conversing with one another through often disrupted dialogic interactions. Our space began to move toward that of co-constructing and creating meaning together. For instance, in our third meeting, we begin talking about not our research from several years ago or our future goals, but about our lives since our last meeting. As we shared and listened, we affirmed and encouraged one another. Immediately after making connections between our lived experiences, we note: "We both independently recognize that we need the dialogic interaction." Our notes reflect the more intimate nature of self-study of practice as we inquire into the self that is a part of the research. "Question for Elsie: What do you want to communicate through this data? I want to know what you have to say. I want to know what you think" (3-28-17). The dialogic interaction in this early phase offers an audience – a sounding board – but also begins to shift toward shared sense-making as we become invested in the lived experiences we each bring to the research space, as we enter into them and offer connections and additional insights from our present, different realities of sociality, temporality, and place. We bring those to a shared moment and begin to weave life lived in the now, even as we picked up the pieces of thought from prior meetings and from our dissertation research. The boundaries of the initial wonderings we independently brought into the critical friendship begin to move, nudged by the safety we create from sharing the stories we are living now as we compose the shared story of our critical friendship.

Elsie: In all of these stories, where am I? I nurtured my dissertation as a child and then admired it from a distance, but now, I'm so far removed...Where is that story? ...

Christi: If life is a story that we author; stories are written by us, advanced by conflict and tensions...

Elsie: ...I'm thinking about how these teacher candidates used stories to disrupt; parallel to that, I see myself using stories to disrupt notions of being an academic researcher. I'm understanding that stories are not only a conduit or tool, but they were a trigger... what makes me revisit ...it's as if my stories trigger because they trigger a response or reaction in me because I'm using a story from the past to ...in the present and the future. Stories are more than a conduit they help me to understand the past by situating the past in my present to move forward...

Christi: Meaning-making in the present. How do these students make meaning through their stories—they use inquiry as a guideline for instructional practices.

Elsie: This event in 2012 is not an event now; I need to give myself permission to do that.

Periodically, in our notes, we stop to note what we see happening so far in our critical friendship. These notes reflect our collaborative and co-authored making new meanings together. They also reflect a shift away from our individual “parallel play” thinking about our individual dissertations and toward the meaning we were making together:

Role of critical friend...not scripted or framed but LIVED and experienced; these [collaborative conference protocol] steps that we are going through; these did not prescribe our interactions, but rather describe what they were, and we welcomed them. [We are connecting] transactional theory and transformational theory and how transactional and transformational are not only complementary but symbiotic. Our life histories and our relationship have allowed us to see and to live this.

Transformation, according to Mezirow, involves alienation from earlier established conceptions of values and one’s actions in the world, ‘reframing new perspectives, and re-engaging life with a greater degree of self-determination’ (Mezirow 2000: xii).

Our transformation of our dialogic interactions [is where] we revisit, we reinvent; we inquire, and then we problematize before we disrupt. We ask questions, we probe; [there is] disruption... a symphony... we have an order.

(Mezirow transformational)

This is real. I want to take this moment.

Synergy is here. [Let’s remember we have documented this in our] researcher-field notes.

[Our] challenge [is] to enact how we close the sphere (Rosenblatt & Langer), how these two [Rosenblatt & Langer] connect. We are going to show [others] through these dissertations how these two aspects of scholarship come together.

Our dialogue created the space to reinvent and re-envision. (Critical Friendship Running Document, 4-12-17)

Our notes became simultaneously more fluid and more interrupted. The ideas flow as we both speak and write, listening and writing together. Gone are the markers of who said what. We also see foundational ideas from our independent dissertations—transformation meets transaction and ignites in the present puzzles brought forward in previous discourse. Shifting and aligning in new ways, we recognize a synergistic making of new meaning that leads to a collaborative point of inquiry we are excited to explore together. Our focus shifts to the present, lived through experiences we live and compose together. The dissertations are no longer the object of our inquiry but shift to become threads we utilize to weave and to make new meanings. Our dialogic interaction reinvented and re-envisioned created new space to see and re-see what was emerging in the shared space of the present, as we composed together, speaking, writing, uttering out loud, forming thoughts in the present moment as they flowed from and through us.

We recognized how the creation of these spaces were moments of discovery and inquiry. Our lived stories, meaning-making and personal experiences, and conversations resulted from our interaction as critical friends who co-construct meaning. During our interactions, we relinquished control and allowed each other to struggle as we examined our own practices in the context of educator researchers that enacted and embodied what it meant to share with our students’ common inquiries about lived experiences and pedagogical stances. Our inquiries resided in the relationship of researcher and participant (Richards & Fletcher, 2018). For example, our field notes depict how we revisit previous conversations in light of new wonderings.

Coming back to Elsie's question: why is it important? Why is doing and living research impactful in our field, not only to tenure-seeking faculty, but to faculty who are engaging in research, questioning, problematizing, disrupting notions. Why is it important for our audience to understand doing and living research [includes] repositioning and changing up the [metaphorical] stitch. [Making] new meaning in new contexts and for different purposes. Living-doing-iving research enables us to grow and change along with our research (through experience) but also helps us to know-to know from experience (different types of knowledge), through complexities and intricacies that our students need to live-do-live to grow. Also, that self-study research is a constant revisiting into our teaching, our learning, our experiences and interactions with our students, our meaning-making interaction and positioning in the texts. In compiling the threads, they are strong and they make something.

How do these found poems represent the doing and the living of research? It is cyclical, iterative [and] dialogic.

Writing to disrupt and to re-imagine—Living our Research. We've got our outline!!
(Critical Friendship Running Document, 5/31/17)

Our shared meaning-making in the above excerpt of our running notes includes the embodied response of joy, song and dance. We respond to discoveries and unexpected events forged over time. The events we experienced together in the virtual world connected our place and space in time (Michigan and Florida), lingering on long after we had logged off and returned to our daily lives. For instance, after our virtual meetings, Christi wrote ideas in her journal with the intention to share when we next met:

Quick Reflection (4/20/17):

This morning while I was blow drying my hair, I smiled thinking about our work session yesterday and smiled even more thinking about the Hezekiah [dancing] moment! This made me think about the critical friends (Castle) piece a bit in light of your [Elise's] question yesterday: What stitches the quilt together? I was/am reminded of a few things that are stitching our critical friends collaboration together: 1) We've used the terms "parallel experiences" in referencing our dissertation research; (2) We've mentioned that we share background knowledge and readings related to English education, narrative inquiry, education, qualitative inquiry, and self-study. The moment (yesterday) where I could spot your brown Denzin and Lincoln book from across your office (and through my own computer screen) stands out right now because there is no way I could have spotted that without knowing that book myself. (3) Our faith-based backgrounds and views of life; and (4) Being mothers. Each of these (and I'm sure there are others) are strong, hearty threads of knowledge and experience; that we have them in common means...I don't know yet—perhaps that we can infer, read between the lines, anticipate; we share common values and language, through which we can stitch together what we are (re)discovering now and (re)stitching from the past, before we collaborated...

Langer's framework helps to explain how our "pen" (our perspective) is tainted and also calls for the importance of critical friends, of discourse, of disruption, of the larger community (both narrowly and broadly defined), as contexts are important in Rosenblatt's theoretical frame and in meaning-making, narrative, and life. The S-STEP community, specifically, shares some (enough) of the same metaphorical books on their mental and actual bookshelves, but they are doing and living life and research in other contexts; together, our stories help to both disrupt and to join patches of quilts—quilt making... narrative threads... as we weave together the larger landscape of life and of educational research, [like] the image of a patchwork landscape as seen from an aerial view. We map and make the terrain even as we traverse it from our different points.

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. Life is not a side note to our research.

We pondered how Shawn Bullock, Alicia [Crowe], Geoff Mills, Deb Tidwell, [Anastasia] Samaras, [Stefinee] Pinnegar, [Mary Lynn] Hamilton and others served as co-conspirators in our meaning-making and making-meaning inquiry. They shared the tension they felt in sharing research.

Although the above segment from our running notes is long, it demonstrates how original ideas from our dissertations were challenged by questions, reframed through additional discourse, interrupted and recomposed in light of the present. It also shows how our ideas grew from and through the tensions and inquiries we posed. More importantly, it begins to show how *critical friends* shifted to embodied experience in the co-authored space of the present.

5.5 Collaborative Meaning-Making/Making Meaning

One meaning-making critical event that challenged us, disrupted our notions and interrogated our dissertation writing process was the crafting of a found poem. In this process of wonderment, both Christi and I ventured into an ongoing discovery (Samaras & Freese, 2006) where we focused on the complex interactions that both she and I had as we deconstructed and co-constructed meanings in order to move toward greater understandings of ourselves, our pedagogical practices and our lived experiences.

As we engaged in dialogic interactions as critical friends, we were cognizant that our written dissertations were a product of our multivoicedness in our settings as former high school teachers, our then (at the time of the dissertation) university instructors, researchers, teacher educators, and our present context as teacher educator researchers in diverse academic settings. We knew we needed to free ourselves, and we turned to practices we employed as teachers. We explored how writing found poems about deeply constructed understandings that were composed through the dissertation event and represented in our dissertation texts might be re-imagined. We were intrigued and wondered about what would happen if we were to reposition ourselves to hear the multivoicedness of our temporal, personal-professional, and conceptual contexts by writing found poems. LaBoskey (2004) explains that these ideas through critical memory work and are used to make the past usable. For example,

The assumption is that the accuracy of our memories does not matter; whatever shape they take, they influence the construction of our identities, our current thinking, and our future behavior. Therefore, if we begin to access and interrogate those memories, we can have more control over them and their impact on our teaching. (p. 843)

Our memories unfolded inquiries where questions surfaced surrounding the importance of revisiting a moment while peeling back the layers of these events.

Why is doing and living research impactful in our field, not only to tenure-seeking faculty, but to faculty who are engaging in research, questioning, problematizing, disrupting notions? Why is it important for our audience to understand doing and living research? Why do we revisit our experiences of the then while we are living the now? How and where does this new meaning come from? How can old contexts become intertwined with our new contexts? Finally, what is the purpose of the inquiry or process? These questions inundated and deafened our meetings. In the time and space between meetings, we reconsidered the original texts, our participant's stories and meaningful events detailed in our dissertation. We welcomed spaces where we needed to step back and think about meaning-making shared in our dialogic interactions. We needed to acknowledge the discomfort the constant probing, questioning and wondering had on us. Taking into consideration the dialogic interaction with our critical friend, we embraced the discovery that our poems, not the original text, was the object of our attention. During these meeting we narrated the tensions brought forth from questioning previous stories and crafting a found poem.

As we interrogated our memories, we embodied Toni Morrison's (1992) description of her reading process-while reading we can become engaged in and watch what is being read simultaneously. We began this process by creating an "untreated" found poem (i.e., one conserving virtually the same order, syntax, and meaning as the original source) (Butler-Kisber, 2010) from our dissertation. The purpose of the untreated found poem was to gauge the capacity for the found poem to capture the experiences portrayed in the texts. We created our found poems by going through our dissertation, highlighting those sentences, phrases, or words that were particularly meaningful, powerful, moving, or interesting to us when writing our poems then took the highlighted sections and on a separate sheet of paper, we reconstructed them into a poem that represented the thoughts and feelings we noted in our own dissertation. We also created an additional "treated" found poem (one changed in a profound and systematic manner) after our dialogic interactions. The purpose of the treated found poem was first to allow us more freedom in constructing our views about our experiences through poetry that might expand beyond the confines of the research questions, and second, to engage in the imaginative appropriation and reconstruction of already-existing texts.

As we focused on the new poem, we read the text aloud as a participatory event. We engaged in a listening-reading-performing-composing act, arranging the words to communicate the new understandings we had garnered from dialogic interactions with the untreated poem. We also listened for possible line breaks and stanzas, noting where we paused, listening for the silent noise. Inside the new event, we arranged words and ideas in an organic manner; we were creating and crafting, but our actions were driven by a stance of exploration—of wonderment, praise, and inquiry. In the process of exchanging and crafting the poem, without the critical friend's insights, we would have been unable to move the poem—the understanding—forward. The critical friendship espoused the interaction needed to both explore new insights and also to more deeply understand the original experience we wrote about in the poem.

Making new meaning from a text we already knew well reflected the power of the relationship between student and teacher/researcher and participants. It also reflected the depth of that relationship by acknowledging similarities of our experiences. In reflecting on the found poem writing process, we realized the impact this experience had on our pedagogical and theoretical stances. Not only were we experiencing similar events with our students, we also began to understand how our students made sense of their newfound knowledge. As researchers, we alongside our participants navigated a constant inquiry about the value and position of lived experiences and pedagogy in the research space. It is now evident how this positionality was salient throughout our stories. In the exercise of reinventing, revisiting and revealing the dissertation process through found poetry, there was an unveiling of new insights and dimensions where we deconstructed realizations resulting from our dialogic interactions in the interplay of questioning and probing. As Elsie reflected:

[When] I rambled about understanding and empathizing with my students, my critical friend probed about what is and what [the ramblings] revealed. [As a result,] I revisited and negotiated experiences, feelings and stances. (Interim text, March 2018)

We stood in a place of greater vulnerability where the self and the other (critical friend) were consistently in tension with each other (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). A tension that was not frowned upon but welcomed as a conduit for exploration of our pedagogical practices. We recognized that our ontological stance was situated in our inquiries, explorations and wonderments regarding our teaching and learning. As critical friends we engaged in meaning-making and making-meaning conversations, a back-and-forth of ideas, and in this back and forth, ideas are revisited, interrogated, refined, discovered and completed. Our critical friendship is constantly revisited and maintained through diligence, authentic and truthful conversations about critical issues, weaknesses and emotionally charged experiences. It is continuously forged by provocative questions, vulnerability, honest critique and tolerance, and commitment and hard-work. We hold ourselves accountable for each other as we co-construct meaning and grow from our learning and teaching.

In telling our story now, we seek to engage in dialogic interactions with the self-study community. We continue the struggle. 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, challenge ourselves 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-envisioning and 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.

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Chapter 6

With a Little Help from My Friends: The Intersectionality of Friendship and Critical Friendship



Adam W. Jordan, Michael Levicky, Andrew L. Hostetler, Todd S. Hawley,
and Geoff Mills

Abstract In this chapter, we explore the influence of the ongoing duality of friendship and critical friendship as they impact all aspects of our lives – researchers, teacher educators and, most importantly friends. Drawing on emails, conference presentations, and peer-reviewed manuscripts compiled over five years (and counting) that were all grounded and connected in an ongoing text thread, we argue that without a deep sense of friendship, critical friendships may never reach their full potential. Further exploration of this under examined aspect of self-study work is important if we are to prepare future researchers to leverage self-study as a space to do the necessary work of improving teaching and teacher education practices.

6.1 Introduction

In life, you are lucky if you find a few good friends. Regardless of the challenges and situations life offers, steady, reliable, caring, constructive friends are a gift. We have found friendship that inhabits these qualities as a group of educators finding

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synergy among our differences. Our group of friends is an unlikely but fortunate crew with overlapping connections that have somehow bound us together as not only friends, but critical friends.

Since 2016, we have become a tight-knit collaborative, both personally and professionally. Personally, we have supported one another through what feels like countless misfortunes and losses, and that does not even include the stress of a global pandemic. Professionally, we are all educators, each with our own varying paths. Todd, Andy, and Mike are social studies teacher educators, Adam is a special education teacher educator, and Geoff, now retired, is a former dean of a college of education.

As academics at varying stages of our careers spanning from doctoral student to professor emeritus, we rely on each other for navigating the often complicated and confusing academy. The duality of our personal friendships and professional collaboration has allowed us to become friends, first and foremost. However, we argue that as friends rather than merely friendly colleagues, we are able to engage more deeply as critical friends in the scholarship of self-study. Though our areas of expertise and interests vary, we all rely on self-study research as a methodology that helps inform our practice. Self-study helps us all to situate ourselves within a complex academic landscape. We argue that the intersection of friendship and critical friendship enhances our ability to think laterally about our roles as teacher educators and that friendship is not well-explored in the critical friend literature.

6.2 Critical Friendship Requires Trusting Friends

Samaras (2011) defined critical friends as “trusted colleagues who seek support and validation of their research to gain new perspectives in understanding and reframing of their interpretations” (p. 5). In essence, critical friends serve as a functional support system for the systematic inquiry required by a rigorous, thoughtful self-study methodology. Schuck and Russell (2005) also add that critical friends are essential when the goal is to reframe practice. Given this collective stance, critical friendship is a bedrock staple of much self-study work. These relationships separate engaging self-study methodologies from standard reflections of teaching. While the latter is also critical to the practice of teaching (Hawley & Jordan, 2015), critical friendship functions as a way to vet self-reflection against the thoughts of knowing and caring others, thus yielding opportunities for more sustained professional development. Samaras further explained that critical friends “serve to mediate, provoke, and support new understandings” (p. 5). In essence, critical friends exist to help, to support, to guide, and to ask questions. Much like the work of Stolle et al. (2019), we understand our positions as critical friends to be layered and complicated, existing on a continuum. We posit that friendship also varies in definition and exists upon an unfixed continuum, rooted in who we are at a given point in time, thus we turn to personal history self-study to better understand the nuances of our friendship and critical friendship.

In explaining her connection to self-study, Samaras and Freese (2006) suggested she was connected particularly to personal history self-study or the “influence of [her] culture, context, and history on [her] teaching practice” (p. 7). We feel that right now it is imperative self-study scholars return to Samaras’ words with a renewed focus on the volatility of this notion amidst a global pandemic in a politically tumultuous time in the United States. These valid modalities of respective influences must be vetted in a new era in which a rapidly diversifying society struggles to find traction on an arc toward justice and equity. This includes critical considerations that juxtapose societal justice and equity against academic norms that remain predominantly white and middle class, all the while embracing Draconian processes for determining career advancement and validation of scholars navigating a dated tenure system.

To conduct personal history self-study as friends and critical friends in 2020 required a deeper discussion of the risky nature of reflecting on the influences of personal cultures, contexts, and histories. Critical friendship enacted in the process of personal history self-study requires vulnerability, and with vulnerability comes risk. We argue here that friendship, like critical friendship, must be grounded in culture, history, and context.

6.3 Cultural, Historical, and Contextual Dispositions of Our Collective

As Samaras (2011) noted, it is the contemplation of the influences of the cultural, historical, and contextual dispositions of personal history self-study that make this approach valuable to the self-study researcher. We agree and argue that it is this rich combination of reflecting on our own cultural, historical, and contextual dispositions through the function of friendship that has allowed us to form a strong collective of friends and critical friendships. As such, we outline here some of the basic components of these variables within each of ourselves through self-expressed positionalities that regularly emerge in our interactions, paying particular attention to our perceptions of how our cultures, histories, and contexts impact our path in the academy. Additionally, we consider how our overlapping critical friendships play a role in our navigation of the academy in analysis seen through the lenses of friendship and critical friendship. These positionalities are offered to help ground our data.

6.3.1 Adam

I am a first-generation college student from rural North Georgia. I identify strongly as a Southerner and a Southern Appalachian. I never intended to attend college, but thanks to a public, merit-based scholarship program in Georgia called the Helping

Outstanding Pupils Education (HOPE) Scholarship, I pursued a degree at the University of Georgia (UGA) in Secondary Social Studies Education. At UGA, I learned many things, but not all of that knowledge came from the curriculum. Specifically, I learned that apparently, my Southern accent is strong and poor kids are not always quite sure how to fit in with the norms of college life, which strongly center around norms of the middle class. Because I was working two jobs, I did not have the time to engage in many extracurricular activities or even engage in many of the social functions so typical of college. As I progressed through my program I felt committed to the profession of teaching, but consistently out of place at the university. During my junior year, Todd, a Ph.D. student at the time, taught my methods class. He was the first “professor” (at the time I knew no difference between a Ph.D. student and a full professor) to be able to relate to the rural and working-class norms I brought to our cohort. This allowed me to trust Todd and thus persist in my program. Todd and I have remained friends since and Todd has been my connection to the rest of the members of this collective, all of which are people I now call true friends. The collective consistently helps me analyze my professional frustrations, usually related to the same feelings of not fitting into the academy, only now as an associate professor and not as an undergraduate student.

6.3.2 Mike

I am a third-generation college student and attended my father’s alma mater, Kent State University, after graduating from high school. Neither of my mothers’ parents attended college, while my maternal grandparents both attended college and my paternal grandparents did not. My family is rooted in blue collar Midwestern values such as working hard and learning to do things yourself. I entered college without a clear path in terms of major or field of study but held a critical perspective and a passion for learning. I enrolled as a communications major with the idea I would be a play-by-play sports broadcaster, but I changed majors deciding to pursue a bachelor’s degree in secondary education, integrated social studies.

After seven semesters at school, I dropped out as my motivation and grades floundered. Soon after I started working as a classroom aide with students with various dis/abilities. I found a renewed sense of purpose toward being an educator from this work and enrolled at the University of Akron to complete my undergraduate degree. While there, I enjoyed fieldwork experiences in urban settings and was excited to be placed with an experienced mentor teacher in an urban school. I thought that as a teacher I could do work in my practice that engaged students using non-traditional methods. Upon graduation, I followed this path for nine years as a social studies practitioner at a rural career and technical school in Northeast Ohio before resigning to become a doctoral student and stay-at-home dad.

I met Todd via the happenstance of being assigned to work with him as his graduate assistant. I also reconnected with Andy (we met as undergraduates) as we were enrolled in the same program and had several graduate courses together. Todd and

Alicia (another professor at Kent State University) introduced me to self-study and Andy, Todd, Alicia, and I (among other colleagues) participated in a collaborative self-study. Through this experience I became interested in self-study connected to my teaching practice and later met Geoff at both the AERA Conference and Castle Conference in 2014. I met Adam at the Castle Conference in 2016 after nearly two years of talking with him via text and e-mail.

6.3.3 *Andy*

I am a first-generation college student from rural Ohio. As a middle and high school student I was under the impression that the steel mill, military, and college were my only after school options. I pursued a degree at the Kent State University in Integrated Social Studies Education. I met Mike my first year. Near the end of that semester we went our separate ways and did not see each other much the remainder of college. I finished my degree with a lot of student loan debt. I thought that middle class students like myself just had to do that and despite working 2–3 jobs while going to school I could not keep up with tuition bills. I learned a lot about teaching, and being social, but struggled to get a job at the end of my time at Kent.

After a year teaching in Charleston, South Carolina I returned to Ohio, where I taught for several years, and applied to the Ph.D. program in curriculum and instruction at Kent State University where Alicia Crowe would become my advisor. During my first year in the doctoral program I met Todd, who was a first year professor at Kent, and reconnected with Mike as a fellow graduate student. Todd and Alicia invited Mike and me, among others, to join a self-study research collaborative and eventually we presented at Castle 2010, where we met Geoff, and published articles in Alicia's edited book (Hawley et al., 2010; Hostetler, 2010). These relationships helped me persist through graduate school, job search, birth of my son, the cancer my wife was diagnosed with, the promotion process, and more over the years. This collective has supported me personally and professionally through difficult times.

6.3.4 *Todd*

I am from Athens, Georgia and I am a proud Southerner and advocate for a better, more inclusive, equitable South. I was a high school social studies teacher in the Atlanta Public Schools for four years and at Oglethorpe County High School for three years before working on a Ph.D. program in Social Studies Education at UGA. I have been at Kent State as a social studies teacher educator for the past 12 years.

I met Adam at UGA. We are close friends and colleagues and have written together about public education in the South, social studies, special education, and

mentally-healthy public schools (Jordan et al., 2017). I met Mike and Andy as a first-year assistant professor. Mike was assigned to me as a graduate assistant. We have become close friends, have written together, and shared many-a deep conversation about life and teaching. I met Andy while sitting in on a graduate-level social studies class at Kent State, and invited Andy to participate in a small grant project and to join a self-study collective, of which Mike was also a member. Andy and I have presented and written together about social studies, collaborative self-study, and the potential for self-study to be taken up in other content and research areas within education, all while remaining close friends. I would follow Andy Hostetler anywhere. Finally, I met Geoff in 2010 while attending the Castle Conference, where Geoff famously said, “I ain’t buyin you shit, Todd.” I have written collaboratively with Geoff and he has since bought me plenty of drinks. This collaborative has been and remains a source of inspiration, a place to vent and be honest, and to laugh. I am certain that without their support I would not be nearly as happy, confident and successful as I have been.

6.3.5 *Geoff*

I am from Perth, Australia. My father served in Borneo during World War II and my mother was a “war bride” having lost her first husband in a Japanese Prison Camp. I grew up in a small rural community where my father worked in the local brick yard and my mother struggled to feed a family on a brick laborer’s wages. Nobody in my family attended school past 9th grade, and there was an expectation that by the time I turned 16 I would work and help support the family. I decided to finish high school and was accepted into university where I entered a three-year diploma of teaching program, and at the age of 20 found myself teaching elementary school in the “outback.”

At that time (circa 1979), distance learning consisted of packets of readings being mailed to the student, assignments were completed and returned by mail, and grades were posted. I completed my bachelors degree via distance learning, returned to the “city” and started taking night classes, eventually completing a masters degree in education. In 1986 I moved to the United States and completed a PhD at the University of Oregon. In 1988 I started working at Southern Oregon University (SOU) as an assistant professor. Over a 30-year period at SOU I moved through the professorial ranks that also included 12 years as dean and professor of education.

I have been fortunate to start writing with Adam, Todd, Andy and Mike. These relationships have been a highlight of my career, and Adam will join me as a co-author on my book, *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Applications* (13e, 2022). We have endured much professionally and personally, including the loss of my wife. This group of colleagues have helped me grieve and move forward with my life.

6.4 Understanding Our Journey as Critical Friends

As both friends and critical friends, we have accumulated a great deal of data over the last five years. In order to provide insight into our journey as friends and critical friends, we offer our analysis of a group text message thread that dates back to 2016. On this running thread, we discuss the intersection between friendship and critical friendship as our topics range from the personal to the professional. While the overall history of the text thread influences our interpretation, for the purposes of this chapter we pay particular attention to the unique nature of our 2020 communications. These communications exist among a global pandemic and during a time of intense personal tragedy, beginning with the passing of Andy's wife, Claire, in January and Geoff's wife, Donna, in May. These events are all trying as stand alone circumstances, and as such, our 2020 communications are unique.

Theoretically, we position our understanding of our journey alongside Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (2009) position on "inquiry as stance." Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) argued that "inquiry as stance" serves as a "grounded theory of action that positions the role of practitioners and practitioner knowledge as central to the goal of transforming teaching, learning, leading, and schooling" (p. 119). Cochran-Smith and Lytle suggested that inquiry should be a collective operation (p. 120). In other words, questioning our practice and making decisions about our actions should be done through a collaborative inquiry process communally with one another, as we seek to do in this text thread as our roles of critical friends and friends intersect. In this view, educational practice is "social and political in the sense of deliberating about what to get done, why to get it done, who decides, and whose interests are served" (p. 121). These deliberations of what, why, who, and at times how are necessary components central to fleshing out context.

In order to communicate our journey, we offer three themes that bound, for us, the inseparable connection between friendship and critical friendship. We refer to these themes as "A Collective Kick in the Teeth", "Humor as Persistence", and "Purposeful Banter".

6.5 Themes

6.5.1 2020: A Collective Kick in the Teeth

While our data go back nearly five years, it is impossible to ignore the impact that has been felt in the year 2020. As all readers realize, 2020 has been an incredibly challenging year for everyone. Near the beginning of the year news of a pandemic began to spread. By March the news reached the doorstep of our country and we continue to grapple with it currently. In the United States, we carry the dubious

distinction of leading the world in COVID-19 cases and deaths. Furthermore, measures to curb viral spread including shutting down some businesses or wearing masks have become weaponized as political tools and have left everyday folks struggling to deal with the harsh health and economic realities. This alone would be enough to try friendships as the tide of stress levels inevitably rise. This alone would be enough to break professional momentum as we try to make sense of our roles as husbands and wives and mothers and fathers striving to grasp the reality of our circumstances by making sure loved ones are safe. For many in education this pandemic strain is pulling attention away from the professional duties of teaching, researching, and serving. Within this collective we have felt this strain as well as additional personal stressors ranging from the passing of spouses, the loss of loved ones, and failing health, to working-class families experiencing job loss and the financial fallout of this pandemic reality. Overall, 2020 has been a real “kick in the teeth” for our teacher educator collective.

It is in these instances of personal struggle, however, that we see friendship and critical friendship begin to prop one another up. No one in this collective has slowed down in professional responsibilities over the course of our data collection. In fighting the tragedy, struggles, and challenges of the pandemic, there have been many instances when we have expressed frustration rooted in needing an “out.” There have been many instances when the frustrations of the academy have altered the consistent norms of our attitude or demeanor as well as in the other roles we inhabit in our lives. These frustrations, however difficult, must be analyzed.

6.5.1.1 Getting Kicked in the Teeth Professionally: Needing Outs

At a point of professional frustration, Adam stated to the collective, “If higher ed collapses, my plan is to get my electrician’s license, start a business, and hire apprentices with disabilities to radically reform what ‘work’ can look like for folks with disabilities...” (personal communication, 4/16/20). To this, Mike responded, “I’m with you in a lot of your thinking, HD (Adam’s nickname, short for Hound Dog). My deepest education dream has long been to open a community center focused on developing young people in terms of humanistic psychology/self-actualization and using art and sports as means of engagement in pursuing discussion, considerations, and explorations of life” (personal communication, April 16). Examples such as this demonstrate how friendship must accompany critical friendship. It would have been easy for the collective to dismiss both Adam and Mike. Adam and Mike are both committed to their roles as teacher educators, but needed an outlet to vent their frustrations. Their expressions were met with kindness, not ridicule, thus allowing them each to sort through their own thinking and continue as teachers and researchers.

6.5.1.2 Navigating the Changing World of the Pandemic in Education

Throughout the pandemic's daily presence in our world we have tried to be supportive friends engaged in critical friendships. We have wondered together what teacher education work should look like and where we might be headed. What will "teacher education" *be* in a post-pandemic landscape?

Geoff's thinking offers an intriguing contextual and historical connection in considering that the pandemic might bring about "the end of brick and mortar" higher education (personal communication, 3/13/20) while also advising the rest of the group to consider his

first Castle Conference paper 'Come To My Web (site) Said The Spider to the Fly: Reflections of a Virtual Professor' circa 1998... I guess I was ahead of the curve. If you have any edition of Action Research it's an opening vignette. Might be funny to look at given the vintage perspective against where higher ed is headed. (personal communication, 3/16/20)

This connecting of current context and historical research from earlier in Geoff's career critically propels us forward in considering how technology can be used in learning environments, but how teaching at its core is a relationship between people interacting face-to-face.

Mike felt the contextual shock in navigating the difference between teaching in the classroom and teaching online in noting, "I talked to my students online today for the first time since we met in person last Monday. A lot has happened in a week. It was eerie. Things are OK here, but tonight was a heavy experience" (personal communication, 3/16/20). Mike felt discombobulated by the new experience of teaching online and was likewise impacted by his students' trepidations in changing and adapting their courses in the middle of the semester, additionally noting,

I'm just trying to keep some semblance of learning together in response to the changing landscape and all the decisions being made by state leaders/policy makers, University administration, and College of Education administration. In six business days, they've changed the game four times. (personal communication, 3/16/20)

Having the ability to reach out to friends for support and critical friends for ideas on a crash course approach to learning to teach online helped to challenge Mike's ideas about what was possible and what was priority in his teaching.

A forthright contextual and cultural conversation took place among the collective in regard to the pandemic's capacity to reshape higher education. Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic impact, the group discussed the potential cultural shift in the way teacher educators work. Geoff began the conversation in stating,

I worry and wonder whether brick and mortar colleges will survive this "new normal." Here's a few things to think about: As educators who primarily have been committed to social constructivism what does online learning really look like? Does a Zoom "conversation" really actively engage our students in creating meaning? Or, is it merely window dressing for a return to didactic teaching and learning? If so, why not be more equitable about delivery and not assume that everyone has access to reliable technology and workspaces and mail out materials to be consumed, thought about in private, written about,

and returned to the teacher for thoughtful feedback? And what about our special needs students? How can the new normal possibly serve this population of students? And children of poverty? This new normal can only exacerbate the learning gap. (personal communication, April 16)

Geoff's wisdom as a dean and teacher educator caused him to survey the contextual landscape and posit important critical questions toward the group. Adam responded, declaring,

These are all great points. I've been contacted by folks from all over the place to Zoom into districts and talk about meeting the needs of kids with disabilities during this "e-learning" time. I've been stone cold blunt. They can't. They barely met them when they were in front of them. (personal communication, April 16)

Through his contextual lens of special educator, Adam responded to Geoff and offered a critical perspective to the rest of the collective about the difficulty special education and marginalized students will face regarding the adaptations made amidst the pandemic. Mike responded by looking at the economic challenges Geoff asked about by suggesting "without deep investment in the coming years by state and federal government and changes in tax code which would better enforce corporations and the wealthy to pay their share public education is doomed or privatized depending on your perspective" (personal communication, May 6). Mike's macro consideration of the economics of higher education in response to Geoff's prompt offers a critical view of the fiscal realities many colleges and universities face in maintaining physical infrastructure while educating virtually.

6.5.1.3 Getting Kicked in the Teeth Personally

Other instances of friendship merging with critical friendship come through the intersections of texts related to deeply personal content. Through multiple instances in the text thread, conversations transition from the professional to personal. Specifically, both Andy and Geoff lost their wives in 2020. These events were deeply painful for them, but their pain extended to the entire collective as we are all friends with families spending time with one another. For this reason, and out of respect, we only offer a broad summary, though texts and narrative are numerous. The collection of texts on the thread germane to these life-altering events express the pain associated with such loss, yet still, the collective stays connected to supporting one another through personal and professional decisions with frequency.

In several instances conversations move from personal to professional or become intertwined as Andy and Geoff, while grieving, still offer advice to other collective members regarding job choices, teaching decisions, and research and writing ideas. We see this as perhaps the strongest indication that friendship matters alongside critical friendship. In these complicated moments where the personal and professional intersect in deeply emotional ways we still have mutually reciprocal personal and professional critical friendships, getting what we give to the collective in the form of vulnerability and visibility.

6.5.2 *Humor as Persistence*

A second theme focuses on humor as a vehicle for perseverance. Humor helps our group bond and generally improves our individual dispositions. Following a loose, unofficial doctrine of *if you don't laugh you'll cry*, humor keeps the group connected both personally and professionally; and likewise helps to ground the collective in facing personal and professional stressors and challenges. Through humor, advice is given, research ideas are vetted, and spirits are lifted. It is through humor that friendships are strengthened, but also that critical friendships are boosted. We argue that while critical friendships that exist outside of friendships are possible and important, the merging of these roles remains a critical component of our professional lives.

6.5.2.1 Pandemic Humor

Surviving, both literally and figuratively, the 2020 global pandemic has been a source of much of our conversation. We all reel at the ways the pandemic has affected the world. Our hearts are broken for the people who have lost their lives and their loved ones and we recognize, and have experienced ourselves in some cases, the financial hardship and loss of jobs that people have endured during this difficult time. This section in particular is not to make light of the pandemic, but to shed light on our collective relationship and trust in one another. Making these comments public is a demonstration of our own relational interaction and coping strategies for difficult times. The following exchange, our first full conversation related to the pandemic, shows how we engage in humor to displace stress.

Geoff: What are the rest of you doing during the COVID-19 2020 reality show crisis?

Adam: I am presently ripping damn ceilings out of my daughter's bedroom to install new ones, crown molding, and a damn chandelier. When Armageddon comes, my princess will still feel like her dad loves her.

The next day, Geoff added:

I'm feeling much better after hearing your President talk about moving hospital ships to both coasts, "They are being prepared right now. They're massive ships. They are the big, white ships with the Red Cross on the sides," Trump said about the ships. No need for panic...we now know what a hospital ship looks like! I hope you boys have good retirement plans?! Holy shit. (Personal Communication, 03/17/20)

As the pandemic continued, this persistence of humor allowed us all to stay connected, lament, and stay connected. While this may seem like casual conversation and the swapping of sarcasm, we argue that it was this level of open friendship that allowed us to destress. No matter how isolated we felt during the pandemic, no matter how unproductive and misdirected we felt as academics and scholars, we knew that we were not alone. We were all experiencing this stress. We did not have to always directly discuss our self-study activities. We did not have to always break down our teaching. Sometimes we could just make bad jokes. And that is okay.

6.5.3 *Purposeful Banter*

A third and final theme relates to what we consider “purposeful banter.” The text data often reveal instances where our banter is disrupted by a serious and directed comment. In most instances, we see the banter as setting the stage for “heavy” conversation. In absence of friendship, many of these comments would feel disconnected and would likely serve to kill conversation, not encourage it. However, because our critical friendships are founded on actual friendships, this is not the case. As a collective we are able to move back and forth quite seamlessly within the text thread between humor and seriousness. The text thread and the participatory responses can come nonlinearly and reflect the spirit of the disconnected connectedness that purposeful banter within communicative mediums like a text thread can offer as standing longitudinal forums.

By discussing the world around us our contextual and cultural dispositions are questioned. For example, Mike read a manuscript Adam and Todd wrote addressing public education. In offering feedback on the manuscript Mike questioned Adam and Todd’s disposition, stating

you both have more optimism than I do about public education. I think they’re going to dismantle it all and there will be a small grassroots movement of local public schools in some towns/cities/counties/parishes that push back against it. It breaks my heart/spirit/passion (which is a big part of my teaching) and causes me to rethink the arch of my career daily. (Personal Communication, 3/6/2020)

By further engaging Adam and Todd in their capacity as educators, researchers, and authors important contextual and cultural dispositions can further be fleshed out via conversations with critical friends. By sharing our expertise in teaching and friendship, while feeling supported as friends, our critical friendship is strengthened.

6.6 Discussion

Our interpretation of our text data indicated that for us, critical friendship is enhanced by friendship. It is through the process of being friends that we vet our ideas, express our frustrations, get advice, give advice, and continue to work out what it means to be researchers engaged as self-study scholars and teacher educators. Without the ability to rely on one another, we each feel that our professional lives and professional momentum would suffer. Given this reality for our collective, we offer the following to critical friend groups who may not engage regularly as friends. Our recommendations are made based on our own processes and not presented as absolute truths, but rather as considerations for greater possibilities toward making connections and furthered critical depth.

6.6.1 Create More Casual Lines of Communication

The professional space of higher education can be challenging, particularly when cultural norms of an individual conflicts with the academy. Our collective consists of individuals with backgrounds in the working-class and the middle-class. By engaging with one another in more casual ways, we have been able to vet our norms and expectations for communication in the academy, receiving advice and guidance. Those connections have gone both directions and have helped to consider how to engage with students, how to address professional concerns, and even how to negotiate professional contracts and positions. It is through the casual that the comfortable was achieved. This led to trust, which is the hallmark of any friendship or critical friendship.

6.6.2 Create More Consistent Lines of Communication

Along with the casual nature of our contact comes the regularity of our communication. Critical friendship requires understanding the intended research agendas of the critical friend. It means wrestling with your critical friend's research positions, ideas, and goals. We have been able to achieve consistency in the critical friend area because we are regularly engaged as friends. As academics, our professional lives and personal lives often intersect. This is the nature of teacher education. By engaging consistently, the opportunity to engage is always there.

6.6.3 Be Okay with Not Being Okay

Perhaps our greatest takeaway from our ongoing critical friendship is the acceptance of the reality that research is messy. It is not always fun. It rarely goes as expected. Often, in the professional world we are pressured to always wear our best face. We are encouraged to have it together, to make it clear that we are professionals engaged in a process. But sometimes, you just want to scream. Sometimes, you want to consider becoming an electrician, or a poet, or a baker, or anything else because you are so frustrated with the reality and the challenges of being a teacher-researcher. Authentic friendships make this venting okay. They create a safe space for getting negative emotions out while receiving constructive criticism and feedback through authentic friendship. For us, admitting that there are times when we are "not okay" has allowed us to persist through personal and professional struggles.

In conclusion, we argue that the lines of authentic friendship and critical friendship can blur, and we think that is a good thing. As Samaras (2011) suggested, critical friends exist to trust and validate one another from a research perspective. We argue that authentic friends do the same, just in a broader sense. It makes sense, then

for critical friends to seek authentic friendships. We hope our chapter has helped to further blur conventional thinking about how and why we choose to work with critical friends and the subsequent process of cultivating critical friendships. There is tremendous value in the friends part of critical friendship. Far too often, the focus has been on the critical aspects of critical friendship rather than on the importance of developing actual friendships. We argue that the research rewards of critical friends are limited without an explicit focus on how the friendship developed and what it made possible in ways that two people simply being critical of each other's work might not. We all need a little help from our friends, especially when that help is presented as critical.

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Chapter 7

Collaborative Learning from Experience Across Cultures: Critical Friendship in Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices



Rodrigo Fuentealba Jara and Tom Russell

Abstract This chapter summarizes the insights gained in a critical friendship between two teacher educators, one in Chile and one in Canada. Over a 10-year period they have conducted self-studies of their own teacher education practices, with each acting as critical friend to the other. Exploration of the concept of critical friendship leads into an account of four themes in this ongoing collaboration. The central portion of the chapter provides details of new practices they have developed together, focusing for each practice on the initial idea, the new practice, and sample student responses. The discussion continues with attention to four key issues in teacher education programs: practicum experience, differences between book knowledge and craft knowledge, the importance of early teaching experience, and the development of skills of reflective practice. A report on the introduction of self-study and critical friendship to teacher educators in Chile continues the cross-cultural theme. The importance of reframing practices in terms of double-loop learning is also considered. The conclusion summarizes perspectives on the professional value of critical friendship, which can become even deeper and more valuable when it is mutual, long term, and conducted across cultures.

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7.1 Introduction

This chapter analyzes events that spanned the decade from 2010 to 2020 as two teacher educators, one in Chile and another in Canada, developed a critical friendship focused on how teacher candidates are prepared for the teaching profession. Each has attended, in person, a few of the other's teacher education classes. Using video software, Rodrigo observed all of Tom's physics methods classes between 2015 to 2019, either live or by videorecording shortly after. There is little that we do not know about each other's practices, the assumptions underlying them, and the effects of those practices on teacher candidates (Fuentealba & Russell, 2016, 2020). Thanks to the technology that enables video communication across large distances, each of us has come to rely heavily on the other for pushes and nudges to examine our practices more carefully and in greater depth. This chapter challenges teacher educators to seek out another teacher educator for purposes of a mutual critical friendship focused on learning from experience. Building a critical friendship involves both serendipity and recognizing the opportunity. In our learning collaboratively across cultural differences, we have focused on the role of practicum experience in the development of a beginning teacher, on the importance of early authentic teaching experiences, on the profound differences between book knowledge and craft knowledge, and on the need for beginning teachers to develop the skills of reflective practice that are required for learning from professional experience. Several portions of the chapter are presented in two languages to be more welcoming to readers whose first language is Spanish.

7.2 Introducción

Este capítulo analiza eventos que abarcaron la década de 2010 a 2020 cuando dos formadores de docentes, uno en Chile y otro en Canadá, desarrollaron una amistad que se ha vuelto crítica en el contexto de los problemas relacionados con la formación de futuros profesores. Cada uno ha tenido la oportunidad de asistir en persona a algunas de las clases de formación docente del otro; Rodrigo ha observado la mayoría de las clases de métodos de física de Tom, a través de videograbaciones, entre 2015 a 2019. Hay poco que no sepamos sobre las prácticas del otro, los supuestos subyacentes y los efectos de esas prácticas en los futuros profesores. (Fuentealba & Russell, 2016, 2020). Gracias a la tecnología que permite la comunicación por video a través de grandes distancias, cada uno de nosotros ha llegado a depender en gran medida del otro para presionar y examinar nuestras prácticas con más detenimiento y profundidad. Este capítulo desafía a otros formadores de futuros profesores a buscar a un par con el propósito de desarrollar una amistad crítica que permita aprender de la experiencia de ambos. Construir una amistad crítica es una cuestión de serendipia y de reconocimiento mutuo de la oportunidad. En nuestro aprendizaje colaborativo a través de las diferencias culturales, nos hemos focalizado

en el papel que juega la experiencia práctica en el desarrollo de un profesor principiante, en la importancia de las auténticas experiencias tempranas de enseñanza, en las profundas diferencias entre el conocimiento de los libros y el conocimiento de la experiencia, y en la necesidad para que los profesores principiantes desarrollen las habilidades de la práctica reflexiva que se requieren para aprender de la experiencia profesional. Varias partes del capítulo se presentan en dos idiomas para hacer más accesible el texto a los lectores cuya lengua materna es el español.

7.3 What Is Critical Friendship?

Our analysis of more than six years of collaborative critical friendship begins with a summary of ideas that we shared about critical friendship in the early stages of our collaboration, shown in Table 7.1.

A critical friendship between two individuals in the same field requires mutual efforts to maintain a positive and productive relationship. Because self-study is aimed at improvement of professional practices, we call attention to LaBoskey's (2004) words about the complexity of changing practices in her chapter about the methodology of self-study:

To influence practice we must transform teacher thinking, but this, for a variety of reasons, is easier said than done. For one thing, our beliefs, values, and knowledge of teaching are derived from our experiences – our personal histories, which are necessarily limited and variant. In addition, many of these assumptions are implicit; they have never been articulated even to us. What is more, some of these ideas are deeply held and intimately connected to our identities as teachers and learners. (p. 829)

As background and context, the following section reviews a selection of articles involving collaboration and critical friendship in self-studies of teacher education practices.

7.3.1 *Examples of Critical Friendship in the Context of Self-Study*

As the principal journal in which self-studies of teacher education practices are published, *Studying Teacher Education* offers a number of reports of self-studies. Here we describe briefly a variety of ways in which critical friendship has been a significant feature of self-studies of different aspects of teacher education.

Early in the history of the journal, Schuck and Russell (2005) reported their experience taking turns serving as critical friends for each other's study of their teacher education practices. Their article includes a table contrasting teaching and critical friendship: For example, "every teacher seeking to improve must proceed from the here and now of schools as we find them," and similarly, "critical

Table 7.1 Basic ideas about critical friendship

<p>In self-study of teacher education practices, the analysis of the practice itself and its reframing process is favored to the extent that there is a relationship, which Costa and Kallick (1993) named as <i>critical friendship</i>, where the role of the critical friend is described as follows:</p>	<p>Para el self-study el análisis de la propia práctica y su proceso de reenmarcamiento se ve favorecido en la medida que existe una relación Costa y Kallick (1993) llamaron amistad crítica, donde el papel del amigo crítico refiere a:</p>
<p>A critical friend . . . is a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person’s work as a friend. The critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work. (Costa & Kallick, (1993), p. 50)</p>	<p>Un amigo crítico . . . es una persona de confianza que hace preguntas provocativas, entrega datos para ser examinados con otros lentes y crítica al trabajo de una persona como un amigo. El amigo crítico se toma tiempo para comprender cabalmente el contexto del trabajo presentado y los resultados que la persona o el grupo están buscando. El amigo aboga por el éxito de ese trabajo. (Costa y Kallick, (1993), p. 50)</p>
<p>Working from the principles developed by Schuck and Russell (2005) regarding its characteristics, critical friendship is a two-way relationship between the teacher educator and the critical friend. This involves sharing personal and professional aspects in a climate of trust and security.</p>	<p>Asumiendo además lo planteado por Schuck y Russell ((2005)) respecto de las características de la amistad crítica, esta es un espacio de establecimiento de relación bidireccional entre los involucrados, lo que significa compartir aspectos personales y profesionales en un clima de confianza y seguridad en la relación.</p>
<p>The critical friend is more than a person who listens and responds. A critical friend also shares evidence for how personal thoughts and practices are changing.</p>	<p>El amigo crítico es más que una persona que escucha y responde. Un amigo crítico también comparte evidencia de cómo están cambiando los pensamientos y prácticas personales.</p>
<p>The critical friend acts as a catalyst for the analysis of the practices themselves, encouraging a deeper look at the assumptions underlying the practices as well as the reframing and the shared assumption of risks associated with exploring the effectiveness of new practices.</p>	<p>El amigo crítico actúa como catalizador de los procesos de análisis de las propias prácticas, permitiendo una mirada profunda a los supuestos de base en ellas, así como su reenmarcamiento y asunción de riesgos para la instalación de nuevas prácticas, proceso en espiral creciente que el amigo crítico favorece.</p>

friendship must respect and build on existing practices as it also works toward improvement” (p. 119).

Loughran and Brubaker (2015) used self-study methodology in an exercise in executive coaching; Brubaker acted as critical friend to Loughran’s self-study of his practices as a dean of a faculty of education. One of their conclusions resonates strongly with our own collaboration:

Both learning to be coached and working with a critical friend... resembles the process of creating opportunities for what Argyris and Schön (1978) described as double-loop learning, where engaging with practice at the big picture level and working and reworking the assumptions that underpin that practice ... can lead to meaningful insights into behaviour and therefore new ways of conceptualizing the “why of one’s practice.” (p. 269)

They also stressed that both individuals in a critical friendship benefit.

Butler and Diacopoulos (2016) engaged in a collaborative critical friendship focused on learning to supervise student teachers. Even though one had experience and the other did not, they concluded that “more than a space where the expert imparted his knowledge to the novice, our critical friendship provided opportunities for both of us to evaluate our respective roles and practices of supervision through different lenses” (p. 132).

Fletcher et al. (2016) reported their experiences of two layers of critical friendship. As two authors collaborated as critical friends, the third played the role of meta-critical friend, “contributing both an expert voice and an alternative perspective.... Critical friendship can be used as a powerful tool to support the development and enactment of pedagogical innovations in teacher education practice” (p. 316).

Finally, Richards and Shiver (2020) analyzed critical friendship in a self-study of the doctoral supervision process focused on how critical friendship would influence their relationship as supervisor and doctoral student. Not surprisingly, power, honesty and trust were central issues. They found, “Results indicated that engaging in a critical friendship through self-study provided us with the space and encouragement to critique traditional power structures and develop a more honest relationship” (p. 240).

These self-studies involving critical friendship confirm that collaboration is frequently a central feature and thus they serve as background and context for the analysis of collaborative critical friendship in this chapter. Several of the examples above reported duration of one or two years; some emphasized that the benefits were reciprocal; some involved looking at each other’s practices simultaneously. In this article, we emphasize both the length of our collaboration and the implications of the cross-cultural nature of our critical friendship. In the next section, we introduce the central themes in our critical friendship.

7.4 Themes in Our Critical Friendship

Four central themes in our long-term collaboration as critical friends are summarized in Table 7.2. Then we describe two early stages in our relationship.

7.4.1 *The Relationship Begins*

In December 2010, Tom was invited to Santiago to consult for 1 week at the Universidad Católica Silva Henríquez (UCSH). The focus was on reflective practice and the role of the practicum in a program of initial teacher education, and Rodrigo participated in the discussions. At dinner on the penultimate day, we sat opposite each other for a conversation that changed our professional development profoundly. We realized that we shared frustrations with the typical structure of most teacher education programs and wanted to explore ways to improve their quality.

Table 7.2 Themes in a long-term critical friendship

Collaboration of critical friends across cultures can be particularly productive because large and small variations in cultural teaching practices help us to identify underlying assumptions.	La colaboración entre amigos críticos de diferentes culturas puede ser particularmente productiva en la medida que las pequeñas o grandes variaciones culturales en las prácticas de enseñanza nos ayudan a identificar los supuestos que las orientan.
Critical friendship can be particularly productive when it includes shared commitments to specific perspectives on reflective practice and professional learning.	La amistad crítica puede ser particularmente productiva cuando incluye compromisos compartidos con perspectivas específicas sobre la práctica reflexiva y el aprendizaje profesional.
Critical friendship can be a catalyst for change when both friends attempt similar changes and can compare the results of their efforts and the challenges of building new habits.	La amistad crítica puede ser un catalizador para el cambio cuando ambos amigos intentan cambios similares y comparan los resultados de sus esfuerzos y desafíos en el desarrollo de nuevos hábitos.

7.4.2 *The Relationship Deepens*

In September 2011, we attended an international seminar on teacher education in Amsterdam. The schedule included tourist time and Rodrigo, Tom and his wife LaVerne explored Amsterdam together. Here the personal relationship developed significantly as we shared professional experiences as well as stories about our respective families. In March 2012, Tom was a keynote speaker at an international conference in Santiago. We were developing a clearer sense of each other and the ways we believed teacher education could be improved.

Since 2012, Tom has visited Chile another 15 times to speak at universities in Santiago, La Serena, Concepción, Talca, Valdivia and Valparaíso. By 2014, we had established mutual trust and sensed that our critical friendship and collaboration would continue. In the period 2015–2019, Rodrigo made four one-week visits to Queen’s University; during each visit he attended two of Tom’s physics method classes. With the permission of Tom’s students, a video camera enabled Rodrigo to observe the classes preceding his visits, enabling him to know the students by name and be familiar with class routines.

7.5 **Perspectives Central to Our Collaborative Learning Through Critical Friendship**

Working between two cultures adds many layers to a critical friendship; often, as in our case, one layer is that of language. Rodrigo’s facility in English allowed us to proceed. Beyond language, each of us has developed a sense of cross-cultural differences in both daily classroom practices and in the assumptions underlying those practices. Tom soon learned that teachers in Chile spend considerable time in

presentation mode; in Canada, teachers may appear to spend more time trying to engage students in their learning and to get some sense of their level of understanding. Gradually, we realized that the assumptions underlying different practices can be similar. Teachers everywhere have a curriculum that forms the basis of planning lessons and assessing student achievement. As he listened to Tom and observed Tom's classes, Rodrigo saw that Tom had practices that had different underlying assumptions he wished to explore in his own teaching.

Over time, books by four authors have become particularly important to the development of our critical friendship.

- *The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change* (Sarason, 1971)
- *Theory into Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness* (Argyris & Schön, 1974)
- *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study* (Lortie, 1975)
- *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (Schön, 1983)

Sarason (1971) offers powerful insights into the cultural reasons why changes in teaching are called for much more often than they are realized. Argyris and Schön (1974) develop the view that an individual's practices include both an espoused theory (when asked to describe intentions) and a theory-in-use (inferred from observations of practice). Typically, there are gaps between them. When teaching future teachers, it is particularly important to minimize those gaps, as teacher candidates are careful observers of teaching behaviour. Lortie's (1975) sociological analysis of schoolteachers is best known for the term "apprenticeship of observation," which captures the point that all students learn a great deal about how teachers teach as they observe them in the role of student. Those who opt to become teachers begin a program with deep-seated theories of action they tend to be unaware of. While they are taught espoused theories of teaching in university classrooms, it is only in the practicum setting they can identify their theories-in-use and attempt to reconcile the two types. Finally, Schön's (1983) concept of reflection-in-action highlights the importance of *reframing* inspired by experience. Teacher candidates lack skills for judging the quality of what they learn from experience. When events of practice inspire reframing of one's espoused theories, professionals may modify their practices and then evaluate their impact on students' learning. In parallel with the term *reframing*, our shared term for such modifications is *repracticing*.

7.6 An Example of Self-Study in Mutual Critical Friendship

When two teacher educators collaborate in mutual critical friendship, each serves as critical friend for the other's self-study of practice. This section of the chapter (adapted from Fuentealba & Russell, 2020) illustrates how two critical friends with quite different practices can assist and support each other. In these recent self-studies, we both agreed to use tickets-out-of-class as an initial indicator of students' responses to each class we taught. Small (quarter-sheet) pieces of paper were

distributed 2 min before the end of each class with two questions: “What is the most important idea you are taking from this class?” and “What topic in today’s class would you like to understand better?” These were always completed anonymously, although students might later volunteer and extend their comments in individual conversations. Additional data included our email messages to each other about class experiences, Rodrigo’s comments to Tom after observing a class remotely, and notes taken during discussions via Skype.

7.6.1 *Rodrigo’s New Practices*

Rodrigo’s first goal was to increase ways of listening to his students, both to better understand their responses to his classes and to build a stronger relationship with them. He has found there is more trust between teacher and student when students feel that their teacher is genuinely listening to them. He has also found that the teacher-student relationship becomes less top-down.

Two additional changes in practice involved the analysis of class experiences. First, a critical friend decreases the traditional experience of teaching as an isolated adventure. He welcomed the reduction in a sense of privacy and the opportunity to resolve a puzzling situation through writing about it to a critical friend. Paradoxically, the value is not in taking his critical friend’s recipe to replace his own but in coming to see his teaching in a new way (reframing). Second, the relationship with a critical friend encouraged Rodrigo to take risks in his teaching and thus to move into double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1974), with the associated opportunity to identify assumptions underlying various teaching practices. It is one thing to make changes in practice; it is also important to understand the rationales that support changes.

Table 7.3 describes Rodrigo’s new practices and his students’ comments. Each new practice is followed by his initial response to the students’ responses.

As Rodrigo observed Tom’s classes, he saw new possibilities for the teacher education classroom and sensed that he had to identify a way to begin. *Realizing the extent to which those learning to teach can be trusted to pursue issues of teaching and learning* became the overall theme. Gradually, he introduced more time for students to talk and himself to listen, explicitly providing time for them to share practicum experiences. Discussions with a critical friend helped him to understand that each student might respond differently to a new practice.

7.6.2 *Tom’s New Practices*

After three years of Rodrigo’s observations, Tom decided it was time for a formal self-study of his teaching practices in one course and so obtained ethical clearance from the university committee on research ethics. On the first day of an eight-month

Table 7.3 Rodrigo's new practices and the results

The idea	The new practice	Sample student responses
Trusting your students involves much more than saying to them "You are important to me."	Give voice to the students by closing every class by asking them "What was the most important topic in this class? and "What question do you want to study more?" In the next class, quickly share and respond to their comments.	"Are our questions really important for you?" "When I listened to some of your comments and questions, I could see your point of view. Why don't the other teachers do something similar, because there we only listen or sleep?"
<i>The comments and questions were surprising because they showed different viewpoints about the class. This approach seemed risky at first because some of their responses were unexpected.</i>		
The teacher can share the talking that occurs in the class. In the Chilean cultural context it is common that the teacher does most of the talking. Students are there to respond to the teacher's questions.	Encourage sharing in the class, making it a real option for students to express their opinions, organizing the topics to include their voices.	Some students say, "Here we feel more like a teacher, because our voice is added to the class" and "You invite us to have a position about the topics in the class." Other students make comments such as "Why do we need to talk about these topics?" and "You are the teacher and I expect you to tell me what I must do."
<i>Here students felt more engaged and more open to showing me how they are thinking about different topics.</i>		
The power of firsthand experience is greater than the power of books. Books are commonly seen as presenting the rules for good teaching but, in Schön's (1995) view, "the new scholarship requires a new epistemology."	Begin by sharing experiences in an environment free of judgement. Then encourage them to make connections to what they are reading.	"In this class I feel like a professional because my experience is taken seriously." "In other classes the teacher connects with us like school students, asking how well we remembered the references in books. Here we connect our experience with the references."
<i>I was surprised by the power of their experiences and how experience is a catalyst for developing strong connections to book knowledge. Starting with theory is not the same.</i>		
Inviting students to form a circle for discussion can create space for significant professional development.	Invite students with recent school experiences to share those experiences as teachers would.	At first the students were silent; then they began to talk differently about the topics of the class. "In a regular class the teacher talks directly with the students, but here we talk between us, and sometimes the teacher is silent. I really learn when I listen to the experiences of others."
<i>I began to reframe my ideas about what it means to be a teacher educator. The positive comments invited me to pay attention to how the teacher educator can listen and give voice to students, so that teaching becomes relational. It was stimulating to challenge traditional assumptions about teaching and professional practice.</i>		

course, he introduced three new practices: (1) inviting students to consent to be participants in his self-study research, (2) inviting students to replace the familiar terms *theory* and *practice* with *book knowledge* and *craft knowledge*, and (3) introducing a practice of using the last 15 minutes of each class for discussion of “What did we learn?” and “How did we learn it?” Each proved unexpectedly productive, thanks to close attention and encouragement by Rodrigo. In hindsight, there is important coherence across these three new practices. The self-study of Tom’s teaching enabled him to model the analysis of one’s teaching, with particular focus on the continuing development of his own craft knowledge. End-of-class discussions similarly focused on analysis of teaching and learning for purposes of improvement.

Data analysis focused on our collaborative conversations and email exchanges leading to advice for others who might attempt comparable collaborative dialogues about changing practices. Table 7.4 describes Tom’s new practices and provides examples of students’ verbatim responses. Each of the four new practices is followed by a statement in italics to summarize his interpretation of the students’ responses.

The first new practice was inspired in a moment at the 2018 international S-STEP conference at Herstmonceux Castle, the second was inspired by a book, and the third emerged from a desire to know more about what students were taking from my course and their program. Tom’s discussions with Rodrigo after his observations of many classes encouraged Tom to keep pushing himself; they also helped him to identify significant coherence across the three new practices. Each contributes in some way to a goal of both modeling and analyzing new practices for those learning to teach, with a focus on greater understanding of the process of learning from experience.

7.7 Teacher Education Practices of Particular Interest in Our Critical Friendship

Our critical friendship has led us to several shared perspectives on the complexity of our professional learning and the complexity of the professional learning of those we teach. One of our favourite shorthand slogans is ‘Telling is not teaching; listening is not learning’ (‘Contar no es enseñar; escuchar no es aprender’). In the context of moving beyond teaching as telling and learning as listening, we are particularly interested in four aspects of teacher education:

- the role of practicum experience in the development of a beginning teacher
- the profound differences between book knowledge and craft knowledge
- the importance of early authentic teaching experience
- the need for beginning teachers to develop the skills of reflective practice that are required for successful learning from professional experience.

Table 7.4 Tom's new practices and the results

The Rationale	The New Practice	Sample Student Responses
An open and transparent self-study should model reflection-in-action.	On the first day of classes, invite students to be participants in their teacher's self-study.	"My reaction was to be extremely impressed that he is studying his teaching." "He is one of the only profs in this program who practices everything he preaches and as a result I have deeply respected both him and this course from day one."
<i>I was impressed that responses indicated a positive reaction; I was pleased that they linked it to the importance of studying their own teaching. The reference to the significance of modeling teaching practices in class seemed particularly important, as teacher educators are often criticized for not practicing what they preach.</i>		
Book knowledge and craft knowledge (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996) seem more realistic than the familiar terms of theory and practice.	On the first day of classes, ask students to replace <i>theory</i> and <i>practice</i> with <i>book knowledge</i> and <i>craft knowledge</i> in our discussions of teaching.	"They both represent teachers' essential knowledge; understanding both terms gave me some ideas on what I should aim to learn and how I can learn them." "Understanding Craft Knowledge helped me to transform everyday experience during the practicum into intuitive and reflective learning and thus bring positive changes and stronger results in my performance."
<i>The initial impact seemed positive, as the term craft knowledge seemed intuitively related to practice and required little explanation. Those who wrote about the use of these two terms halfway through the course spoke positively. Written work often used both terms.</i>		
Discussion of teaching and learning at the end of class should be a new way to understand what students are learning.	Beginning in the first class, introduce the practice of a significant period of discussion at the end of every class.	"The end-of-class discussions (and accompanying exit cards) have been excellent for consolidating my teaching experiences and take-aways from class." "They have allowed me to capture essential Book Knowledge during a discussion or lesson and reflect on Craft Knowledge from my practicum." "The discussions have helped me to recognize different perspectives on learning and thus moved me to deeper levels of reflective practice. The discussions allow me and others a sense of ownership in the class and learning. With that, I feel more engaged in learning."
<i>Students' comments were refreshingly positive; I can now recommend this metacognitive practice to all teacher educators. Halfway through the course, students asked if they could generate a list of their own discussion topics. Some of the discussions continued for an hour or more after the end of class.</i>		

Through sharing of experiences in critical friendship, we have come to better understand these four aspects and the relationship of our teaching to each one.

7.7.1 The Role of Practicum Experience

For those learning to teach, practicum experience is essential; teacher candidates typically rate it as the most important element of a teacher education program. We work to ensure that our classes are helping teacher candidates to anticipate practicum experiences and to process the quality of what they are learning from those experiences. Self-study research methods help us to judge how well we are contributing to and supporting practicum experiences. Perhaps the foundation of our collaboration has been our commitment to sharing our own learning from experience with each other and with our students.

The practicum is typically the only location where those learning to teach can develop the essential skills of learning from experience (Munby & Russell, 1994). Words alone fall far short of the impact that personal experience can have on future actions. Professional learning from personal experience is unfamiliar; those learning to teach require assistance in developing the skills of learning from experience and assessing the quality of that learning. Our self-studies have led us to believe that the earlier their first authentic teaching experience occurs, the sooner teacher candidates will acquire a teacher's perspective for interpreting what they are being taught about teaching.

7.7.2 The Differences Between Book Knowledge and Craft Knowledge

The terms *book knowledge* and *craft knowledge* seem to have intuitive credibility as a way of comparing what is learned in the teacher education classroom to what is learned in the teacher education practicum. With so many years of experience as students, teacher candidates know how to work with and evaluate book knowledge. Our critical friendship has helped us to see that the term *craft knowledge* signals to our students that what they learn from firsthand experience is quite different. Cooper and McIntyre (1996) captured the distinction in these terms:

Professional craft knowledge – as opposed to other forms of knowledge that teachers might possess – is the knowledge that experienced teachers gather throughout their careers that enables them to make decisions about how best to approach professional tasks. This knowledge is firmly rooted in teachers' practical experience, and is directly linked to their daily practice.... While experienced teachers clearly possess such knowledge, the culture of teaching and the nature of schools are such that this knowledge is often not articulated.... Because of the often tacit nature of professional craft knowledge, it is difficult to access. (pp. 75–76)

We also recommend the excellent review of teachers' craft knowledge by Grimmert and MacKinnon (1992). Their words parallel those of Cooper and McIntyre.

Craft knowledge is vastly different from the packaged and glossy maxims that govern the "science of education"—at the very least, the expectation that rules and findings can drive practice. Craft knowledge has a different sort of rigor, one that places more confidence in the judgment of teachers, their feel for their work, their love for students and learning, and so on, almost on aesthetic grounds. Ryle and Schön reminded us that there were good reasons for distinguishing between "knowing that" and "knowing how," suggesting that craft is something that is acquired "at the elbows" rather than in books. (p. 437)

Contrasting craft knowledge with book knowledge has played a significant role in our teaching and in analysis of our teaching.

7.7.3 *The Need to Develop Skills of Reflective Practice*

Once in the classroom as a full-time teacher, personal learning from experience becomes the major avenue of professional development. Teacher education programs often invoke the word *reflection*, a familiar word in today's teacher education programs. When Schön (1983) introduced the term *reflection-in-action*, he wrote about the learning that occurs not before or after action but during action—when a puzzling, surprising, or unexpected event inspires new thinking about one's practice, possibly inspiring a new practice. If a teacher education program can help teacher candidates to refine skills of *reflection-in-action*, then it can improve their chances of productive learning from experience. We see self-study as a way to understand the extent to which we are helping new teachers to develop skills of reflective practice. In the next section, we illustrate the impact of our critical friendship on teacher education in Chile.

7.8 Introducing Self-Study and Critical Friendship in Chile

As his interest in and understanding of self-study developed, Rodrigo shared his interest with Carolina Hirmas, in the office of the Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos (OEI) in Chile. Carolina recognized the potential of self-study and arranged with Taylor and Francis for permission to translate and republish in Spanish 11 articles from *Studying Teacher Education*, under the title *Formadores de Formadores, Descubriendo la propia voz a través del self-study* (Russell et al., 2016).

Through OEI, Carolina has created and supported REDFFORMA, the Network of Teachers Educators, with the purpose of generating opportunities to bridge the gap between theory and practice, a gap that is deeply rooted in the Chilean educational context. REDFFORMA has promoted the introduction of self-study in Chile

and supported three periods of research, focusing on critical friendships and the “dialogue of knowledge” (de Sousa Santos & Meneses, 2014) among colleagues. Reports of this work have been published in a special issue of *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación* [Ibero-American Journal of Education], 82(1), 2020, available at https://rieoei.org/RIE/issue/view/Self_Study.

7.9 Insights About Reframing Professional Practice: ‘You Can’t Fix What You Can’t See’

Our critical friendship has deepened our shared interest in the work of Schön (1983) concerning the significance of reflection-in-action as professionals learn from experience. In our interpretation of Schön’s work, *reframing* refers to seeing the practice situation in a new way because of a surprising, puzzling or unexpected event in the classroom. That new way of framing the situation may inspire a new way to respond, and that new response may inspire a permanent change in practice. In keeping with the term *reframing*, we call this *repracticing*. This term is more awkward than *reframing* and may not be helpful to others, but it reminds us that when we do see an aspect of practice in a new way (reframing), it is important to pay attention to how we decide to change practice (repracticing).

When Tom heard the statement, ‘You can’t fix what you can see’ on a radio broadcast, it immediately resonated with our critical friendship. Improving (fixing) personal practice depends on seeing some aspect of one’s practice in a new way, or reframing a familiar situation. Schön (1983) described framing in the following terms. Only when we see a problem in a new way can we begin to fix it.

Although problem setting is a necessary condition for technical problem solving, it is not itself a technical problem. When we set the problem, we select what we will treat as the “things” of the situation, we set the boundaries of our attention to it, and we impose upon it a coherence which allows us to say what is wrong and in what directions the situation needs to be changed. Problem setting is a process in which, interactively, we *name* the things to which we will attend and *frame* the context in which we will attend to them. (p. 40, emphasis in original)

As we try to fix a problem that emerges from a new view of a practice situation (for us, the teacher education classroom or practicum school), we also try to identify the assumptions that underlie both previous and alternative actions.

To move from changes in practice to changes in assumptions, we draw on Argyris and Schön’s (1974) account of single-loop and double-loop learning: “In single-loop learning, we learn to maintain the field of constancy by learning to design actions that satisfy existing governing values. In double-loop learning, we learn to change the field of constancy itself” (p. 19). While single-loop learning focuses on

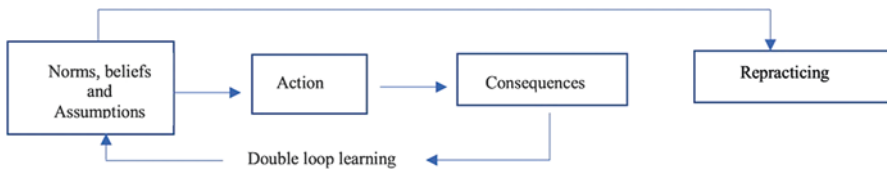


Fig. 7.1 The process of double-loop learning

actions and their consequences, double-loop learning examines consequences in terms of assumptions and common-sense beliefs and practices, as in Fig. 7.1.

Here we focus on changes in practice and their consequences and on the relationship of old and new practices to traditional and longstanding assumptions about how individuals learn to teach. We see self-study methods as strong support for moving from reframing to repracticing in a way that documents and interprets the experience. When we make the process explicit to beginning teachers in our classes, we are helping new teachers understand how they can ultimately work to improve and understand their own development as a teacher. This contrasts sharply with the idea that teachers improve by being told by others what they should change.

7.10 Conclusion

In this chapter we maintain that a critical friend is an essential ingredient of a successful self-study of teacher education practices (Loughran & Northfield, 1998) and we suggest critical friendship can be even more productive when it is both mutual and long term. When two teacher educators collaborate as critical friends to each other in simultaneous self-studies, the insights gained are deeper and richer than when only one is studying personal practice. When the collaboration continues over a series of reframing and repracticing sequences, it becomes easier to identify the assumptions underlying old and new practices. Loughran and Brubaker (2015) found, as we did, that the concept of double-loop learning can be powerful and productive in self-studies.

Tables 7.1 and 7.2 illustrate how our collaborative critical friendship began with sharing practices with each other. We then identified and questioned the assumptions implicit in our practices, accepted the risk of introducing our students to new practices, gathered evidence from the students to assess the impact and, finally, examined the changes in our assumptions. Our students appreciated this modeling of how a teacher thinks about improving practice.

We predicted that it would not be a simple task to introduce self-study to other Chilean teacher educators. While that prediction was correct, persistence has paid off, thanks to leadership and support from OEI. In October 2019, Tom attended a

meeting in which three groups presented detailed reports of their most recent self-studies. Several are available in the January 2020 special issue of *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación*, which contains 10 articles (most prepared by Chilean teacher educators).

Our critical friendship in self-study of our teacher education practices has had several unusual features from which we have learned a great deal about each other and about teaching and teacher education in two cultures. We highly recommend long-term critical friendship to all teacher educators. When two teacher educators are fortunate enough to connect across cultures and share, as we have, the benefits can be even more profound.

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Chapter 8

Mediating Critical Friendship Through Language(s): A Plurilingual Approach



Cécile Bullock and Shawn M. Bullock 

Abstract In this chapter we consider the roles that language(s) play(s) in mediating expectations and roles in critical friendship in self-study methodology. Drawing from our multi-year collaborative self-study on language teacher education, we consider examples from our critical friendship in light of theoretical frameworks providing by sociolinguistics on plurilingualism. In so doing, we draw from research not typically considered within the English-speaking academy to contribute to the conceptualisation of critical friendship within self-study methodology in general and language teacher education in particular.

8.1 Introduction

There are many terms in educational research frequently used in a way that suggests a common understanding, despite evidence to the contrary. Ideas such as *reflective practice*, for example, can exhume a plethora of different viewpoints, to the point where there are those who insist on using the term *critical reflective practice* and those who believe that criticality is embedded within *reflective practice*. Some may speak of *communities of practice* in a way that reflects a literal definition of the terms rather than an engagement with existing literature – and the literature on communities of practice itself is quite far-reaching, as seen in this volume. The risk of a shallow consensus, in which most people assume that everyone else is using a concept in the same way, can arise. The situation is further complicated when concepts originating in other languages find their ways into the academic English lexicon. Freire's *conscienc̃ao* is one example, German *Didatik* and French *la didactique* are

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others. Sabatier and Bullock (2019) discussed the problems of thinking about *la didactique* in English-language scholarship, particularly in teacher education. Loughran (2006) outlined the problems associated with a casual use of the term *pedagogy* in the English-speaking academy.

We believe that the term *critical friend* might often be the victim of such a shallow consensus and, in this chapter, we seek to explore the ways in which plurilingual approaches to the act of engaging in critical friendship can ensure the term *critical friend* remains productively complicated – indeed, understood within an inherent plurality. After briefly defining fundamental linguistic concepts such as *mediation*, *plurilingualism*, and *linguaging*, we move to present excerpts from our critical friendship over the years that reflect the ways in which mediation functions as evidence of plurilingual behaviours as a warrant for the crux of our chapter. Our position is that critical friends can act as mediators of experience and that such mediation requires particular attention to the roles that languages play in interactions. We argue that self-study researchers who act as critical friends need to consider carefully the nature of their plurilingual repertoire. In so doing, we hope to create more of a space for those who might use multiple languages when working with critical friends, regardless of the target language for publication. We also hope to encourage a greater plurality of publication of self-study work outside of English-language academies.

Our conclusion will suggest the ways in which the present study contributes to conceptualizing critical friendship within the existing literature, particularly with a view toward underlining the challenges and tensions provoked by our results to the field more generally and to our selves more specifically. Although the chapter uses the example of linguaging between French and English, we encourage our readers to consider the ways in which they might engage in “plurilinguaging” practices regardless of the “formal” languages they may or may not speak. We are all called upon to use different languages in our daily lives – including but not limited to how we might speak to those within and outside our academic disciplines. Our data sources have varied during our self-study projects and critical friendship and include both written and audio-recorded dialogues, response memos in research journals, and personal history approaches in considering the roles of our prior experiences in who we are as teacher educators. Examples were selected from a set of *turning points* (Bullock & Ritter, 2011) identified throughout our ongoing critical friendship and self-study of the role of language in how we think about our selves as teacher educators.

8.2 Mediation, Collaboration and Plurilingualism in Self-Study

For purposes of beginning the chapter, we identify with the definition of critical friendship posed by Schuck and Russell (2005), who argued in part that a “critical friend acts as a sounding board, asks challenging questions, supports reframing of

events, and joins in the professional learning experience” (p. 107). We find resonance with Olan and Edge’s (2019) comments that critical friendship offers opportunities for interpreting “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” (p. 41). Sometimes, our critical friendship has helped us to recognise why we were silent in the moment, as detailed by vignettes shared in Sabatier and Bullock (2018). Finally, we take Fletcher et al.’s (2016) comments about the importance of vulnerability in this kind of work, particularly in developing a space to “acknowledge uncertainty without a fear of judgment” (p. 315). We also recognize that a part of our work involves developing understandings of critical friendship as method and stance through self-study. We believe in 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 and we concur with Schuck and Russell that critical friendship has a central role in self-study work. For us, critical friendship provides a useful framework for thinking about how we navigate and negotiate our shared understanding of our collaborative work.

In search of “turning points” (Bullock & Ritter, 2011) in our practice, each one of us positions oneself as a mediator in the sense that each one of us helps to make intelligible what is not necessarily and make visible the invisible in each other’s reflective practice. We make sense of experiences by discussing and negotiating their meanings. The concept of language in general, and the French and English languages in particular, have been at the core of our ways of mediating knowledge from the beginning of our collaborative self-study. We are bi-/pluri-lingual academics. We grew up, lived and worked in different multicultural environments. The languages of our everyday professional conversations are French and English (or English and French depending on the situation). Our language of personal communication both as a married couple and as academic collaborators is French. We have taught and presented research in both languages. By using the different languages that are in our linguistic repertoire, we are engaging in a dynamic process of meaning-making through what sociolinguists refer to as *linguaging*. Linguaging is a process that everyone uses every day – someone who communicates solely in English, for example, will engage in linguaging when speaking with different colleagues for different purposes, across and within disciplines. Those of us who use multiple languages of communication are called upon to consider the role of *plurilinguaging* (Lüdi et al., 2013; Piccardo, 2017) in their lives and meaning-making.

According to Swain (2006), the concept of *linguaging* demonstrates the critical role language plays in mediating cognitive processes. For Vygotsky (1986), language and thought are not the same thing; language “completes thought.” In essence, linguaging is “a dynamic, never-ending process of using language to make meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language” (Swain, 2006, p. 98). Shifting from the noun *language* to the verb *linguaging* requires one to understand language as an on-going social process, rather than as a decontextualized object.

Linguaging becomes more noticeable in our critical friendship because we communicate in several languages. We co-construct meaning of our selves as teacher

educators through mobilising our plurilingual and pluricultural competence (Coste et al., 1997/2009). Beacco et al. (2016) defined this competence as:

The ability to use a plural repertoire of linguistic and cultural resources to meet communication needs or interact with people from other backgrounds and contexts, and enrich that repertoire while doing so. The repertoire consists of resources which individual learners have acquired in all the languages they know or have learned, and which also relate to the cultures associated with those languages. (p. 23)

It is thus the ability to switch from one language to another, to express oneself in one language and understand the other and to call upon our whole linguistic (and cultural) repertoire to make sense of the/our world. It departs from a monoglossic lens toward language(s) as it emphasizes “the relationships between the languages that [we speak], the underlying linguistic mechanisms and cultural connotations, the personal linguistic and cultural trajectory as well as [our] attitude toward language diversity, stressing openness, curiosity, and flexibility” (Piccardo, 2017, para. 6).

The dynamic nature of plurilingualism and the on-going process of languaging participate in building the foundations of our critical friendship. We are constantly mediating to communicate beyond linguistic and cultural barriers and to make sense of the complex nature of concepts developed in one or the other language to co-construct meaning. Mediation and plurilingualism are therefore closely linked as “mediation is at the core of plurilingualism, as plurilingualism cannot exist without some form of mediation” (Piccardo, 2019, p. 194). Furthermore, a plurilingual understanding of our critical friendship draws from an understanding that we are creating and operating from a shared safe space and acting in a plurilingual context that brings us together to negotiate our professional and personal identities as self-study researchers. Put differently, our critical friendship is what Swain (2001) defined as a *collaborative dialogue* in the sense that we are engaged in problem solving and knowledge building that take place across languages. Our dialogue appears as a source and a space for learning. It is also reflective and dialogic as it is between the two of us, but it also has a dialogic dimension within ourselves as Elijah (2004) wrote: “Our voices are heterophonic and polyphonic, authoritative and authentic” (p. 247). Navigating this shared collaborative space requires and develops our agency as individuals and as self-study researchers who use multiple languages.

As mentioned earlier, we are called to adopt a plurilingual perspective on the mediation that occurs via our critical friendship and self-study. In so doing, we focus on what we do when we are languaging in using the different linguistic and semiotic resources that compose our communicative repertoire, in other words when we are *plurilinguaging* (Lüdi et al., 2013; Piccardo, 2017). From this plurilingual stance which “embraces a complex and dynamic vision of language construction with a focus on linguistic and cultural repertoires of individuals seen as agents that are constantly changing in relation to all their experiences and interactions with other agents within changing contexts” (Piccardo, 2019, p. 194), *plurilinguaging* appears as a cognitive process that uses different linguistic and semiotic resources to contribute to meaning-making and come to new understandings.

8.3 Plurilinguaging *IS* Mediation and Plurilinguaging *AS* Mediation

Having explored the concepts of plurilingualism and mediation, we now turn to examples of the ways in which these ideas are manifest in our critical friendship and self-study of the role of language in teacher education and the identities of teacher educators. Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) raised the importance of *ontological commitment* in self-study and so we feel compelled to interpret and analyse how our lived plurilingual realities interact with our self-study work. We present some of our data as photographs of research logs rather than the more standard practice of transcribing written research notes because we feel that understanding the ways in which we write to each other requires a consideration of how we position, spatially, text, diagrams, and questions.

Our first two examples provide evidence for the importance of the position of text and the ways in which our critical friendship mediates knowledge across languages as well as within languages. In that sense, plurilinguaging *is* mediation. Throughout our self-study work, which is broadly concerned with understanding our pedagogies of language teacher education, we have either alternated between languages (Photo 8.1), mixed languages, or both (Photo 8.2) in our research journals:

The first example, taken from early on in our self-study work, shows Shawn reacting in English to Cécile's differentiations of three fields of knowledge (didactics, pedagogy, and applied linguistics) that are conceptualized distinctively in the French Academy and the English-speaking Academy. This discussion, and its implications for how Cécile situated herself in self-study methodology as an experienced researcher but a newcomer to the field, was important to our early work as we were able to articulate some of the challenges of translation and academic border-crossing in self-study (Sabatier & Bullock, 2019; Bullock & Sabatier, 2019). For purposes of this chapter, however, it is important to note that through plurilinguaging and mediating meaning, Shawn points out the nature of Cécile's "knowledge hard-won." By doing so, he assumes the expertise to suggest the making meanings for Cécile in order to help her negotiate the socially, linguistically and culturally situated

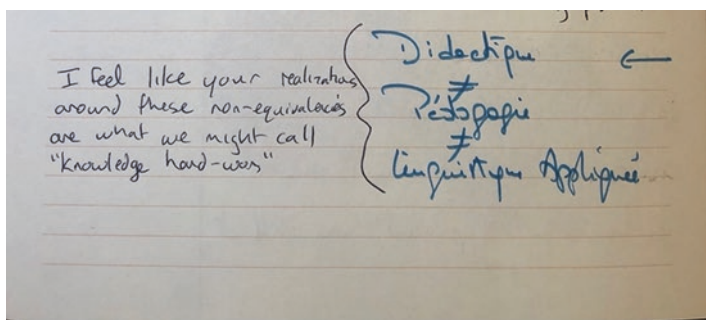
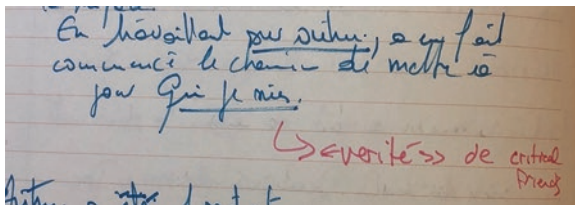


Photo 8.1 Cécile's research journal – English text and grouping by Shawn (26/06/2017)

Photo 8.2 Cécile's research journal – Comment by Shawn in red (31/01/2018)



meanings of her differentiations. Shawn later stated he purposely wrote in English despite the fact Cécile's journal entries were in French, and despite the fact their language of personal communication is French, because he felt that he needed to help mediate Cécile's entry into self-study literature that is mostly published in English. Shawn also noted the personal tension he felt in doing so, as he did not want Cécile to feel as though she had to use English to engage in self-study. Through his choice of language, drawing from his expertise in self-study research, and by reducing distances between two frames of thoughts, Shawn was hosting Cécile, a novice in self-study, into the community of self-study researchers (Bullock & Bullock, 2020).

In the second example, Shawn mixes French and English to convey his perception of the foundational role of *critical friendship* through the deictic function of the words in French. In doing so, Shawn is enacting critical friendship by encapsulating in two languages the responsibility a critical friend should display (“*dire la vérité*”; speaking the truth). Shawn is also displaying what Lüdi and Py (2009, p. 156) called “situated multilingual resources” that

[presuppose] the existence of a free and active subject who has amassed a repertoire of resources and who activates this repertoire according to his/her need, knowledge or whims, modifying or combining them where necessary. At the same time, these resources are often mobilised during interaction, in collaboration with (a) partner(s); as such, one can speak of shared resources. (p. 157)

We argue that, in part, it is through confrontation with the gaze of a critical friend that we can see another self (*autrui*). This self is another aspect of the “true” nature (*la vraie nature*) of our identity as teachers, teacher educators and self-study researchers. A critical friend is the one who makes it happen through, as Costa and Kallick (1993) would argue, support and challenge (hence, la “*vérité de critical friend*”). Shawn exposes what the role of a critical friend is by switching to Cécile's first language. Yet, his code switch is multi-faceted. Its first purpose is cognitive as it facilitates the encounter between the experience reported by Cécile (working with another's self helps to bring one's self to light) and Shawn's knowledge on critical friendship. A second intent is relational mediation as Shawn's code switching is bi-directional. It is, on the one hand, oriented toward Cécile in order to support her understanding of the role of critical friendship and, on the other hand, it is oriented toward himself in order to establish a bridge with the literature that has defined critical friendship.

Our collaborative dialogue further underscores the importance of questioning the effect of the challenges inherit in using French and English; two languages with a long history and many shared cognate words that often have slightly different meanings (Photo 8.3):

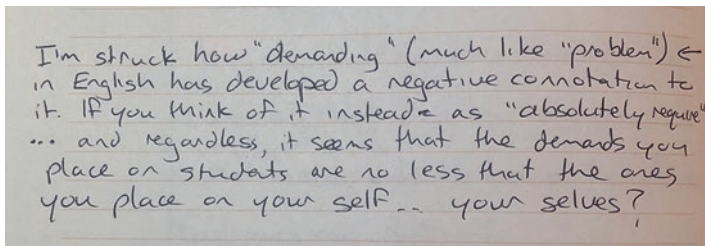


Photo 8.3 Cécile's research journal – Shawn's comment (26/06/2017)

Here we see Shawn discussing the impact of the use of the word “demanding” in English in reaction to a comment Cécile formulated about her personal expectations as a teacher educator. Cécile wrote in English about how she was/is perceived as “demanding by [her] students” and how “demanding with herself” she was/is. Yet, the word is not the literal translation for the French word *exigeant*, which encompasses how Cécile would have talked about her perception of herself as a teacher and a teacher educator in French. She is “demanding” toward her students, but she is *exigeante* toward herself. *Demander* and *exiger* in French have two different connotations; the former implies that you clearly let someone know what you want from them; the latter means that you demand a lot from yourself and are not easily satisfied with the quality of your own work.

As plurilingual speakers and mediators we use all the linguistic resources of our repertoire as an *integrated communication system* (Garcia & Wei, 2014; Lewis et al., 2012) throughout our critical friendship, as evidenced by the preceding three examples from research journals. Our shared, integrated communication system helps us to navigate our intellectual frameworks to make sense of our selves. It also demands we become more explicit about the languages we use to think about our interactions and about how we construct knowledge through the multiple languages that compose our linguistic repertoire. In our interpersonal mediation, throughout our critical friendship, the choice of the language in which we choose to interact highlights how much our bi-/plurilingualism is therefore put at the service of our collaboration. By expressing our bilingual identity, we strategically use plurilingual *as* mediation to express and negotiate what for us is the foundation of our knowledge.

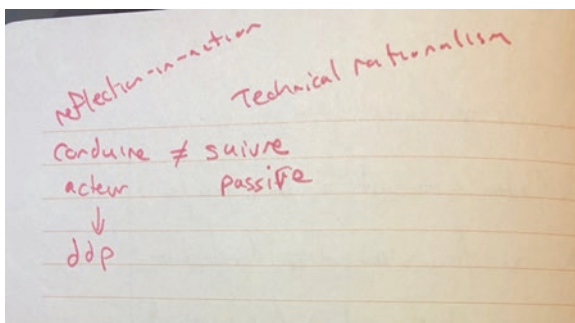
In addition to mediating our critical friendship, plurilingual and collaborative dialogue are sources of learning. The two languages we share play an equal part in constructing and mediating our understanding of our work and, crucially, our understanding of what self-study is about – particularly because the majority of self-study literature is written in English and thus places particular demands on our approach. One of Cécile's early questions, “What language do I write in?” (12/06/2017) highlights the fact that mediating knowledge through (pluri)language is more than mere translation, or even interpretation. The tacit agreement between us that both languages would be used by the two of us in our dialogue suggests that our collaboration is based on the shared awareness that the circulation of

ideas, concepts, and notions, from one framework to another, from one language to others, lies in the ways in which these ideas, concepts, notions and frameworks are transformed by the different linguistic and intellectual traditions (Zarate & Liddicoat, 2009). Early on, we discovered Cécile's use of English is a way for her to distance herself from her pedagogy, as using English helps to remove some of the emotional nuance of what she is interested in discussing – a useful approach when she had a challenging class to teach. At the same time, Cécile's switch to French during an English interaction sometimes serves as a call for Shawn's help to process new learning. In this instance, Shawn is recognized as a trusted person, a supportive friend, “an advocate for the success of that work” (Costa & Kallick, 1993, p. 50, in Schuck & Russell, 2005, p. 108). From Shawn's perspective, code-switching between French and English allows him to mediate meaning and facilitate Cécile's entry into the self-study community, while challenging his own ontological commitment to disrupting inherent English-language bias within his methodological tradition. But is also allows him to mediate his own learning as seen in the following example (Photo 8.4).

By mobilizing the two languages, and speaking plurilingually (Lüdi & Py, 2009, p. 161), Shawn's mediation “operates on the *in-between* [knowledge], it is more than a work of go-between and more than a kind of filter” (Coste & Cavalli, 2015, p. 30 – our translation). Through the medium of Cécile's first language, Shawn reformulates and transforms his own knowledge by reducing the tension inherent in mediation. Bilingual speech (Lüdi & Py, 2003) places the two language items side by side and reduces possible gaps through “a tacit, spontaneous alternation from the basic or ‘matrix language’ to the ‘embedded language’, and vice versa (Myers-Scotton, 1997)” (Lüdi & Py, 2009, p. 161). Thus, plurilinguaging modifies both Cécile's and Shawn's positions and brings them closer through a transformation that Coste and Cavalli (2015) call a “double alteration” in the sense that any modifications influence both sides (p. 30).

In discussing the challenges that emerge from the enactment of our form of collaboration, in relation to the roles that language(s) play(s)? in mediating our expectations toward self-study, it is obvious that our bilingual interactions shape our critical friendship's talks. Alternating and mixing French and English reveal that languages are what connects us to others and to the world. Mediating knowledge

Photo 8.4 Cécile's research journal – Shawn's comment (31/01/2018)



and collaboration through the use of multiple linguistic and cultural resources leads us to access cognitive operations of reformulation and clarification of our thoughts in one or/and the other language. It helps us become aware of the concrete implications of what stands in the way (notions, representations, values, cultures of education) and to implement new learning to transform our practice as teacher educators and as self-study researchers in constructing a shared reframing of our pedagogies of teacher education.

8.4 Critical Friends as Mediators of Experiences

At the beginning of this chapter we stated that our critical friendship positions each one of us as mediators. We would like to push further our idea, as it appears that our critical friendship clearly also mediates our experiences and our personal histories. In a way, we as critical friends become experience brokers. In a reciprocal posture for each other (Stolle et al., 2019), our role as critical friends is then to understand, from our own experience, that others understand differently and how they understand differently (Coste & Cavalli, 2018). It is expanding to encompass mediation functions which make us in turn a linguistic and cultural mediator to mend a gap across languages and cultures, a pedagogic mediator to facilitate knowledge and thought and encourage conceptual thoughts by linking previous knowledge and frameworks, a knowledge mediator to ask provocative questions in order to make sense of our experiences and transform them into a source of learning.

The following extended example provides additional clarity on the ways in which our critical friendship enables us to act as experience brokers. It describes Cécile's frustration with the gaps she perceived between her practice, the professed needs of her students, and the requirements she set out for herself. With Shawn's critical friendship, Cécile questioned the relationship between her intentions as a teacher educator and her actions as a teacher and as a teacher educator (as reported in Bullock & Sabatier, 2019). We include both the original text in French and our translation, although we recognise that this choice has an impact on the length of the chapter. Nonetheless, we feel that our ontological commitment to exploring plurilingual aspects of our identities and critical friendship as teacher educators requires us to use both languages. It is also a useful reminder that if language is a representation of thought, the nature of that representation is dependent on the language in question. For example, the term *formateur.e. des enseignants* in French has implicitly different connotations to the term *teacher educator* in English. We struggle, as we always do, with a translation that balances the need for clarity in a target language with the nuances implicit in the original:

« Le semestre dernier, lors du dernier cours de la M.Ed., cours qui porte sur la réflexivité, un des étudiants n'a pas embarqué et n'a pas perçu l'importance ou la nécessité du cours, le jugeant du coup inutile. Cela m'interroge car est-ce moi en tant que formateur qui n'ait pas su déconstruire les résistances de cette étudiante ? Est-ce la légitimité de la pratique réflexive qui est mise en question ou la mienne ? Si je n'ai pas réussi à "convaincre" l'étudiant

(qui est aussi un enseignant) que la pratique réflexive est un outil d'émancipation professionnelle, quel formateur suis-je ? » [Cécile's research journal – 24/01/2018]

“Last semester, during the last course of an M.Ed. program which focuses on reflective practice, one of the students simply did not engage. They did not perceive the importance of the course, and deemed it unnecessary. The reaction of the student encouraged me to question my practice as a teacher educator. Was it a lack of knowledge on my part... was I unable to conceptualise why the student resisted the course? Is the problem the conceptual underpinnings of reflective practice or my pedagogical approach as a teacher educator? If I failed to “convince” the student (who is also a teacher) that reflective practice is a powerful tool for professional empowerment, what sort of teacher educator am I?” [Translation of Cécile's research journal – 24/01/2018]

The tension documented here is between several of Cécile's representation of teacher educators: the role of a teacher educator in teaching content about teaching, the ways in which how teacher educators teach interact with what they are teaching, and the ways in which teacher educators are represented (or not) as part of the teaching profession. By explicitly questioning her identity, Cécile examines the modalities that emerge from her practice for thinking about the construction of professional identities. In so doing, and with Shawn's mediation, as example 2 below demonstrates, she managed to turn from this tension to a what some in self-study would call a *turn to self*:

“Cécile: Les étudiants refusent tout simplement de lire et j'ai l'impression que je ne suis plus en contact avec ces futurs enseignants....

Shawn: Pourquoi penses-tu que quelque chose a changé pour toi? Qu'est ce qui te fait penser ça?

Cécile: Je devrais savoir comment les atteindre. Comment leur faire prendre conscience de l'importance de leurs besoins. Ils pensent simplement que l'enseignement est un livre de recettes que vous implémentez; ils ne sont pas intéressés par les raisons pour lesquelles ils font ce qu'on leur demande de faire... en tant que formateur d'enseignants, je m'interroge sur mes capacités... il est également clair pour moi qu'ils ne me reconnaissent pas en tant qu'enseignant; je suis un membre du corps professoral qui mène des recherches et qui possède des connaissances... le nombre de fois que je tire de mon expérience en classe... mais ils répondent que je devrais aller visiter une salle de classe de 7ème année de FLS...

Shawn: One of the things that strikes me about what you are saying is the tension between how much you want to “tell” candidates and how much you want them to realise for themselves the importance of taking advantage of time in the preservice year to carefully analyse their practice”.

[Transcription of Discussion – 1/08/2018]

Cécile: My students simply refuse to read and I have the impression that I am no longer in sync with the needs of these future teachers...

Shawn: Why do you think something has changed for you? What makes you think that?

Cécile: I should know how to reach them. How to make teacher candidates aware of the importance of taking their professional needs seriously. I have the impression that they are

just thinking of teaching as a cookbook that you implement; they are not interested in why they do what they are asked to do... as a teacher educator I question my abilities... it is also clear to me that they do not recognize me as a *real* teacher; I'm a research faculty member who has some knowledge... the number of times I draw from my classroom experience... but they respond that I should go visit a grade 7 FSL classroom...

Shawn: One of the things that strikes me about what you are saying is the tension between how much you want to "tell" candidates and how much you want them to realise for themselves the importance of taking advantage of time in the preservice year to carefully analyse their practice.

[Translation of Discussion – 08/01/2018]

In this example of our collaborative dialogue, Shawn commented to elicit more detail about Cécile's concerns and, where possible, suggested a focus on how these experiences were affecting her pedagogy of teacher education. Gradually, he brought out several levels of questions around tensions related to (a) intended and enacted practice and (b) safety and challenge (Berry, 2007). While the conversation was on-going, he in turn came to realize that

Shawn: Our conversations make me realise a different dimension to safety and challenge: The idea that in making a teacher education program that is so safe for candidates, as I would argue the PDP [teacher education] program at SFU is, we (professors) have perhaps constructed a place that is not safe for us. When you think about it, almost all of the program is taught by seconded teachers and, as a result, we are explicitly positioned as aliens, as outsiders.

[Transcription of Discussion – 08/01/2018]

These exchanges, based on the fact that Shawn and Cécile worked in the same institution and therefore share a common knowledge of its functioning, illustrate how critical friendship is a way of putting in order what we think about our identities and our places in teacher education. It introduces interactions, questions and clarifications that disturbs the original tensions and bring back a sense of calm after several moments of crisis. It requires serious attention to our plurilingual identities as teacher educators and critical friends. Were we not to attend to the linguistic elements of our critical friendship, we would be less able to broker one another's experiences. We would be less able to productively question what we mean by invoking particular ideas, concerns, and tensions. It may be that Cécile would have less access to academic literature on self-study and that Shawn would have less access to academic literature on plurilingual education. Although we can both read both languages fluidly and independently, we are each missing some crucial tacit experiences that enable the reading of our respective literatures. Just as critical friendship enables us to think differently about our own experiences through the lenses of another, so too does it motivate us to reframe our long-held assumptions through translation and plurilinguaging. A brokerage is only successful if both parties are willing to work together productively.

8.5 Conclusions: Critical Friendship as a Plurilingual System

The purpose of this chapter was to take seriously the ways in which concepts from sociolinguistics, in particular the ideas of mediation, plurilingualism, and languaging, might shed light on both our critical friendship as teacher educators and the process of critical friendship more generally. In particular, we have argued that our critical friendship has been a process of facilitating a plurilingual space for learning and meaning making. Attending carefully to plurilingual identities and practice has enabled us to build bridges across different conceptual frameworks, languages, and academic cultures.

Our chapter makes an important contribution to language teacher education and self-study methodology because of its focus on the application of sociolinguistic theories to the practice of critical friendship. Unlike our previous work, and the focus of many self-studies of language education, the focus has not been on our enactment of language teacher education practices with teachers. Rather, we have attempted to clearly document the ways in which our collaborative environment has been generated via critical friendship. Our plurilingual approach to our critical friendship in our collaborative self-study encourages us to build bridges and look for links between languages and between different cultural, epistemological frameworks. It also increases our attention on how language(s) operates to build knowledge and construct our identities as self-study researchers and teacher educators.

Our plurilingual relationship has made a significant difference to our practices as teacher educators in a number of ways. First, we can act as linguistic and cultural brokers for one another as we explore research in the languages we speak, which in turn has a consequence for how we teach future teachers. Not only is this important for providing plurilingual experiences in teacher education classrooms, it also is important to broaden the scope of educational research that we share with our students. The ability to share research written in multiple languages with our students is important to us, and our practice as linguistic brokers for each other has further enabled us to consider carefully how we work with students and colleagues on issues of language education and the importance of exploring different perspectives in and on educational research (beyond, say, the canon of well-used research methods textbooks often used with graduate students in English-speaking academies). Second, our plurilingual relationship has challenged us to think about the sets of assumptions we make about languaging in our teacher education classrooms and indeed our work with graduate students. We seek to find ways to more clearly live our commitment to (pluri-)languaging with our students. Finally, we must highlight the value of critical friendship within self-study – our critical friendship helps us to continually shine a light on the role that using multiple languages plays in our selves as academics, teacher educators, and researchers.

We wish to conclude by both acknowledging a concern that might be raised about our work and issuing a subsequent challenge. There may be readers who feel as though this chapter might have little to add to the ways in which they might enact

critical friendship as method in self-study because they communicate and write in one language. It would be easy to dismiss our challenges as ones unique to individuals navigating multiple languages in a relationship. Our work has implications for self-study researchers more generally, not just those who work across multiple languages. As we articulated earlier, we all engage in languaging processes daily, regardless of how many “official” languages we speak. Nilsson (2013), for example, documented and interpreted experiences of critical friendship between a teacher educator and a group of engineering educators. A key component of the work was the languaging process that took place between practitioners as it required to understand how different disciplines framed problems of practice. The term *languaging* was not used, that is the term that we bring to Nilsson’s (2013) work with our disciplinary lenses.

We argue that the plurilingual nature of our relationship encouraged us to take account of both our languaging and plurilanguaging practices. A focus on (pluri-) languaging in critical friendship encourages one to take account of the development of a shared repertoire for talking about teaching, learning, and teacher education. The repertoire, or *shared language*, is unique to a critical friendship and acts as both mediator and generator of discussion. While it is true that our shared repertoire and system for talking about teacher education is based on shared languages (French and English), it is also true that we continue a shared language of how we interpret terms, ideas, tensions, and ways forward in our self-study. We would argue that the development of a similar system – regardless of whether or not it is mono- or multi-lingual in the traditional sense of the terms – is crucial to any critical friendship. We are all products of our experiences in education and our formation as scholars is highly contextual. In that sense, engaging in critical friendship requires us to recognise that we are all plurilingual as we develop a shared language.

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Part II
Collaborative Self-Study

Chapter 9

Collaboration in Self-Study to Foster Professional and Personal Agency



Hafdís Guðjónsdóttir and Svanborg Rannveig Jónsdóttir

Abstract This chapter focuses on the concept of collaborative self-study and the different manifestations it can take. Collaboration in self-study research is an indicator of quality and the critical emphasis of the methodology. Taking the stance that all self-study research is collaborative in nature, the authors present their personal experience and highlight how collaboration in self-study research improved our practice and professional growth. They describe how the tensions or challenges that emerged helped them develop their collaboration. The authors conclude that collaboration can have synergistic effects, expand resources, and increase personal and professional agency.

This chapter focuses on the concept of collaborative self-study and the different manifestations it can take. Collaboration in self-study research is an indicator of quality and the critical emphasis of the methodology. Taking the stance that all self-study research is collaborative in nature, we present our personal experience and highlight how collaboration in self-study research improved our practice and professional growth. We describe how the tensions or challenges that emerged helped us to develop our collaboration. We conclude that collaboration can have synergistic effects, expand resources, and increase personal and professional agency.

Self-study of educational practices is a way of thinking, acting and living that becomes a part of the pathway to guide the learning of practitioners towards professional and personal agency. It focuses on teacher educators' professional and personal practice and identity. Self-study research methodology is situated within the discourses of the social construction of knowledge, reflective practices, and action for social change (Bodone et al., 2004). This important work is performed individually as well as jointly, with the support and critiques of colleagues. It can be argued that collaboration is integral to the nature of self-study and to the way it might

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unfold. The first handbook of self-study introduced three different forms of collaboration found in self-study methodology: collaborative self-study, or collaboration acknowledged from the beginning of the research; collaboration *in* self-study, where the collaboration can be seen and felt throughout the research but is not explained or recognized; and meta-collaboration in the creation of self-study, in which the community of Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices shares, review and supports each other's work (Bodone et al., 2004). It can both expand the resources we have as teacher educators and self-study researchers and strengthen us as agents for change. Collaboration as agency derives from conditions of research where the researchers collaborate and participate in a dialogic process. It rises from a community where knowledge of teacher education is created and recreated (Bodone et al., 2004; Guðjónsdóttir & Dalmau, 2017).

9.1 Creating a Collaborative Space for Professional Growth

Ever since I can remember as a student, teacher, teacher educator, or researcher, collaboration has been the key for me (Hafðís) to function, to develop, or to thrive. Without realizing it, I often begin to look for someone to collaborate with in my work.

The first time I (Svanborg) worked with Hafðís we were co-teaching the course *Working in Inclusive Practices*. I was very happy when she offered me a space in the course, and I seized the opportunity to perform a self-study to find out how we could strengthen ourselves as well as the course. I had not used self-study methodology before, but from the outset it rang true to me. The collaboration in teaching and doing the self-study at the same time brought us tightly together, and we discovered in the process how well our specialties harmonized. I would not have guessed that the methods and approaches of my subject, innovation and entrepreneurial education, and Hafðís's specialty of inclusive education, were fundamentally driven by the same purpose. Through the process of collaborating on the self-study, we concluded that inclusive education and innovation and entrepreneurial education both aimed to support people in becoming creative and inclusive participants in society. We concluded in our first paper that inclusive schools develop responsive practices, differentiating instruction for all learners, and innovation education was about applying creativity and knowledge to meet needs or solve problems that learners themselves identify (Guðjónsdóttir & Jónsdóttir, 2012).

Performing the self-study on our teaching in the *Working in Inclusive Practices* course gave us the opportunity to fully scrutinize the meaning of the key concepts we were using and to develop a space for professional development. Not only did the collaboration help us see more in the data than would doing the research individually, but we also had the support of theoretical lenses to sharpen our vision. These first steps in self-study were important for me (Svanborg), not least because I was collaborating with someone experienced in self-study research. While Hafðís was already well versed in self-study, for me at this time it was a new pathway to

getting to know the methodology and methods and the literature available. This collaboration as the first self-study research I took part in, and it set the foundation for further teamwork and professional development. For me (Hafðís) the collaboration and the dialogue were important, as it enabled us to discuss our planning, teaching, and development of the course framed in self-study. Discussing self-study methodology and method in Icelandic was crucial at that time, as I had mostly talked about it in English at that point.

Self-study researchers are not only the selves conducting research; they are also the selves being studied, as well as interacting around an external data set (LaBosky, 2004). Teaching is an interpersonal act, or as often is said: teachers teach who they are, driving home the close connection between teachers' beliefs and actions. However, sometimes we act in contradiction to our values. This calls for self-analysis and self-transformation in order to strengthen ourselves so we can stand for our beliefs (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). These interactions can require a dynamic process in which the self-study researchers invite each other to extend themselves beyond their comfort zones (Bullock, 2020). Boden et al. (2004) introduced the idea that "the international and intercommunal collaboration will have the major influence in the development of the discourse and practice of the self-study in teacher education" (p. 750), and we relate to this belief.

9.2 Expanding Collaboration – Utilizing Collective Resources

If we believe in pedagogy and research theories that are social, situated, and distributed, then we must create work conditions that enable group interactions and knowledge development, as well as individual development (LaBosky, 2004). Collaborative self-study, grounded in a dialogue, conceptualized as an interaction between colleagues, can help us see our situation through different eyes and at the same time help us reframe both our practice and our personal actions. The interaction can take many forms, but by bringing into our research various perspectives on our professional practice, it can challenge our assumptions and biases, reveal our inconsistencies, expand our interpretations, and triangulate the data (LaBosky, 2004).

We used our study in the Working in Inclusive Practices course to adjust our collaboration and learn about our strengths and each other's subject disciplines. The focus was on how we were developing responsive and resourceful teacher skills in the course by analyzing how we implemented the core practices of innovation education to serve inclusive education. The study helped us shed light on how we adjusted in working with each other as well as analyzing and understanding the framing (teacher control) in the course (Guðjónsdóttir & Jónsdóttir, 2016).

When Karen Rut joined our group, our collaboration was expanded both in teaching and self-study of our practice. We three continued the doing Working in Inclusive Practices self-study, and also began a self-study as we developed a group

supervision of master's projects through collaborative supervisory meetings. Our goals as teachers and supervisors were to facilitate, guide, and encourage the students to work on their master's theses. To assess students' learning, we used exit tickets (ticket out of class) and had them send us a short e-mail every Monday. We organized specific preparation meetings for the collaborative supervisory meetings and separate reflection and analytical meetings to discuss our data and findings. The preparation meetings often became mixed with analytical ponderings and reflections on the data we were gathering, which consisted of both the exit tickets and what students shared with us in the Monday e-mails. We gradually became comfortable with this mix as our self-studies became a living part of our teaching (Whitehead, 2018).

As we got to know each other better through teaching and self-study collaboration, we began to rely on and trust each other's funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005). We soon realized Karen's strengths in constructing writing exercises for the students, assisting them to develop their voice through writing. Svanborg's organizational skills helped us to plan the different parts of the meetings and lessons using her artistic and creative approaches. Hafðís' strengths emerged in her willingness to collaborate and in her inclusive thinking which often served as a check on what we were doing.

We discovered our collective visions in teaching, and we also tested our trust as we became increasingly open about our concerns, our limitations in experience, and irritations. The trust we developed through self-study afforded a space for cultivating our collective supervisory and teacher efficacy. One of the main realizations we gained through working collaboratively and collecting and analyzing data was that we discovered and used each other's strengths and collective resources to respond to the needs and challenges students encountered working on their masters' projects or as learners in the Working in Inclusive Practices course.

Conversations with critical friends that are professionally, passionately, and constructively focused allow us to dig beneath the surface of our teaching inquiry. Dialogue that is collaborative can contribute to the iterative and ongoing process by which uneasiness and even conflicts become a facilitator for new perspectives, new findings, new teachings, new actions, and new questions (Bodone et al., 2004; Guðjónsdóttir & Dalmau, 2017).

9.3 Risk Taking and Vulnerability: Developing a Trusting Atmosphere

Through collaborative inquiries, the researcher appreciates, and is respectful to, outside views and questions. Self-study involves risk taking and a level of vulnerability since one of the intentions for educators who practice self-study is to introduce their experience and learning to the public discourse. In so doing, the personal and professional actions and the identities of individuals become known to others and open for discussion and critique. This is when collaboration in different forms

can create safe places for self-study practitioners as they inquire into their own practices to develop or transform them.

Self-study scholars incorporate the viewpoints and perspectives of their colleagues to gain alternative perspectives on and ongoing support for their research. New insights and questions can trigger new understandings of old ideas, leading to further questions. On a theoretical level, the notion of critical collaborative inquiry builds on the necessity of collective cognition in professional development and within a learning community of engaged scholarship (Bodone et al., 2004).

The trust we developed in our collaboration did not come about without challenges, which sometimes exceeded our comfort zone. In preparing for our Working in Inclusive Practices course a challenging matter struck us:

We were discussing how much we should correct students' misunderstandings directly and Karen and Hafdís had a totally different opinion to mine. I had been under a lot of stress at work and I felt very frustrated and angry as I discussed the issue and suddenly, I broke down crying and stormed out of the office. When I had calmed down, I returned to the office and Hafdís said to me: the reason you reacted the way you did shows that you are a caring teacher, and you have every right to show your emotions for the issue. (Svanborg, memory)

I was relieved and grateful that she responded in a respectful way to me and were even able to find value behind my outburst. They were both very supportive and they made me feel that my reaction was quite normal and not inappropriate. I felt I was in a trusting and understanding environment working with them.

9.4 Constructive Conflicts and Provocations

If self-study researchers intend to question the present circumstances in teacher education and attain new understandings of it, then it is critical that they bring their different viewpoints to the discussion. Professional communities are analyzed and defined both by dilemmas and agreements. Differences are essential for better understanding and knowledge creation around challenging topics. However, conflicts have also broken communities, silenced voices, and made sensitive topics taboo. Understanding the resilient and strong forms of collaborative conversation that will persevere in the face of complex, conflicting viewpoints and harsh realities will be equally important to self-study researchers who wish to take a critical and transformative stance in their research (Bodone et al., 2004).

One incident when trust was tested was at a group supervision meeting where I (Svanborg) was giving a mini presentation on how I work with data. I was showing the group of students how one of my former students had gathered codes in her data and was sorting them into categories in a table in a Word document to help her in the analytical process.

Karen and Hafdís were standing to the side and suddenly Karen started responding when I displayed the table. She said that this way of working with data was not how she worked and seeing such a set frame as in a table "it literally makes me nauseous". She said that she would rather write findings in a flow and objected to using such structured methods.

I was a bit startled and the students looked confused. Hafdís stepped in as well and said to the students that it was important to find a way that suited them to make sense of their data. As Hafdís talked, she grabbed a basket full of small bits of textiles, poured them on the table, and asked: If this was my data how could I make sense of it? Can I group these bits and pieces? (Svanborg, research journal)

This seemed to make sense to the students. They started to help sort the pieces, and I finished my mini lesson connecting the coding-table I had presented with what Hafdís had interjected. I also acknowledged that there were different ways to work with data, as Karen had pointed out. I reiterated to the students that they had to find the way that best helped them in their analytical journey. After the next preparation meeting, I asked Karen if she could give a specific presentation for the students about analyzing and writing in a flow. Moments such as this challenged us, but also presented us with opportunities to excavate our different approaches and strengths as we realized the different ways in which we as supervisors could lead students through the research process. Our collaboration produced dialogues and interactions that helped to develop a constructive community of practice.

9.5 Collaborative and Critical

The strong presence of collaboration in the practice of self-study of education is a natural response to its ethical and theoretical location (Bodone et al., 2004). Essential to self-study is the collective work done with colleagues. By documenting personal insights, sharing one's work, and having it critiqued, it is possible to validate our interpretations and enhance the research. However, being critical doesn't mean being judgmental or evaluative. Instead, it refers to receiving and offering honest and constructive feedback that moves beyond technical advice and pushes the researchers to question how research efforts might be interpreted by the readers (Bodone et al., 2004).

Being a critical friend reviewing our colleagues work and reporting back to them can call for tensions. When we suggest changes or reworking it is not always easy to report or to take it professionally. We as colleagues, comment on each other's teaching and writing and we also ask for advice and suggestions. Hafdís describes her experience:

After having learnt that one of my colleagues felt my advice as criticism and felt I was hindering her professional development I became more careful. Later as I was advising Svanborg on her writing and knew she had to do considerable amendments, I experienced tensions. I asked myself, should I be honest or tell her this was fine? Would I lose her friendship and continuing collaboration? In the end I decided to talk to Svanborg and rely on my own professionalism and hers. The talk we had was constructive and Svanborg decided to take my advice.

The tensions this task brought to the surface was real, emotional, strong and called for careful reflections and a plan for action. The critical friendship we have

developed was helpful, but we cannot deny or look away that Svanborg's strong professionalism also played an important role, and this became a learning moment.

In the collaborative supervision we regularly discussed cases each of us was dealing with and scrutinized how the challenges could be resolved constructively. I (Svanborg) often provided too many direct instructions and too detailed of comments to the students I supervised. I shared this with Hafþís and Karen in an e-mail about Hanna, one of the first students I supervised:

I tend to do direct corrections to her writing. However, I do try to make just advising comments in a positive tone, rather than directives. I want her to feel empowered through the whole process, but it sometimes takes so long for her to hone the writing to the quality required by the university. 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.

When we discussed this challenge at our next preparation meeting, we found that Karen and Hafþís also recognized these challenges in their own supervision. We discussed that we must remind each other not to intervene too much into the students' writing process with our words and understandings, but rather to give them the space to develop their own understanding of their actions to expand their agency. Together we learned that, rather than giving students the answers, asking them for explanations, or clarifications was often helpful. We used this collaborative space to scrutinize whether we were doing what we wanted to be doing, critically evaluating incidents and our approaches.

The collaboration in supervision helped us identify and develop important supervisory issues such as time awareness, the challenge of connecting practice and theories, and the importance of appropriate methodology. We used core reflection and other theoretical ideas (e.g., critical theory, community of practice) purposefully in our self-studies to understand better our practice and how we were developing our collaboration. Our intention was to understand how we could improve as teacher educators and support our learners. Reflecting critically on our work, we realized that our collaboration was built both on trust and on our common core beliefs. These were our collective adherence to critical pedagogy and our belief in the strengths of our different resources and those of our students. We believed that learning should empower the learners by building on their resources, and that students should not be offered ready-made knowledge uncritically.

According to the tickets out-of-class, the students appreciated the presentations we gave as supervisors and examples of how to work with data. Several of the students asked for more lessons about how to make sense of data and how to write findings. Such requests came repeatedly and worried us, since we expected the students to be somewhat well-versed in research methods. We discussed how we could respond to student needs and what kind of opportunities we could create for them to learn more about research methods and writing up. One of the ideas we wanted to enact was Korthagen's and Kessel's idea of turning the approach in teacher education upside down – instead of starting with theories, build on students' experience. We believed that students' learning was best supported by using their own resources (experiences, strengths, and qualities), addressing problems and issues on their own

terms, and learning through practice (their writing). As a response to students' requests for learning about handling data, we discussed in the meetings the importance of creating a space for the students to work with their data,

Focusing on our mission, we admitted that this was the reality and we needed to respond accordingly to actually connect to where students were and work from there. We decided that next time we would ask them to bring their data, so they could practice coding, grouping and finding their themes. Karen suggested they write short pieces from their data and share them in small groups. (Guðjónsdóttir et al., 2017)

By collaborating on the supervision and conducting self-study, we gained knowledge and understanding about how we created an effective learning community both for our master's students and for ourselves as supervisors.

We gradually got to know each other's professionalism, which we built on as we divided tasks between us according to each of our strengths, sometimes taking on new and challenging roles outside our comfort zones. Our collaboration and self-studies on both the Working in Inclusive Practices course and our collaborative supervision elicited our common core beliefs in working with critical pedagogy as we emphasized empowering students and believing in the strengths of our students' and our own resources.

9.6 Collaborative Agency

As noted in the beginning of the chapter, three different forms can be found in self-study research: collaborative self-study, collaboration in self-study, and meta-collaboration in the creation of self-study (Bodone et al., 2004). We can see each of these forms reflected in our practices. When we began to teach the Working in Inclusive Practices course and the group supervision, we decided to do a collaborative self-study on these practices. Both the importance of collaboration and doing self-study were gradually recognized and explained as we took part in meta-collaboration within the S-STEP community, sharing our work and receiving support through dialogue and review. Most often we planned collaborative self-study; however, in analyzing our data we realized that we could find collaboration in all our self-studies.

Collaborative agency expresses well the empowerment we experienced through the construction and reconstruction of our practice with collaborative self-study. Looking at our practice from different perspectives, engaging in frequent dialogues on teaching and learning, and reflecting on how we could enact critical pedagogy as agents of change, encouraged us to "dare to teach" (Freire, 1998). The self-study collaboration grounded our collective agency as it has given us professional confidence and a voice to be heard (Gísladóttir et al., 2019; Guðjónsdóttir et al., 2019; Guðjónsdóttir & Jónsdóttir, 2016).

Our collaboration had synergistic effects, as it expanded our collective resources and increased our personal and professional agency. These effects have emerged in our teaching and research and our participation in both the international and national

discourses in teacher education through our publications (e.g., Guðjónsdóttir et al., 2017; Jónsdóttir et al., 2018). The self-study collaboration multiplied our collective agency, stemming directly from the conditions of our research as we participate in a dialogic process with each other and local and international communities of practice (Kristinsdóttir et al., 2020). Our professional agency rises from a community where knowledge of teacher education is created and transformed (Jónsdóttir et al., 2015). Through collaborative self-study we take part in establishing the conditions of research, creating educational knowledge, and recreating teacher education (Bodone et al., 2004). Collaborative agency encourages and supports us in making a difference in teacher education – in daring to teach (Guðjónsdóttir & Dalmau, 2017).

The collaboration and interactions in our collaborative self-study took many forms. But what matters the most is that self-study allowed us to see how our knowledge and understanding multiplied by acquiring different perspectives on our professional practice. Doing collaborative self-study has challenged our assumptions, revealed our conflicts, expanded and deepened our interpretations, and strengthened our collaborative agency.

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Chapter 10

The ‘We-Me’ Dynamic in a Collaborative Self Study



Nicola Carse, Mike Jess, Paul McMillan, and Tim Fletcher

Abstract Collaboration is a critical feature of self-study research. However, accounts of how, and in what ways, collaboration unfolds in self-study research needs to be explored in more detail. To address this issue, we build on Davey and Ham’s (2009) “Me Identities” and “We Identity” concepts to investigate a collaborative self-study carried out by four teacher educators. We consider how each member’s facilitator role and identity (‘me-identities’) within a practitioner inquiry project with teachers intersected with the ‘we-identity’ that was built over many years and helped create a positive climate for the group’s collaborative efforts. In addition, we discuss how the formal and informal roles of each member influenced their contributions to the self-study process. We conclude by discussing the importance of acknowledging the ‘We-Me’ dynamic within collaborative work.

10.1 Introduction

A defining feature of self-study research is a focus on, “practice, but at the intersection of self and other” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 15). Central to interrogating the “intersection” between self and practice is collaboration with others (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 15). Collaboration involving working with a critical friend has remained a prominent feature as self-study has evolved theoretically (Craig & Curtis, 2020), methodologically (Fletcher, 2020), and across different disciplines (Crowe, 2020). However, concerns have been voiced within and beyond the S-STEP community that details of collaborative processes tend to be reported very generally,

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with little exploration of the challenges of collaboration itself (Davey & Ham, 2009; Davey et al., 2011; East et al., 2010; Martin & Dismuke, 2015; this volume).

The first three authors of this chapter are teacher educators and members of the Developmental Physical Education Group (DPEG) at the University of Edinburgh (the fourth acted as critical friend to the group). The self-study also involved another DPEG member, Jan McCall who, while engaged in the research process, was not directly involved in the writing of this chapter. In Table 10.1 we provide descriptive profiles of DPEG members, including our involvement in the DPEG.

Our work with the DPEG has led to the development of a series of professional learning projects for teachers (Jess & McEville, 2015). This chapter reports on a two-year project where four members of the DPEG (Nicola, Mike, Paul and Jan) worked together to support teachers in Scotland to engage in practitioner enquiry as professional learning. The project stemmed from our concerns about the largely transmissive nature of teacher professional learning (e.g. Kennedy, 2014; Darling Hammond et al., 2017) and the possibilities for professional autonomy we perceived practitioner enquiry offered teachers. Through this project we also wanted to explore the role we, as university-based teacher educators and researchers, could play within the practitioner enquiry process. Crucially, we recognised that developing the transformative potential of practitioner enquiry as professional learning requires not only teachers, but also those leading professional learning to research their practice (Keay et al., 2019). It is for this reason that we engaged in collaborative self-study to investigate our practice.

We present the chapter in three inter-related sections: firstly, we share insights from the collaborative self-study literature and make connections to how individual and collective identity can shape interaction with others; secondly, we outline how we used self-study methodology; and finally, we discuss our findings making connections to self-study and identity literature.

10.2 The Collaborative in Self-Study

Despite the centrality of collaboration in self-study scholarship, Martin and Dismuke (2015) assert that, “investigation of collaborative processes – how collaboration occurred – was either absent or offered only general description” (p. 6). This lack of

Table 10.1 Overview of DPEG Membership

Name	Duration of Membership	Area of interest in primary physical education	Number of teachers supporting with practitioner enquiry
Nicola	10 years	Middle and upper (aged 8–12 years)	2
Paul	10 years	Upper (aged 10–12 years)	2
Mike	17 years	Early and middle primary (aged 5–10 years)	4
Jan	17 years	Early and middle primary (aged 5–10 years)	2

detail conceals both the “benefits” (Martin & Dismuke, 2015, p. 6) and “tensions” (East et al., 2010, p. 281) of collaboration, and the time and resources required to build “professional intimacy” (Fitzgerald et al., 2002, p. 77). A further issue about collaboration in self-study is that existing literature tends to report people individually engaging in a self-study and periodically sharing the research with a critical friend or a group of critical friends (Davey et al., 2011). We do not view this more individually focused form of collaboration as a weakness, but rather, draw attention to this familiar pattern to highlight how our own self-study is positioned amongst a smaller body of work on groups collaboratively involved in self-study (e.g. Davey et al., 2011; Davey & Ham, 2009; Gallagher et al., 2011; Gregory et al., 2017; Ritter et al., 2018). Our collaborative self-study was informed by Davey et al. (2011) who identify a continuum for categorizing collaborative-collective relationships within self-study research.

Although the literature base is limited, there are several recent studies where participants engaged in collaborative teaching practice and scholarship (e.g., Martin & Dismuke, 2015; O’Dwyer et al., 2019; Ritter et al., 2018). Martin and Dismuke (2015) describe, “co-planning, co-teaching, and co-reflection-on-practice” to investigate their work as teacher educators (p. 5). Their process was not straightforward but working together positively impacted teacher educator identities and practices. O’Dwyer et al. (2019) also report, “co-planning, co-coaching and co-reflection” but in a sport coaching setting (p. 142), where O’Dwyer and Bowles worked together in a frequent, recursive cycle of action and reflection while Ní Chróinín provided an external layer of criticality. Their findings report that both layers of critical friendship – the internal structure of working closely with others, together with the external critical friend – were deemed necessary to support effective learning.

Although not examining collaborative teaching practices, Kitchen et al. (2008), Goodnough et al. (2020), Gregory et al. (2017), and Tuval et al. (2011) all closely consider the collaborative process, demonstrating how S-STEP facilitated collaborative dialogue about the process of becoming teacher educators. These examples report that S-STEP offered a safe space to constructively explore and critique teacher education practices, identities, and contexts. For example, Tuval et al. (2011) described the role their collaboration played in developing the identities of both individuals and the group. That is, the identities of the individuals in the group shaped the development of a group identity; in turn, the group identity had implications for how individual identities evolved.

Returning to Davey et al. (2011), they recognize the need for collaborative work to consider the group’s “We” identity and the individual’s “Me” identities. This ‘We-Me’ emphasis in our work contributes to existing understanding about collective forms of collaboration by documenting how the process shapes, and is shaped by, group and individual identities. Like Davey et al. (2011) this focus on identity led us to Gee (2000), who acknowledges that people have myriad identities and describes how these are performed in everyday life. This literature about identity underpinned the analysis of our self-study, providing an insight into how our experiences affected us individually and collectively.

10.3 Insights on Identity

The concept of ‘identity’ has a broad theoretical span, drawing on, for example, cultural psychology (Lave & Wenger, 1991), anthropology (Holland et al., 1998), linguistics (Gee, 2000), poststructuralism (Bourdieu, 1986), and postmodernism (Gergen, 1991). Much of the work on identity in education can be positioned within two theoretical camps (Fairbanks et al., 2010). The first, which is the most prevalent, focuses on race relations and power asymmetries in contemporary education; the second explores how people negotiate the competing discourses of educational settings together with the extent to which identity is (re)defined through interaction with different groups of people, across time, and in different places. This second camp, albeit in the minority within education, led us to Gee’s (2000) “analytic lens”, which seemed to provide helpful literature for our purpose of making sense of the individual and collective identities at play in our group.

Looking specifically at Gee (2000), he provides insights into, “the contextually specific ways in which people act out and recognise identities” (p. 99). Of significance to our research is the contention that people have myriad identities and how these are performed and manifest in everyday life. Gee (2000) sketches a four-dimensional view of identity (Table 10.2).

Rather than presenting these four perspectives singularly, Gee argues an interactive mix of these comes to the fore at different times, and in different ways, in a specific context or across contexts. In relation to our research, Gee’s work on identity is useful because it provides a lens for us to consider how our efforts to work together in a collaborative self-study can be traced back to a possible interplay of these factors influencing our individual and group identity.

10.4 Methodology

10.4.1 Design

We (the first three authors and Jan, and including Tim as our critical friend) undertook a collaborative self-study into our practice leading the DPEG practitioner enquiry professional learning project. This practitioner enquiry project involved us

Table 10.2 Framework of identity

Nature	Emerging from nature and developed over time.
Institution	Emerging from authorisation – laws, rules, traditions – from within institutions.
Discourse	Emerging from the discourse and dialogue of other people.
Affinity	Emerging from common endeavours within a group, allegiance to, access to, and participation in specific practices.

Note. Adapted from Gee (2000)

working with a group of ten teachers supporting them to engage in practitioner enquiry within their contexts. To support professional learning through enquiry we brought the teachers together to explore the concepts of enquiry and research. We also individually worked with small groups of teachers, as indicated within Table 10.1, within their school contexts to support them to plan for, undertake and analyse their practitioner enquiries.

Building on previous DPEG self-study work, we undertook a collective group self-study focused on the evolving DPEG practitioner enquiry project. The research design of our self-study 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 that we invited ‘critical friends’ – the practising teachers we worked with, and an international colleague, Tim Fletcher. Nicola and Mike met Tim at an S-STEP Castle Conference, and we all shared an interest in primary physical education and teacher education. With Tim having previous experience of collaborative self-study and Nicola and Mike being relatively new to self-study, Tim offered a good sounding board for Nicola and Mike to share their initial ideas for the collaborative self-study. This meeting and discussion developed into Tim becoming involved in the collaborative self-study as a critical friend to offer ‘fresh’ insights on our work.

Davey et al. (2011) proved helpful for us to buttress LaBoskey’s feature of interactivity in self-study. 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, p. 195–196). Therefore, in this chapter we employ this ‘Me’ and ‘We’ distinction in tandem with Gee’s (2000) framework of identity to discuss our findings.

10.4.2 Method

The methods employed in this study were multiple and qualitative (LaBoskey, 2004), to pursue the key interest in collaboration, data reported on in this chapter were captured using: audio recorded conversations and written self-reflections. The audio recorded conversations document the discussions that took place between us during eight ‘group meetings’ between early-2016 and late-2017. These group meetings, which lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, were largely unstructured to enable each individual member to share thoughts and next steps for the project. The written self-reflections followed a template of questions designed to scrutinise our individual and collective experiences of working together after 2 years of participating in the study. These written reflection templates were completed in early-2018 by each member as we revisited the project data responding to key questions that provoked explicit reflection about our ‘Me Identities’ and ‘We Identity’, including:

What did I think? What did I do? What did I observe? What is my identity within the group? What is our 'we' identity?

Through the research we became conscious that our interactions with others were central to the self-study process (see LaBoskey, 2004), and we grappled to articulate the ways in which we were interacting and collaborating with each other as teacher educators in the practitioner enquiry project. Interactions with Tim gradually started to tease out our individual and collective roles in the project. From an early stage, Tim recognised the potential to make clear the ways in which we each influenced and made quite different contributions to the project. For example, the following written comment from Tim, while he was reviewing parts of our emerging data set, triggered a curiosity for deeper analysis of our collaborative-collective relations:

Reading as an outsider, this is the overwhelming impression I got throughout the observation [that there was a shared understanding and trust between the whole group of people involved in the project – practising teachers and teacher educators]. So what was done to lead to this? Had this been developed over weeks, months, or years? Or is it simply a group of people with a shared interest in their professional learning and developing deeper understandings of practice? Or is there more to it? Were there specific ideas, angles, and approaches taken by DPEG leader(s) to reach this point? If so, what were they? (Group meeting on 4/11/16)

It was a series of related points from Tim, similar to that cited above, that led us to focus our analysis on the ways in which our collaborative processes (consisting of individual and collective contributions) shaped the project.

10.4.3 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 from existing literature influencing our thinking (e.g. complexity thinking). Through this analysis process, and in correspondence with 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 prompted us to reanalyse the transcripts from our group meetings using the written self-reflection templates.

Analysis of self-reflections involved two key steps. Firstly, the text generated for each question – What did I think? What did I do? What did I observe? What is my identity within the group? What is our 'we' identity? – 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 further these categories with each member to clarify individual 'Me Identities' and shared ideas that constituted a collective 'We Identity'. The templates were also shared with Tim for comment, question, and further reflection.

10.5 Me Within We, and We Within Me

Our engagement in this self-study highlighted the collaborative and collective nature of our endeavours. Throughout our experience of working together, and within the data, we identified as a collective. This ethos of shared trust and understanding between us was also identified by Tim. The questions posed by Tim prompted us to drill down into the foundations of this collaborative-collective to explore how it had developed and was maintained over time. In presenting and discussing our findings we will first consider the 'We' identity before reflecting on the 'Me' identity and consider the implications of this for understanding collaboration within self-study.

10.5.1 A Strong We Identity

At the core was a strong 'We Identity' that developed from our long-standing history (over 10 years), a shared vision, and a common interest. In the following quotation from Mike's reflection on our 'We Identity' he encapsulates these ideas, "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." The long-standing history between us evolved over time: Mike and Jan were founding members of the DPEG in 2003, and Nicola and Paul joined in 2009 as a PhD student and MSc student, respectively. Over time our roles within the group changed: Mike completed his PhD; Jan transitioned into a Physical Education leadership role within a school local authority while studying for an MSc in Education; Nicola completed her PhD and became a lecturer within the university; and Paul divided his time between studying for his MSc then PhD and working as a teaching fellow in the University. These life and career changes contributed to the evolution of our relationship, which involved us studying together, teaching together, researching together, socialising together and, ultimately, developing a bond of friendship beyond work. Holding us and the DPEG group together was a common interest and a shared vision, summarised by Nicola in her reflection as: "primary physical education" and "advocating for the educational value of primary physical education using complexity thinking as a theoretical lens".

These findings reflect 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).

Similarly, our allegiances to two main areas of interest – primary physical education and complexity thinking – can be seen as bonding us together. We were initially brought together through primary physical education, but as our research progressed in this area, and we further theorised our work, we collectively developed our

understanding of complexity thinking. Our collective grappling with this theoretical lens is documented in an earlier DPEG self-study (See Jess et al., 2018 for detailed discussion of this self-study). Furthermore, and in common with Martin and Dismuke (2015) and O'Dwyer et al. (2019), as our relationship evolved over time, through our work and friendship, an allegiance to each other emerged as we supported each other in the pursuit of common research aims (PhD and MSc level study, and shared research projects), which contributed to sustaining the group. We suggest that this affinity and allegiance influenced the ways in which we interacted with each other to design and facilitate the practitioner enquiry project and how we approached working with the teachers. This is evidenced particularly in the personal approach we took to develop relationships with the teachers by creating smaller teams within the larger network, where one of us each worked with two teachers to support them to engage in enquiry.

As critical friend, Tim offered an outsider's perspective of the 'We' identity of the DPEG group: "When I see one or more of you at a conference, I think to myself simultaneously: 'There is Mike, Nicola, Paul/DPEG'. So, in a way I see both the individuals and the group. And I imagine others might see you walk past and think 'There's DPEG' or 'I'm going to see the DPEG presentation.'" This comment suggests that our bond goes beyond our immediate interpersonal interactions and can be observed by others, further reinforcing how we identify ourselves individually and collectively. So, we are seen at the same time as individuals and as a collective due to our strong we identity.

10.5.2 The Collaborative-Collective Side of Our Practice

Analysis of the written reflections and group conversations further exemplified the affinity between us. In parallel with Martin and Dismuke (2015) and O'Dwyer et al. (2019), we uncovered the extent to which many of the planning and teaching decisions made about our practice evolved from reflection during the collaborative-collective process. The group conversation data and our reflections on this data evidenced that, although we were four individuals with independent thoughts, decisions regarding the practitioner enquiry project emerged from a process of interaction, discussion and debate. Recognizing the independent thoughts we each displayed, and the debate within the group, our efforts to work together were not entirely harmonious: "there are major points of tension between us in the group meetings" (Paul's reflection).

We all similarly identified a degree of tension during group meetings, particularly as we worked together to share our thinking and engage in decision-making. Jan, in her reflection, explains 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 reflection captures the decision-making process whereby the collective decisions we made as a group evolved from a process of negotiation and debate. This involved us listening to, and challenging, the ideas of each other as we deliberated and attempted to justify our practice; as exemplified in the following group discussion extract as we prepared for a forthcoming network meeting with the teachers:

- Nicola I think we want to model the research process...the suggestion I have is that we (Nicola and Mike)...engage in conversation about our self-study, using the template plan we have given to the teachers.
- 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...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.

(Group conversation 1, September 2016)

While we have labelled these exchanges as tension in this section, they differed to those outlined in East et al. (2010). The tensions in the collaborative work of East and colleagues emerged from the self-study process itself (i.e., differing ideas about self-study, the goals of it, how to collaborate, and whose agenda was being best served). In contrast, the extracts in this section exemplify that our tensions were about our teacher educator practices and how, by virtue of a discursive process, we made decisions and challenged each other's thinking. This discursive process also compelled us to articulate and justify our practice.

There are commonalities between our experiences of working as a group and Gee's (2000) discourse perspective of identity; 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). Relating this discourse identity to our data it captures how, through our interactions with each other, we developed an understanding and recognition of each of our individual identities. In our interactions there is a recognition that while each of us may be "a certain kind of person" (Gee, 2000), we embrace this diversity, recognizing that each of us has a genuine and distinct contribution to make to the development of the practitioner enquiry project. We now discuss further how this discourse identity shaped our 'Me identities'.

10.5.3 *Me Identities Remain*

Despite the strong ‘We Identity’ of the group that is present within the data, as previously alluded to, the ‘We Identity’ did not dilute the ‘Me Identities’ of members within the group. The two main themes generated in relation to our ‘Me Identities’ were (a) that each of us had an identified role within the group, which emerged from our interactions and (b) we had our own individual approach to how we interacted with the teachers we were supporting with practitioner enquiry.

Gee (2000) highlights how aspects of identity – institution, discourse, affinity, and nature – interact and combine in different ways. From analysis of the data, it was evident that each of us had identified roles within the group, which resonated with the aspects of identity developed by Gee (2000). These identities were dynamic, fashioned over time as our roles and lives evolved, and influenced by factors both within and outside the group. We now consider each of these identities and how they manifested in our ‘Me Identities’.

Within the group, each of us is who we are partly because of our position within the education system, our institutional identity. We all share 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 involved teaching within primary school contexts. This also means that teaching overshadows any research Jan may do into her own practice or context. In contrast, the teacher identity is in the background for Nicola, Paul and Mike; this reflects the demands of their lecturer identity where, while teaching is valued, participation in research and bringing in research funding to the University is held in a high regard. One of Jan’s reflections evidences how she initially felt daunted by engaging in research and the self-study, but through her interactions with the group and the teachers her confidence increased:

Initially, I did not think I would be able to contribute (based on my perceptions of my competence in 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 and my role with the teachers I was supporting.

In contrast, while Nicola, Mike and Paul did not feel daunted by the research and self-study, the group conversations evidenced that repeated reference was made to building the research capacity of the group through the practitioner enquiry project and the need to identify funding to expand the research. For example, in our fourth group conversation Mike stated: “It hits lots and lots of buttons, but it’s not the sort of research that I suspect is funded particularly well. The depth that we’re going to build to get out of this [project] should be, hopefully, valuable down the road.”

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 and outside 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 several 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, mentoring role, as he reflected that he “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 her 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.

While Nicola found adapting to the ‘leader’ role somewhat uncomfortable, she was also supported in developing this identity because of the way that Paul, Jan and Mike treated her, talked about her and interacted with her in this role. In a group conversation Jan and Mike reflected on how Nicola was “driving” the project through distributed leadership:

Jan It is being driven. And are we going now, so is Nicola just leading all of this -no, she’s absolutely not. There are key actions that she’s taking responsibility for, in this particular phase of it, and as I go through it, there were other moments where other people have said things or taken the lead.

Mike But it’s about distribution...it’s not hierarchical leadership.

(Group conversation 6, February 2017)

Similarly, the roles Jan and Paul adopted within the group related to how they were perceived by others in the group. Knowing that Paul’s PhD research had developed his knowledge, skill and understanding in observations and the recording of fieldnotes as a research method the group recognised him as the research methodology lead within the project. In this role during the larger network meetings Paul became a participant observer, observing group interactions and writing up fieldnotes. Paul also led on identifying self-study and research methodology texts to inform the group as the project and research process evolved. As the member of the group who was teaching in a school context throughout the project it was acknowledged that Jan brought an understanding of the realities of teaching and school contexts to the project. Jan was also recognised as the member of the group who listened intently within group conversations and therefore often offered insightful comments as Nicola captured in group conversation 6: “the contributions you [Jan] were making, there’s some from Jan, there’s loads that I’ve starred against things that you’ve said, and I’ve been like, that sums up this section.”

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. 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.

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 ‘Me 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-organizers in relation to the individual, environment, and task constraints they interact with. Consequently, this meant that each of us adopted our own approach to interacting with the teachers in their school contexts as we supported them to engage in practitioner enquiry.

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 group 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. Our individual approaches to working with the teachers in smaller groups enabled us to tailor our support to meet the needs and interests of the teachers. It also meant that the teachers worked at their own pace through the enquiry process (some had completed inquiries, while others were still at the planning stage). Additionally, while we recognized self-pacing as important for gaining ‘buy-in’ from the teachers, as we had always emphasized that enquiry should not add to workload, this was at times difficult to reconcile within ourselves. The following reflection from Paul captures this:

There are times when it seems that I am defensive about the progress of the teachers I was working with... across the conversations I talk about not wanting to “steamroll their ideas” and being “patient”. There are also several occasions where I share doubts about “am I doing a good job”?

This captures how, throughout the group conversations, we continually reflected on the ways in which we supported the teachers and the progress they were making as they engaged with enquiry. Recognising the teachers were all at different stages, was something we were conscious to highlight as a positive within the network meetings with the teachers. Furthermore, this thinking was underpinned by our understanding of the need for professional development to be guided by teachers, offer space for reflection and be of sustained duration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). As facilitators we, as Nicola reflected, had to:

go with the flow and draw on complexity thinking to remind myself [ourselves] that all the teachers do not have to be at the same stage in the enquiry process and that we all have our own ways of working with the teachers.

This individual way of working with the teachers was captured in the following phrase by Paul where he described it as “teams within the team”, which emphasizes both the individual and collaborative way we worked.

Through the presentation and discussion of these findings we hope that it is possible to see how we engaged in a collective form of self-study, driven by our 'We-Me' identities. Analysis of these group (We) and individual (Me) dynamics using the work of Davey et al. (2011) and the analytic lenses of Gee (2000), enabled us to better understand ourselves both individually and collectively, and develop insights into the collaborative group process. With Martin and Dismuke (2015) and O'Dwyer et al. (2019) providing detailed accounts of the collaborative cycle in self-study, our work makes a further contribution by documenting how these collaborative efforts may shape, and are shaped by, group and individual identities.

10.6 Conclusion

With calls for collaborative and participative approaches to teachers' professional learning becoming more common, this chapter has as its basis the view that teacher educators will increasingly need to support experiences that are authentically collaborative in nature. We suggest that when collaboration is authentic it is underpinned by a commitment to building and nurturing mutually beneficial relationships centred on joint responsibility and focused on common goals. This chapter represents our first attempt to focus on our collaborative efforts as teacher educators to support a longitudinal practitioner enquiry project with teachers. Placing strong emphasis on collaboration in this self-study has provided deeper awareness of our own teacher educator practices and the decisions we make individually and collectively. This self-study has also illuminated for us the authentic nature of our collaboration evidenced in, our commitment to a common goal, the practitioner enquiry project, which we pursued both collectively and individually, and in the examination of our relationship. Examining our relationship as a collective revealed the interplay between our we/me identities and enabled us to better understand ourselves as both individuals and a collective.

In relation to our practice as teacher educators, Davey et al. (2011) and Gee (2000) 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-organizing 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 ways in which we work and research together in the future. Building on the small body of research that has extensively explored collaborative self-study, this chapter has drawn particularly on the work of Davey et al. (2011) to track the contributions made by collaborative-collective interaction.

Exploring the collaborative-collective nature of our self-study we would argue adds to the understanding of how collaboration within self-study works – how each individual needs to have the space to keep their identity but also how the common identity develops and can multiply the ability of each individual in the group.

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Chapter 11

The Value of Collaborative Self-Study in Navigating Stages of Teacher Education: Adopting New Roles, Creating New Identities, and Evolving Our Selves



Laurie A. Ramirez and Valerie A. Allison

Abstract As mid-level teacher educators, scholars, and administrators, we have consistently engaged in collaborative self-study to investigate our practices and their consequences for our self-identities, our students, our practice, and our research community. We believe our sustained commitment to self-study has been imperative to our professional and personal well-being as we have navigated academia for over a decade. We initiated collaborative efforts early on and continued to use collaboration throughout our careers thus far as teacher educators and scholars in the S-STEP community. Introduced to self-study in our doctoral programs, it was a methodological approach that resonated with our espoused beliefs about the necessary alignment of research and teaching. Throughout the years, we have benefited greatly from our critical friendship and research partnership, most recently as administrators at our respective institutions. In all our various roles and responsibilities to date, collaboration has been instrumental in helping us hone our skills, build our knowledge, and consider the implications of our work. This chapter details how and why we came to engage in collaborative self-study research and how our conceptualizations of it have changed over time and with experience. We will share the principles and practices we have endeavored to espouse that we believe have had lasting significance on our personal and professional selves, sustained by an enduring and significant decade-long collaborative relationship.

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11.1 History and Context

Collaboration has always been at the heart of our work – as teachers and now as teacher educators. As our educational trajectories have grown and changed over the years, our relationship has as well, moving from colleagues and friends to include research partners. We highly value collaboration and see it as a critical component in our transition from public school educators to teacher educators to researchers to educational leaders.

We, Valerie and Laurie, met in our doctoral program at a large university in the Western United States. We had numerous courses together and realized we shared similar research interests and backgrounds. We became friends and, after leaving our public school positions and moving into the unfamiliar world of academia, we became research partners to help each other navigate our new roles. Initially, we chose to collaborate on our scholarship, not only because of shared interests and similar lived experiences as educators, but more so because we felt comfortable with each other. We each began our new careers in new communities across the country from where we had grown up, completed our schooling, built our lives and careers. The overwhelming newness was difficult, even borderline intolerable at times. We had lived nearly our entire lives in one place and had never had to actively work at navigating as newcomers. Doing so was emotionally taxing, particularly when combined with unfamiliar professional responsibilities and the circumstances of our personal lives, which unfortunately changed greatly in those early years. We needed something and someone familiar to hold onto, to tether us as we settled into our new selves.

Our research collaborations within the S-STEP community have been enjoyable and fruitful both because we genuinely like each other and share similar frames of reference. We are close in age, grew up in the same metropolitan area; we started our careers in education as middle/junior high English teachers, and we completed our graduate degrees at the same institution with shared mentors and colleagues. In brief, we speak the same academic, regional, and generational languages. However, we are not carbon copies of each other and our differences, as well as our commonalities, are vital to our research. Differences in cultural backgrounds, lived experiences, and now vastly different institutional contexts have enriched and enlarged our perspectives as we worked together as novice professors, cultivated our researcher identities, and journeyed forward into administrative roles.

Laurie is an associate professor of education at a large state institution in the Southeastern US. She previously taught middle school English, Spanish, and English as a Second Language at a large, urban school. During those 11 years, Laurie was a coach, student government advisor, and leader in positive behavior initiatives and student advocacy. In her current position, Laurie teaches courses in both the undergraduate and graduate middle grades programs including courses in diversity, culturally/linguistically responsive pedagogy, young adolescent development, classroom management, and media/digital literacy. She has served as program director for both the undergraduate and graduate programs in her area and has

advised and mentored students from pre-college to the doctoral level. As program director, she was responsible for scheduling, program assessment, curriculum development, accreditation efforts, and myriad other administrative tasks.

Valerie is an associate professor of education at a small, private liberal arts institution in the Mid-Atlantic area of the US. Previously, she was a junior high English teacher, a staff development writer, a clinical instructor of teacher education, and an elementary school principal. As a professor, she teaches courses in the elementary and secondary programs and supervises student teachers. Prior to obtaining tenure, Valerie was assigned to be her department's chair. A year later, she was appointed as the secondary education program director. During her 6 year as department chair, she was required to complete or oversee a broad range of administrative tasks involving students, faculty colleagues, campus upper-level leadership, K-12 personnel, and state and national agencies.

In our early years, as you will see below, we turned to self-study to examine the alignment, and as often the misalignment, of our ideals and practices. Further, we strove to determine how students perceived our practice with the goal of improvement (Ramirez & Allison-Roan, 2014a, b; Ramirez et al., 2012). Our initial goals included modeling transparency, critical reflection, democratic principles, and social justice. We entered the academy with the hope our espoused goals and intentional efforts would foster in our teacher candidates the dispositions that would lead them to become critically aware, reflective thinkers who would create classroom communities that were authentic, caring, and empowering for their students. While we have not abandoned those initial ambitions for our practice, we discerned through retrospectively interrogating our journals and correspondence that these goals were not something we could simply achieve and replicate forever thereafter.

It's interesting to me that our journals of the last several months largely mirror the journals we shared in our first years in the academy. The more things and we change, they more they and we remain the same. (Valerie, January 5, 2014)

As Valerie's journal excerpt above illustrates, we recognized we must continually examine our work and our selves as part of that work, continually evolving as teacher educators and scholars. We are no longer the neophytes we once were; our ideals and practices have shifted along with our growth and experience with self-study. Collaborative self-study has provided us the opportunity and space to continually investigate and interrogate who we are and what we do, relative to who we hope to be as teacher educators. Unlike other types of research, self-study allows a focus on the self, where we can deliberately and thoughtfully inquire into our teaching practices, the assumptions behind them, and the implications of them for us, our students, and the larger educational community.

Given our historical and contextual similarities and differences, our journey as self-study researchers, teacher educators, and collaborative colleagues provides an evolutionary perspective and demonstrates the flexibility of self-study research. Contained within this chapter are glimpses into the stages of collaboration through which we have progressed over time. We recognize our naivete in our early years, our rise to feelings of relative expertise, our return to novice roles, and our more

recent feelings of sufficient confidence to engage in research that emphasizes transparency yet creates vulnerability. Though we appreciate our collaboration and commitment to studying our selves and our practices has evolved, we are committed to a continual pattern of intentional examination and interrogation that, while aimed at improvement, still may present growing pains as we move forward in our academic careers. Themes of growth and change have permeated our work together – our strategies have changed, our understanding of self-study has grown, and we have progressed through various stages, both professionally and personally, side by side. The collaborative process afforded through self-study research has been significant in who we are now and how we approach our work as teacher educators.

11.2 Methods: Growth and Change Over Time

Self-study allows teacher educators to examine beliefs, practices, and the interconnections between the two (Berry, 2007; Samaras, 2011). It offers a framework for inquiry that allows educators to focus on better understanding the alignment of beliefs and practices (Berry & Crowe, 2009) where the “self” cannot be separated from research or teaching (Samaras, 2011). As we first engaged with self-study, a helpful approach was that of Tidwell (2006) and her collaboration with a colleague around what they identified as *nodal moments* – those that prompt a pause for reflection and which result in transformation of practice. We envisioned our early self-study work as mainly collective reflection, with our espoused goal to “improve teaching and teacher education and the institutional contexts in which they take place” (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 844). Our collaboration, regardless of what we were calling it at any given time, was central to supporting one another, furthering and fortifying our research, and offering different perspectives on our experiences (Ramirez & Allison-Roan, 2014a, b; Samaras, 2011). As partners, we were able to better understand and (re)frame the challenges we faced in each new position or role and critically analyze them with a trusted friend and colleague. Self-study allows us to consider our individual selves, our contexts and goals, and the results of our beliefs and actions from both an insider and outsider perspective, without the methodological constraints of other types of educational research (Roose, 2008; Zeichner, 2007).

Initially, as novice scholars, our collaborative research efforts relied on some of the research tools we learned in our doctoral programs – case study, ethnography, and others. The move to self-study felt natural, since self-study still allows a range of approaches to inquiry. We have always been committed to critical reflection (i.e., Larrivee, 2008); thus, we have consistently used journals and written reflections as data sources in our work. This made possible a sort of dialogue that bridged the distance between us, as we live in different regions of the US and finding time and opportunity to meet face-to-face often proved to be difficult. Still, we committed to meeting two to three times each year because we felt that being together in the same space for extended, real time was beneficial to our work and our understanding of

the other's issues and/or dilemmas. More recently, because of time constraints, life changes, and the recent pandemic, we have engaged in frequent meetings via Zoom. While not ideal, the flexibility to meet remotely using tools like Zoom and Google Docs, etc. has become somewhat fortuitous. Time is more flexible, meetings are still meaningful, and we can meet "virtual-face-to-virtual-face" more often than when travel arrangements were necessary.

These two sources of data – journaling and meetings – have allowed us to honestly communicate, either asynchronously or synchronously, about the challenges and successes we are experiencing. They also allow a safe space for exploration of ideas, beliefs, practices, and perhaps biases and long-held conceptualizations of our work and our positions as teacher educators, colored by our years of work in public schools. Journals were typically prompted by a significant event (good or bad) we wanted to share, reflect upon, and process collaboratively as friends, colleagues, and research partners. At times, we also shared weekly schedules, calendars, feedback from other stakeholders, course materials, personal life reflections, etc. Thus, our collaboration, while intentionally focused on our teaching, became an essential component of our research and our overall experiences in the world of higher education.

Over time, our research turned toward a narrative inquiry approach. Narrative inquiry, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), is a way to understand experience as "stories lived and told" (p. 20). It is a process which takes place over time, in multiple spaces, and in collaboration, of "living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up peoples' lives" (p. 20). As new teacher educators, as well as later in our careers, our stories existed in a time and space bound by our professional and institutional contexts, but also within the unique worlds of our personal lives, both in and outside of our academic selves. Narrative is a mode of both reasoning and representation; we can comprehend the world and our experiences within it narratively, as well as share it narratively for the purposes of dissemination and critique (Feldman, 2009). This approach provided the tools necessary for us to tell our professional and personal stories. Ramirez and Allison (2018) is an excellent example of the benefits of self-study and narrative inquiry; we were able to not only interrogate our professional selves, but also come to understand how our personal, lived experiences have impacted who we are as teacher educators. Narrative self-study affirmed it was unnecessary, and perhaps impossible, to separate our teacher selves from our selves as individuals in the world. Self-study is unique in its allowance for teacher educators to examine beliefs, practices, and the interconnections between the two (Berry, 2007; Samaras, 2011). This ability to create our own narrative(s) through collaborative inquiry was not only productive, but also empowering. We were able to find our own voices as teacher educators, scholars, and persons in that academic space.

With all our collaborative studies, we compiled data sources and systematically immersed ourselves in an iterative process, doing multiple line-by-line readings, individually and then collaboratively, identifying codes and subcodes, emergent themes, and questions for consideration as they related to the initial research question we were examining at the time (Merriam, 1998; Samaras, 2011). As we engaged

with the data, we exchanged ideas, discussed and reflected, and identified the larger patterns and the discrepancies in our experiences based on our different contexts and roles (Samaras & Freese, 2006). We began our collaborative writing process in face-to-face meetings or online, returning to the data and the summaries we had created in the initial analysis stage. Then, we refined codes and themes, outlined plans for writing, and selected representative data points (i.e., excerpts from journal entries or transcriptions from meetings) to include in the manuscripts we produced. Critical friendship and multiple data sources provided trustworthiness, confirming interpretations and strengthening our work (Taylor & Coia, 2009).

11.3 Stages of Collaborative Growth

11.3.1 Stage 1: The Early Years of Learning Self-Study

Critical friendship is highly valued and its roles and expectations have been well enumerated (i.e., Loughran & Northfield, 1998; Mena & Russell, 2017; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009; Samaras & Freese, 2006). The self-study literature over more than two decades has consistently included examples of teacher educators reaching out to colleagues as collaborative research partners. A critical friend is, “A helping colleague who encourages the researcher to look at the problems, weaknesses, and emotionally-charged issues but, on the other hand, is willing to be honest and offer feedback that may result in discomfort and disagreement” (Mena & Russell, 2017, p. 108). Critical friends allow us to express vulnerability and uncertainty, pose important or problematic questions, and garner feedback and perspectives beyond our own. Likewise, critical friends can be a confidential sounding board, someone who can provide an outside perspective unencumbered by context or distinctive institutional politics. They can provide an objective, dispassionate view that challenges our, perhaps unrealized, rationalizations or defensive thinking or actions.

While the method of critical friendship and the value of collaboration is common and widely used, the manner often varies based on contextual factors or distinct research purposes. Thus, self-study allows its delegates the opportunity to fine-tune critical friendship in the way that works best for the focus of their inquiry. One example comes from Loughran (in Loughran & Allen, 2014; Loughran & Brubaker, 2015), who employed a variation of critical friendship, *executive coaching*, in studying Loughran’s work as a dean. Summarizing Hall et al. (2000), Loughran and Brubaker (2015), offered the following definition: “Executive coaching is a personal and specific approach to working as a critical friend in an attempt to offer an opportunity to challenge the coachee to see beyond the current situation and understand different perspectives on episodes, behaviours, and events” (p. 256). Within the context of challenging workplace issues, Loughran utilized a trusted confidant, Allen, to systematically guide him in interrogating his contextual circumstances and his reactions and responses and support him in his roles and responsibilities.

Like many researchers, including those noted above, critical friendship and collaboration can take different names and forms, depending on the needs of those involved and the contexts in which their study exists. Our first foray into self-study research began with Valerie partnering with a former mentor who had also recently made the transition to academia. On opposite ends of the US, they began journaling and communicating regularly, providing feedback from and support for one another. In their second year, they invited two others to join their online community, intentionally choosing two colleagues also beginning academic careers, one of whom was Laurie. The four of us saw value in collaboration because of the common issues we all seemed to be facing despite the differences in location and institutional makeup. The decision to construct an online community across institutions allowed us to transcend geographic boundaries to create a support system in which we could overcome individual, taken-for-granted beliefs and values, introducing new ways of thinking to help us recognize our own cognitive distortions and reinterpret our long-held beliefs and practices. What we were seeking at the time (and in many ways, still) was “a ‘safe space’ in which to question, examine, enhance, and develop our practices” (Allison-Roan et al., 2010; Ramirez et al., 2012). The opportunity to collaborate with others facing similar dilemmas diminished initial feelings of tension and isolation.

Looking back at this early collaborative effort, it is clear (now) our conceptualizations of self-study were primitive, at best. Our partnerships were borne of uncertainty and the need to develop survival skills with the help of others in similar situations. At the time, we did not realize exactly what we were engaged in, yet we soon came to recognize that the intents and efforts of our collegial community mirrored those of early pioneers of self-study (i.e., the Arizona Group, 1994, as discussed in Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). Their work began to give new meaning to ours, offering us perspectives on our early experiences we had not previously considered. Like the Arizona group, our main goal was supporting each other in our socialization as junior faculty members and in our development as teacher educators – two interconnected aspects of our work at the time that we saw as critical, but also as quite difficult (Hamilton & Guilfoyle, 1998). We began to engage in critical conversations despite our contextual, institutional, and personal influences which created a sense of vulnerability and disequilibrium (Guilfoyle, 1995; Pinnegar, 1995). We saw these conversations as not only essential to our professional transition to academia, but also as support in our moves to new locations, new responsibilities, new lives. Similar to the Arizona Group and others, reflective journals were central to our adjustment and eventual scholarship. Regularly written and shared journals included our personal reflections, perceptions, impressions, and questions. For example, in July 2011, Valerie reflected, “The opportunity to collaborate has been invaluable...I have known I have an avenue for asking questions and exploring shortcomings... Sometimes it was simply about having a safe place to ‘vent.’” These journals were data for a systematic inquiry into our journey of becoming teacher educators. Guided by earlier self-study scholars, we saw how our collaborative dialogue could be something worth investigating more deeply and which we could share with our newly found research community.

While this first collaborative effort was short lived, we each saw the inherent value in self-study and continued to work with influential others, forging new and different communities of study and practice. We, Valerie and Laurie, continued our partnership and still work together regularly after 10+ years. The common thread woven through the years is our professional and personal commitment to each other as educators, scholars, and friends. In a retrospective reflection in July of 2011, Laurie noted, “We have empowered each other and are growing into reflective practitioners whose collective voice has potential for positive change within ourselves, with our students, and in our respective institutions.” We were reminded of Aristotle’s idea of a *polis*, the highest form of community and a bond of friendship embodying a shared recognition and pursuit of a good. Our “good” was self-study and, as we planned our future career goals, we submerged ourselves more fully into the S-STEP community and began to see the importance of that community in our growth, learning, and development. Likewise, we came to quickly recognize the benefits of being part of such a strong, welcoming group of scholars and began to delve more deeply into the literature and the history of those who helped build and grow it into what it is today.

11.4 Next Stages: Co-mentoring Toward Critical Friendship

11.4.1 *Co-mentoring*

As mentioned above, critical friendship and collaboration can take many forms. Most of our work has been as a pair, with more recent studies conducted by bringing in influential others. As co-authors, our early work eventually resulted in a type of critical friendship we identified as *co-mentoring* (Allison & Ramirez, 2016). This type of collaboration arose from the lack of mentoring and support we received as we entered our new academic careers. As novice teacher educators who had been well-steeped in the world of public education, we found ourselves in unfamiliar territory and suffered from feelings of “imposter syndrome.” While our first four-person online community was helpful, we had not quite yet really come to understand self-study as a methodology and as an approach to examining our practice.

Our co-mentoring journey began after a few years of navigating academia. Research suggests that new teacher educators take about 3 years to establish their teacher-research identities (Bullock & Ritter, 2011; Murray & Male, 2005). Early on, the pressures of academic life forced us to shift our focus repeatedly, initially focusing on learning our new communities, institutions, responsibilities, etc. We were quickly obliged to engage in various service capacities, taking our focus away from teaching and scholarship as evidenced when Laurie, in her third-year review, was told she “must” get something published immediately. At that point in our budding careers, we began to engage in self-study in earnest, turning to each other for guidance, support, ideas, and goals. We began to examine the effects on our “selves,”

professionally and personally, turning to self-study and collaboration as tools to understand our early years and where we were at the fourth-fifth year mark. Schuck and Segal (2002) and Taylor and Coia (2009) guided us in our challenge to look back and examine our burgeoning identities and reevaluate our goals and hopes for our futures, individually and collectively. Williams et al. (2012) helped tremendously at that time, providing an overview of 60 self-study teacher education researchers who had shared their own journeys into the academy. Thus, our co-mentoring, while initially just with each other, in some ways indirectly included the lessons of others who had once been in our positions striving to define and identify their teacher and researcher selves amid the often-overwhelming demands of academic life.

Over time, we began to see shifts in our teacher educator and scholar identities. Our collaborative efforts resulted in re-analysis of our former selves and the ideals and, perhaps, limitations we had brought with us to our new positions. Valerie recalled that she had begun “shedding my old identity as a principal and establishing myself as someone new. I gave up the charade...and was more willing to risk being myself in my classroom” (Ramirez & Allison-Roan, 2014a, b). Likewise, Laurie began to see a change, noting that she had “successfully shifted into a new identity...the move from classroom teacher to graduate student to professor was complete. I felt confident and willing to grow with the help of others.” (Ramirez & Allison-Roan, 2014a, b). We had moved away from the initial survival instinct and were no longer helping each other navigate the newness of our respective positions. Rather, we were starting to grow as teachers and researchers and our collaborative efforts grew alongside our changes in self-awareness, self-perception, and feelings of competence.

11.5 Moving Forward and Shifting Our Collaborative Focus

As our roles changed, we continued to work together as partners and friends. However, over time, our foci have shifted. Early in our careers – prior to tenure and promotion – we were each placed in administrative positions. These placements were involuntary but, as junior faculty pursuing stability and status at our institutions, we felt obligated to accept the appointments. Ultimately, we each served in these roles for 6 years and were both asked to fulfill more than one role – Valerie as chair and program director, Laurie as program director for three separate programs. Finding ourselves returned to a novice status, we turned to each other for support and guidance. While not only reluctant to take on these roles, we were apprehensive about the effects they would have on our priorities and the identities we had worked so hard to create and nurture. While we had both held leadership positions in public schools and felt we had competence in some areas, those experiences did not adequately prepare us for leadership in the academic world, with its complexity, internal and institutional politics, and heightened (read: often unrealistic) expectations. Further, we recognized quickly that our previous experiences had, in many ways,

shaped us toward viewing administration in a negative light. Our collaboration, then, centered on sustaining the work we had done to align our beliefs and ideals with our practices. We had committed to values that included democratic principles, transparency, collaboration, and, necessarily, vulnerability (Ramirez & Allison-Roan, 2014a, b). We saw the possibility of our work as administrators driving us toward identities and traditions we did not value and did not want to emulate or perpetuate. The immediacy of certain tasks, the hierarchy and politics, the examples set by those previously in our positions all came together to stoke our fears of moving backward and internalizing what we saw as ineffective, impersonal, and overall poor practice.

As self-study researchers now more confident in our selves and our collaborative work, we chose to look past the potential hurdles, mistakes, and frustrations. Rather, we committed to the ideal of seeing every new endeavor as an avenue toward a better understanding of our roles and our impact. Building on our previous work (Allison-Roan et al., 2010; Ramirez et al., 2012; Ramirez & Allison-Roan, 2014a, b), we envisioned this new experience as another chance to align our espoused beliefs with our enacted practices. In our first months in our administrative roles (Allison & Ramirez, 2016), we noted we were relying upon only our preconceived, external, and negative images of administrators, influenced by those who had come before us or other experiences with uninspired or ineffective leaders. We turned to the self-study literature for guidance and found others who had similarly been placed in positions of leadership, some willingly and others not. Mills (2002, 2006, 2010) communicated his journey into and out of the position of dean. Likewise, Loughran and Allen (2014) provided insight into how one could employ a partnership to help traverse the role of leader. Manke (2004) also assisted our work as new teacher educator leaders, providing a review of self-studies that explored issues of administrative practice with an emphasis on power, community, social justice, and education reform, all goals we held and hoped to exhibit and promote in our practice. At this time in our careers, becoming leaders (involuntarily and pre-tenure), we looked to each other again for support. "I hope we can help each other through these challenging times" (Laurie's journal, September 6, 2013). Further, we looked to our self-study predecessors for guidance. In this way, collaboration moved beyond our paired endeavor. We had the words and lived experience of other self-study scholars on which to draw. Their lessons proved invaluable to us in our new administrative roles, often informing or affirming our experiences.

11.6 The Significance of Collaboration

The years of collaboration have proved to benefit us immensely, both personally and professionally. While we first engaged in our partnership for purposes of survival and support, we eventually grew into more intentional co-mentors and critical friends. While we initially saw self-study as mainly focused on teaching and its improvement, we came to realize the influence and gains it provided for our

scholarship and service. At this point in our careers, we have come to take on leadership roles within the self-study community, accepting hesitantly, but with gratitude, the torch that has been passed to us by those who began self-study and nurtured it to the welcoming international community it is today. It became clear to us that collaboration, regardless of what form it takes or what it is called in particular studies, is at the heart of what we do as self-study teacher researchers. *Studying Teacher Education*, the Springer series of self-study research, and the two international handbooks of self-study research are invaluable resources for self-study scholars at any level and its volumes are unmatched in their versatility and capacity to influence practice in innovative and transformative ways. They demonstrate the wide range of work being done by the S-STEP community and beyond. More and more, self-study is growing and reaching a broader audience, one that has the potential to contribute to the global educational conversation and create change worldwide.

Allender and Allender (2008) argue teaching is “not about fulfilling some theoretical image or ideal” (p. 35). Rather, it is engagement in the process where self, identity, and stories are continually changing and growing. Perhaps, unlike our initial conceptions of our selves, newcomers to academia will see themselves as “good enough” in the moment, knowing that every experience brings the potential for improvement. Critical reflection, collaborative engagement, and the flexible methods afforded by self-study research allowed us, and can remind others, “looking inward can lead to a more intelligent and useful outward gaze” (Mitchell & Weber, 2005, p. 4). As we continue to evolve as teacher educators, researchers, and people in a changing world, we will continue to reflect, journal, collaborate, and systematically investigate our journeys. Likewise, we will use the self-study literature and the journeys of others to inform our practice. Because of our years of collaboration together and with various “others” in our research communities, we better understand how to support ourselves and others along paths that are both remarkably similar while simultaneously being exceptionally distinct.

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Chapter 12

Balancing Process and Outcomes to Further Collaboration Among Teacher Education Faculty in a Self-Study Learning Group



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Abstract This chapter details the experiences of a diverse group of teacher education faculty who chose to participate in collaborative self-study. Two major elements led us as we found ourselves caught between two competing goals which framed how we functioned as a collaborative self-study group. Specifically, we consider how collaboration might have benefitted from our ongoing attempts to balance the pull of learning about and engaging in self-study as an end in its own right, with the push of learning about and engaging in self-study as a means to achieve tangible scholarly outcomes and products. The four sections of the chapter serve to illustrate our journey and include: (a) the emergence and values of a self-study group, (b) what marked our interactions and collaboration, (c) a question of which came first: the chicken or the egg, and (d) a group at the crossroads. Throughout the chapter is weaved with the challenges, tensions, and opportunities that pulled the various members into the group, how the group navigated our goals, and what comes next for us as a collaborative self-study group. The final thoughts in the chapter leave the reader with a utopian purpose of collaborative self-study.

This chapter details the experiences of a diverse group of teacher education faculty who have participated in a department-level self-study learning group in the School of Education at Duquesne University since 2014. Although various aspects of the group's work have been documented over the years (e.g., Ritter, 2017; Ritter et al., 2018a, b, 2019; Ritter, & Quiñones, 2020), the focus of this chapter is novel in that it attempts to explore how collaborative self-study was initiated and then maintained against the backdrop of two competing, though not mutually exclusive, objectives. Specifically, we consider how collaboration might have benefitted from our ongoing

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attempts to balance the pull of learning about and engaging in self-study as an end in its own right, with the push of learning about and engaging in self-study as a means to achieve tangible scholarly outcomes and products.

Before moving into the heart of the chapter, we must address a few nuances. Although self-study is central to our story, this chapter is not a self-study per se. The authors are participating members of the group, but the approach used to write this chapter is more in line with case study insofar as the group dynamics over the last seven years are the focus of our examination. The authors forge interpretations of how collaborative self-study seemed to play into these dynamics as revealed through three primary data sources: (a) notes and personal reflections from our meetings, (b) periodic interviews conducted to study our dynamics, and (c) various products that evolved from our work together. Such a broad approach was necessary because, generally speaking, the group has functioned fluidly and catered to diverse ideas on the value and use of self-study in all of our work. It is also the case that while membership has remained strong over the years, the natural ebb and flow of academia (e.g., new hires, departing faculty, and rotating graduate assistants) causes some fluctuation of membership.

In what follows, we explore the evolution of our self-study group from its conception to today. We detail who we are as a self-study group and how we function as a collaborative space developed to support and push ourselves as both teacher educators and researchers. The first three sections of the chapter serve to illustrate our journey and include: (a) the emergence and values of a self-study group, (b) what marked our interactions and collaboration, and (c) a question of which came first: the chicken or the egg? This is followed by a discussion that synthesizes what we might glean about collaborative self-study from our endeavors as a teacher education faculty engaged in learning about and doing self-study research.

12.1 The Emergence and Values of a Self-Study Group

Teacher education has long been regarded as a “self-evident activity” (Zeichner, 2005, p. 118), carrying with it the assumption “that a good teacher will also make a good teacher educator” (Korthagen et al., 2005, p. 110). These assumptions have been fiercely challenged in recent years, owing to profound differences in context, role, and emphasis of instruction. Murray and Male (2005) claimed the transition to teacher educator “entails the learning of new social mores...and the creation of a new professional identity” (p. 126). Dinkelman et al. (2006) asserted how “developing an identity and a set of successful practices in teacher education is best understood as a process of becoming” (p. 6).

The process of becoming a teacher educator now represents a significant thread in self-study literature (e.g., Butler et al., 2014; Dinkelman et al., 2006; Kitchen, 2005; Ritter, 2007, 2009, 2012; Williams & Ritter, 2010; Williams et al., 2012). In an article exploring the notion of professional development as a teacher educator, Loughran (2014) presented a framework illustrating:

how the development of teacher educators' knowledge and practice of teaching *and* learning about teaching is intimately tied to: understandings of identity; the challenges and expectations of the teacher education enterprise; and, the place of scholarship as an important marker of knowledge, skill, and ability in the academy. (p. 272)

Many of these same ideas are explored in this section regarding the emergence of our self-study learning group. As a means to consider how collaborative self-study featured into our dynamics, we chose to focus on the following questions:

1. What drove us to want to collaborate as part of a self-study group, and how did our identities align with self-study?
2. How did the group help its members to better understand our teacher educator/researcher identities?

When the group was initiated in 2014, the chair of the department at the time saw it as an opportunity to break the longstanding—but largely counterproductive—tradition in which newer faculty are left to “sink or swim.” The chair believed that learning about and enacting self-study might represent a point of synergy for group members to simultaneously improve their teaching (and student evaluations), get more published, and feel supported. Leadership for the group came from a recently tenured faculty member who the chair described as gaining a national and international reputation in the area of self-study in teacher education. Constituent faculty members included some on the tenure track interested in “excellence in teaching,” not only out of a desire to truly want to impact their learners, but also to support their efforts to secure tenure and promotion. Others were non-tenure track primarily interested in focusing on improving their teaching and/or relationships with students. As the group evolved, some graduate students also joined, usually pulled in because of their assistantship duties requiring them to interact with some aspects of the group. Importantly, faculty members and graduate students also hailed from different backgrounds, research traditions, and a variety of curricular areas including social studies, science, reading, math, English as a Second Language, instructional technology, and early childhood education.

The diverse makeup suggests that each individual member of the group joined for his or her own reasons, which were not necessarily similar or weighted equally to one another. One was experiencing a specific teaching challenge and yearned for the days of her teaching assistantship, which included collaborative reflection with other teacher educators to work through issues. She told the chair how she felt like she was out on an “island” in academia. Similarly, another faculty member wanted to critically think about her teaching practices, to understand both herself and her students better. Another faculty member merely wanted to “get her feet wet” about qualitative research, exploring questions like what it was and how it was done. For others, the group was an opportunity for collegial interaction and professional development for research. A brand-new faculty member viewed the group as an opportunity for creating new critical friends in her transition to a new institution and learning a new community. These motivations for joining the group lend support to the notion that becoming a teacher educator is an ongoing process.

We should also note who was not at the table. Our self-study group membership over the years has generally stood at just over 50% of the department (averaging about 8 people each year). While impressive, one might wonder why participation rates were not even higher. To that end, some of our colleagues cited the ever-present issue of not having enough time. Others seemed unsure about how SSTEP might be viewed and struggled with the design and expectations for rigor associated with self-study as a research methodology. This mirrors what other SSTEP scholars have discussed in the past (e.g., Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, 2004; LaBoskey, 2004; Loughran, 2004). Like action research and Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL), self-study is not always seen as robust research that serves the greater good. Practitioners value it but certain kinds of researchers tend to be less impressed. Some colleagues in our department share this view, which complicates professional dynamics, program development, tenure and promotion, and so on. But for the individuals who decided to join and continue in the group over the years, its collaborative nature, focus on teaching, and other potential benefits fit well with their identities.

Murray and Male (2005) asserted teacher educators need up to three years to develop their professional identities, as they must navigate a great deal of tension felt in their development as academics. The tension seemingly comes from all directions for those of us in teacher education, including: our departmental, school, and university colleagues; our institution's promotion and tenure committees which are often eclectic groups from various disciplines; the larger field of teacher education; and, of course, our inner-selves, fraught with our egos, insecurities, and the need to belong (Ritter & Hayler, 2020). Although not necessarily by design, our self-study learning group is, and always has been, made up of mostly younger/newer teacher educators and researchers; we might be characterized as confident enough in some methodologies but not so well established to be considered experts. We believe this is an element of our group dynamics that helped us to better collaborate or at least to be more open to collaborating. Self-study was new to everyone in the group except the facilitator, and he had a fairly "open" approach to the various ways in which self-study could be done. This collegial and "open" environment proved important in a variety of ways.

Self-study was unfamiliar to some members of the group and vaguely familiar to others. A few members of our group were trained in and primarily used quantitative approaches for their research but were interested in exploring qualitative methodology. Our self-study learning group provided a safe outlet to do that. Some members had done mixed-methods research and case studies while other group members had a great deal of experience in using qualitative methodologies and approaches like ethnography, grounded theory, and inquiry-based learning. A few had previous understandings and experiences related to action research and the study of teaching and learning. For those group members already accustomed to qualitative research, self-study offered a new avenue in which to apply research methods or to understand one's positionality as a researcher. Despite these different "starting points," everyone in the group noted how their participation quickly transformed into a form of holistic engagement as they earnestly collaborated with one another in first

learning about and then enacting/learning about self-study in various ways in their practice.

Closely connected to self-study as a methodology is an interest in improving one's teaching. Indeed, this is what draws many to self-study in the first place. Korthagen et al. (2006) developed seven principles of "learning about teaching" including how it: involves continuously conflicting and competing demands; requires a view of knowledge as a subject to be created; requires a shift in the focus from the curriculum to the learner; is enhanced through (student) teacher research; requires an emphasis on those learning to teach working closely with peers; requires meaningful relationships between schools, universities, and student teachers; and is enhanced when the teaching and learning approaches advocated in the program are modeled by the teacher educators in their own practice (pp. 1025–1036). These principles illustrate how challenging teacher education can be. Teacher educators are tasked with describing and critiquing the existing system of education to current and future teachers while simultaneously preparing them with tools to work within and around the system as it currently exists.

That we were all interested in striving to become better teacher educators (e.g., improving our teaching while simultaneously modeling and promoting impactful teaching to our preservice and in-service teachers) proved to be an important aspect of the self-study learning group that bound us together. We were also humble enough to recognize the complexity of the teacher education enterprise and sought help from one another to better understand our practice. The collaborative space of our self-study learning group became the place to negotiate, vent, have excitement, and work out a vision to balance identity as researcher, scholar, instructor, and colleague. Loughran (2014) posits how teacher educators "need to have a vision for their professional development that affords them agency in the active development of their scholarship" (p. 280). Slowly but surely, the group worked toward a shared understanding and direction of our work. Individual and group goals evolved. At times, these goals were exclusively tied to our teaching, while at other times formally contributing to the research base. In looking back over the years, we see how the group provided an opportunity for willing and interested participants to develop their identities as both individuals and formal group members. For example, some members of the group struggled with the legitimacy of self-study as a research methodology in their specialized fields, especially those from quantitative backgrounds. The self-study learning group provided those members with an outlet to voice their internal tensions (i.e., conceptual and methodological as related to identity), and to negotiate a new understanding of research. In many ways what the group offered was an opportunity to be vulnerable by weaving back and forth between identities and understandings, in a space where there were only other developing experts.

12.2 What Marked Our Interactions and Collaborations?

In addition to the kind of space that emerged as a result of our motivations and desires, we also believe our longevity and success can be attributed to the fact that the group became equal part *learning* and equal part *doing* self-study. This approach assisted those who were less comfortable in qualitative research methodologies while simultaneously keeping others engaged through applied projects, activities, or research. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to share everything that occurred during our meetings in the last three years, representative activities included: instructor-led presentations, resource sharing, coding activities, question and answer sessions, hosting guest speakers, open-ended discussion, and supporting each other in planning self-study inquiries. Most of our group meetings were marked by somewhat organic conversations.

For those who conduct S-STEP research, some of the recurring conversations as we learned (and continue learning) about the methodology will likely not be surprising. In one instance, members of our group readily came to recognize the terms “critical” and “critical friendship” as seemingly important in much of what was being done in the self-study community. We considered these terms in relation to other terms that often dominate the discourse of what constitutes strong and reliable research (e.g., validity, generalizability, reliability, replicability, etc.). Over time, the group came to realize how critical friendship could be thought of as a way to create some form of validity around the research, perhaps as a means to prevent accusations of bias or simple “navel-gazing.” Some in the group also contended that self-study never really seemed to be about navel-gazing as much as it seemed to be about critically looking in the mirror. More so, the critical friend could symbolically be thought of as the mirror – a mirror that talks back, but not necessarily to offer validation or verification. The mirror can help to reflect upon our own imperfections so that we adjust them. Our friends can look at our work in a research format, help us to decipher student evaluations, or offer additional perspectives on teaching practices in a specific context. Self-study must use various data points beyond the “navel,” and critical friendship can offer a way to accomplish such data points.

Still, as the group has engaged with the concept of critical friendship over the years, additional questions have been raised. For instance, who decides who is a good critical friend? What are the qualifications of a critical friend? How might the way in which a critical friend is chosen or the methodological role they play in a self-study change based on the focus of the inquiry? Are there some inquiries that would not really benefit from a critical friend? How specifically does critical friendship enhance self-study? Stolle et al. (2019) recently responded to some of these questions but also confirmed some of our fears around the concept. Specifically, the authors describe how critical friends might be used to support the transformation of teaching as well as to support the trustworthiness of research methods. Although these goals are not mutually exclusive, it can be problematic when research does not make clear how this “tool” is being used. Indeed, the authors found that the term is often loosely infused in self-studies as a signpost for trustworthiness but undertaken

in a shallow way that fails to describe how the relationship supports reflective practice or verified research analysis and finding. Did we become critical friends and was that part of our collaboration seems to be two questions that it is hard to answer without simultaneously saying “yes” and “no” to both. The group never felt the need to definitively answer questions.

Beyond questioning the place of others in self-study as both a practical and philosophical matter, collaborative self-study meant we spent a great deal of time discussing with one another other ways that self-study seems to anchor itself as a research methodology, including the repetition of keywords and data delivery via charts of terms. Examples of keywords that often appear in self-study articles include “tension” and “rigorous.” Tension appears in several self-studies, perhaps in recognition of the complexity of teaching practice and the messiness of trying to study it. Tension serves to illustrate how emotional responses to experiences serve as data. This allows the researcher to be both qualitatively powerful as it connects to the human experience and simultaneously to be criticized as navel-gazing. An additional term often used in self-study research publications is “rigorous.” Rigor is typically defined using words such as demanding or thorough but is by nature elusive. There is no discernible way to really know whether a thought is rigorous or not as no construct fully encompasses its meaning. Our self-study learning group members collaboratively explored such terminology in various ways, at times validating the anchoring of methodological philosophy and structure, while at other times questioning the substance. The language of self-study is both provocatively real as it captures humanity and lofty as it lacks the quantitative language often associated with cause and effect thinking.

Our group also discussed another common component of publications of self-study research, charts of terms that articulate data analysis. This adds a visual element to the data, some might argue similar to how quantitative research charts statistical analyses. The charts often consist of terms categorized in various ways to demonstrate comparisons and contrasts, cause and effects, or other analytical presentations. For the group, collaborative self-study often involved discussions critiquing various aspects of research; one example was the degree to which a visual organization graphic accomplishes criticality or rigor, as opposed to creating the perception that the analysis was doggedly methodological. For our group, this became one more space that was not clear. Is it important to organize your data a certain way or not? And, if so, why? For what reasons? We questioned whether some forms of qualitative research will always utilize aspects of quantitative research methodology as a way to “legitimize” the research.

Many of the aforementioned issues were brought up and discussed in our group meetings prior to individual members formally doing self-study, but this was not always the case. Our ideas on these concepts sometimes evolved or changed as we actively engaged in studying some aspect of ourselves and our practice. There was no official starting point when group members began formally studying their practices. Everyone moved forward at his or her own pace. However, as a group, collaboration meant we did slowly move toward enacting self-study via reading influential texts in the field as well as newly published articles. An additional step

forward occurred when the group developed and participated in interviews regarding our experiences in the group. The entire group accessed the transcripts and spent time in some of our meetings collaboratively discussing and analyzing our perspectives. One final important step in translating some of our work into research to be published occurred when the facilitator of the group secured a book contract (Ritter et al., 2018a, b). Actively participating group members were invited to take part in the book project and to share some of their experiences and research in self-study.

At this point, members of the group who accepted the invitation, all formally began engaging in self-study and tackled such diverse topics as differentiation in mathematics (Ayieko, 2018), researching lived experience (Chao, 2018), helping teachers engage with diversity (Mahalingappa, 2018), becoming a literacy teacher educator (Meyer, 2018), recruiting teachers of color (Meidl, 2018), mindfulness (Quinoñes, 2018), and being othered (Williams, 2018). Interestingly, these chapters were individual endeavors, except for one collaborative chapter written about the insight gleaned from our collective participation in the group (Ritter et al., 2018a, b). But this appearance of autonomy and separateness belies the true nature of our work together. In addition to regularly pushing each other in our interpretations of data, we extended support and attempted to add thoughtful contributions to our colleagues' work.

Without a doubt, across the multiple aims of our group, everyone acknowledged that we came together to collaborate. One of the main ways this emerged was that we provided a skeptical perspective on what and how each other was researching. This sometimes provided an opportunity by opening a door that the researcher might not have seen themselves. This is the cautionary tale of trying to follow a methodology so closely that you lose sight of the possibilities that might come from research, especially research about what we as teacher educators are enacting in our pedagogy and curriculum. This is where collaborative self-study became powerful. Our formal positions and identities merged as friends, teacher educators, and scholars, allowing for a place in which we became comfortable being vulnerable, engaging in reflection, and exhibiting our skepticism about ourselves and each other. While this chapter emphasizes how we collaborated as a self-study learning group, there is something to be said of our true essence as colleagues who enjoy spending time together and wanting to be helpful.

12.3 A Question of Which Came First: The Chicken or the Egg?

The famous metaphor of the chicken or the egg speaks well to what many experienced as members of the group. The intent behind the metaphor is to figure out whether the egg first led to chickens or chickens first led to eggs. In thinking about how we as a group collaborated, this metaphor seems to fit well with the expectations members of our group felt to contribute to group products (or even to establish

what we might do as a group) versus wanting the group to help with individual products. As graduate students, we all participated in many different research projects, but as faculty members we felt as if there was little room for participating in anything that would not directly enhance our cases for being excellent teacher-educators and scholars.

With that written, the general ethos of the group centers on a group of academics who care about our teaching, our students, and each other. We also recognize learning about teaching and scholarly development as ongoing processes, and consequently, continue to have insecurities about how effective our teaching is and if our scholarly production is sufficient. At the core, we are academic colleagues who see ourselves as critical scholars but who can also empathize as friends in the academe, a place that typically promotes a “lone-wolf” mentality. Because of this kind of ethos, the group has found reason enough to gather productively in collaborative self-study for many years.

Getting the group together meant coordinating schedules and trying to have an agenda, and in some instances, homework, so we would be productive in our monthly sessions. The following three reasons for gathering were part of most meetings:

- Collegial atmosphere; marked by belief in improved pedagogy without judgment, reflective practice in collaboration, an opportunity for scholarly thinking, and publication outcomes
- Learning about self-study for individual and group initiatives
- Using self-study for individual and group research

While it would be wonderful to declare that the collaborative process was always clear, productive, and fulfilling, it would also be disingenuous.

We figured out what we wanted to accomplish in real-time. Within our group, the understanding and utility of self-study was established with flexible boundaries that allowed for individuals to participate in the ways they chose, to use self-study as a group and as individuals, and for purposes that changed over time. Guidance occurred with the facilitator asking us where we wanted to go as well as providing us with resources about self-study as a methodology. The scope of how the group collaborated went from really loose and general ideas about our self-studies or self-study methodology all the way to being critical friends and reviewers of each other's work.

Collaboration in this self-study group did not mean you constantly got what you wanted out of the group; for us, it meant that the benefits outweighed the costs in the long run. We negotiated making time for the meetings and sometimes members of the group could not participate because of schedules. Yet, members always seemed to reconnect and reenter the dialogue. While we continue to be collaborative, we are not a utopian group. Members sometimes get a lot out of a meeting or the collaborative effort, at other times we want more or wonder how our time could be better spent. Nevertheless, the benefits of collegiality, friendship, scholarly collaboration, critical thinking as a collective process, publications, and improved pedagogical practice bring us all back together defining our collaborative self-study group.

As a final point, while our group has successfully found outlets for the publication of our scholarly work, interest and respect remain limited within the larger community at our university. While we can certainly say that we are the self-study learning group at Duquesne University, our work has found more recognition at the national and international level within the field of self-study than at our local level. This is strange considering the university has a Center for Teaching Excellence. Notwithstanding, our group has not been invited or included in any type of professional development. Perhaps this is because teacher education programs at liberal arts colleges and larger universities often experience some friction as it relates to what “good” teaching is. The truth is most faculty believe they are “good” teachers. Therefore, this group functions as a collaborative group knowing many colleagues within the liberal arts or natural sciences will not acknowledge our work as anything other than quasi-research methodology. Promotion and tenure often force academics to articulate their work as teaching or scholarship, and often do not allow individuals to claim both. Self-study is messy for academics because it is both, but the system forces us to identify it as one or the other. While our accomplishments as a group can be counted by publication, they can also be articulated in various ways. The intangible aspect of this work is it contributes to most of us understanding ourselves as mindful, self-reflective practitioners. But the question arises whether this collaborative group is sustainable. Does it matter if we are here to support, here to be supported, or not even sure?

12.4 Discussion: A Group at the Crossroads

A Ponzi scheme occurs when an individual scams another by getting the investor to believe he or she is investing their money in a high return stock. The scam is that, in fact, there is no investment; instead, there is a taking off from the top and shifting money around to make it appear as though the investments are legitimate. The scammer creates a fictitious investment and sells people the idea it is real. For some researchers, self-study has the feel of a research methodology Ponzi scheme because the research focuses on the self. For some, the connection between inward reflection, the study of practice, and professional growth is not tantamount to legitimate research methodology in their various fields of study. Similarly, given the diverse makeup of our group, and the fact that no one had longstanding loyalty to arguing in favor of or against self-study, we had to process the degree to which we understood self-study as “real” research methodology.

To those who care to take the time to learn, the legitimacy of self-study as a potentially powerful genre of qualitative research methodology can be argued based on various attributes. Self-study has its own special interest group (SIG) of the American Educational Research Association (AERA); books published by reputable companies (e.g., Sage, Springer), including two international handbooks; its own peer-reviewed journal, *Studying Teacher Education*; and its own biannual conference in Herstmonceux, England. Still, Loughran (2018) acknowledges:

Initially, in the early 90s, many critics expressed concern about the 'acceptability' of self-study as a form of research. In some ways, the self-study community offered validation of the work, but it was in moving beyond the individual through (in particular) collaborative self-studies that the rigour and significance necessary to offer evidence to others about its value began to stand out. (p. 4)

This tends to signify the experience of members of our group as well. All were willing to give self-study a chance but had concerns about its widespread acceptance, especially in specific disciplines. For these reasons, the group spent a great deal of time collaboratively processing self-study as a methodology. Positionality led to some questioning it as a methodology, some seeing its potential but also recognizing its inherent messiness, and still others quickly identifying how it could enhance or be connected to their own familiar methodologies.

Having learned about and engaged in self-study as part of our meetings over the years, our collaborative self-study learning group is now at a proverbial crossroads. Many of the original group have been promoted and tenured with self-study publications as part of their packet for evaluation. But, as is often the case in academia, these newly-tenured faculty have shouldered leadership roles that often drain both energy and time. One founding member has moved on to a new institution, and two members are still in the promotion and tenure process, all of which leaves the group in a tenuous situation. Collectively, the group needs to address the following questions:

- What does it mean to be part of our self-study group currently?
- Where do we want to see the group go?
- Do we want to work on one solid project around self-study?
- Or work on one individual's content focus but collaboratively?
- Or move on to work individually but be affiliated with the group?

Additionally, we must ask ourselves if our fields have space for self-study while at the same time asking if self-study has space for specialized fields. By addressing the above questions, we can determine how we move forward in our endeavor.

But then again, the question remains, how does the field of self-study recognize and nurture research that straddles research paradigms? An advantage of our collaborative group is we are necessarily fluid; collaborative self-study works as a conduit for collegial work and relationships. It supports our ability to teach better, publish more, and recognize who we are both individually and collectively. We believe this is potentially the greatest power that collaborative self-study offers; a greater collective "good" for all. In the end, this group of teacher educators might make the hazy world of self-study even hazier. We move in and out of studying self-study to applying self-study to becoming a community of practice anchored in self-study. This all occurs as we manage our individual needs and the demands of academia. Our group is filled with critical and loving friends crossing various social lines. In the end, our goal never was to become anything in particular; we gathered with two goals of using self-study to teach better and as a methodology that might support the demands of scholarly work expected to achieve promotion and tenure. But we have come to realize collaborative self-study has the potential to

renormalize the climate in the academe. It has the power to decrease the lonely space of teaching and scholarship when done in a caring, supportive way.

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Chapter 13

Power-With: Strength to Transform Through Collaborative Self-Study Across Spaces, Places, and Identities



Christi U. Edge, Abby Cameron-Standerford, and Bethney Bergh

Abstract In the context of longitudinal collaborative self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP), we explore *power with* as empowerment from relationships and collaboration. We define *power-with* in self-study as relational strength and capacity; it is generative, fluid, empowering, ecological energy, and space to transform self, practices, knowledge, and culture by broadening and deepening understandings and relationships. Drawing from 9 years of collaborative self-study, we describe how we were invited into S-STEP, constructed a collaborative framework, and created a public homeplace through a process for collaboration that included textualizing lived experiences and enacting a fluid collaborative conference protocol. Positioned as texts, lived experiences became sources for envisionment-building. Together, we read and made meaning from teaching and self-study experiences, over time and through multiple contexts, resulting in shifting paradigms. We created a collaborative space for cross-disciplinary collaboration. In this space, we transformed and re-created a collaborative culture as we navigated personal and professional tensions. Strengthening our individual efficacy and teaching practices lifted us from our academic silos to see and to understand our identities, our practices, and the broader educational landscape in which we teach and research. The collaborative nature of self-study of teaching practices methodology affords the strength of *power-with*.

Power, authority, knowledge, and discourse are topics of perennial interest, woven through teacher education literature (e.g., Ball, 1993; Deacon, 2002; McNay, 2004). In this chapter, we consider the relationship between these metaphorical threads in the context of longitudinal collaborative self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP). As teacher educators who are S-STEP researchers, we have come to understand how critical friendships and public homeplaces grow over time, across

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places, and through diverse spaces. This chapter highlights the generative and transformative nature of collaborative self-study as a methodology for transforming culture, practices, and self through *power-with*. *Power-with* is distinct from power associated with *power over*. *Power over* is often characterized as force or control, in a belief that power is finite, and motivated by or resulting in fear, dominance, oppression, and injustice. *Power-with* is founded upon a commitment to self-awareness, grows out of collaboration and relationships, and is expressed through the journey of embodiment. *Power with* is power from relationships and collaboration (Kreisberg, 1992). We define *power-with* in self-study as relational strength and capacity; it is generative, fluid, empowering, ecological energy, and space to transform self, practices, knowledge, and culture by broadening and deepening understandings and relationships.

Empowering others to construct meaningful understanding through educative experiences is the crux of professional learning for educators (Dewey, 1938). In order for teachers to use their knowledge to improve their teaching practice and to create educative experiences for others, they must first construct an understanding as learners themselves. This process of making meaning, as opposed to getting meaning, is dependent on teachers' opportunity to transact with texts and is aided by communication with and support from a caring community of learners.

We are three female teacher educators and program leaders representing literacy, special education, and educational leadership for a teaching-focused, mid-sized university in the Midwestern United States. Drawing from 9 years of collaborative self-study, in this chapter we describe how we were initially invited into S-STEP, constructed a collaborative framework, and created a public homeplace through a process for collaboration that included textualizing lived experiences and enacting a fluid collaborative conference protocol. Positioned as texts, lived experiences became sources for envisionment-building. Together, we read and made meaning from teaching and self-study experiences, over time and through multiple contexts, resulting in shifting paradigms. We created a collaborative space for cross-disciplinary collaboration. In this space, we transformed and re-created a collaborative culture as we navigated personal and professional tensions. Strengthening our individual efficacy and teaching practices lifted us from our academic silos to see and to understand our identities, our practices, and the broader educational landscape in which we teach and research. The collaborative nature of self-study of teaching practices methodology affords the strength of *power-with*.

13.1 Perspectives

Longitudinally, our collaborative self-studies have been situated in transactional reading and learning theory (e.g., Edge, 2011; Dewey, 1938; Dewey & Bentley, 1949; Rosenblatt, 1978/1994; Rosenblatt, 2005) and feminist communication theory (e.g., Belenky et al., 1986, 1997; Colflesh, 1996). Epistemologically, transactional and feminist communication theories recognize the relationship between a

knower and their environment, both in what they know and how they communicate that knowledge. Humans share an ecological relationship with their environment—both taking from it and contributing to it (Dewey & Bentley, 1949; Rosenblatt, 2005), much like Gee's (2008) notion of society as an ambiguous cultural text that is read and composed by its members. The knower, the known, and knowing are aspects of one process (Dewey & Bentley, 1949).

13.1.1 Feminist Perspectives

Teaching is “intimate work” (Bruner, 1996, p. 86). Professional learning that makes a difference in classroom instruction offers educators opportunities grounded in the complex environment of practice while supporting and nurturing reflections and discourse on their developing knowledge, often termed praxis. From a feminist perspective, care and understanding are at the center of teaching and learning (Noddings, 1984). Like the typically female role of a midwife who helps draw new life from the mother, a teacher recognizes that knowledge is created within and drawn from the learner. Such a theory of knowledge creation is a departure from the more traditional and often male perspective of a banker who deposits knowledge within the learner (Belenky et al., 1986).

Expanding the feminist focus on care and understanding, a framework for women's ways of knowing grounded our collaborative research. Belenky et al. (1986) advocate for women to become constructivist knowers who see knowledge as actively constructed by all human beings. Constructivist knowers move beyond silent receivers of knowledge and act with a sense of agency. To act with agency, women must gain confidence and skill in using information from a wide range of sources to form their own understandings (Colflesh, 1996).

Teacher learning that improves teaching practice requires not only new knowledge and skills but also new ways of thinking and of seeing oneself. As teachers become confident knowledge constructors, they learn through praxis or trying new practices while seeking to understand why those practices work or do not work. Thus, teachers become researchers who learn new ways to think about and to carry out their work; they become more deliberate and attentive to their instructional decisions (Cohen, 2011). Teachers with a well-developed sense of agency build theory grounded in classroom practice (Bruner, 1996). Through inquiry, they actively formulate questions of importance to them, direct their own investigations, and communicate their newly constructed ideas, thus improving their practice in the process (Liston & Zeichner, 1991).

13.1.2 *Transactional Theory*

Transactional theory also suggests that learning occurs when people consider, discuss, and inquire into problems and issues of significance to them (Dewey & Bentley, 1949; Rosenblatt, 1978/1994; Rosenblatt, 2005). Based on this framework, the goal of professional learning for educators would be that they become constructivist thinkers and knowers through reading their own experiences, sharing their interpretations, and expanding those interpretations within a trusted community with the intent of improving their teaching practices.

13.1.3 *Envisionment Building*

We also embrace a vision of transformative teaching and learning that is informed by Langer's envisionment building stances for building understanding (Langer, 2011). An envisionment is "meaning in motion" (p. 17) generated in the act of making meaning, or "the understanding a learner has at any point in time, whether it is growing during reading, being tested against new information, or kept on hold awaiting new input" (pp. 18–19). Meaning-making is potentially ongoing as one learns—confirming, troubling, challenging, and shifting what one knows in light of new meaning-making events. Langer (2011) asserted, "Stances are crucial to the act of knowledge building because each stance offers a different vantage point from which to gain ideas. The stances are not linear; they can and often do recur at various points in the learning process" (p. 22). The five stances Langer identified include: (1) being out and stepping into an envisionment; (2) being in and moving through an envisionment; (3) stepping out and rethinking what one knows; (4) stepping out and objectifying the experience; and (5) leaving and envisionment and going beyond. Langer posits that the stances are a "useful framework for thinking about instruction" (p. 23). Envisionment building stances are also useful for thinking about a narrative inquirer's orientation to participants' stories, lived experiences, classroom practices, and professional learning (Edge, 2011, 2021).

Examining how we have enacted 9 years of collaborative self-study, our purpose is to begin to articulate a framework for learning from lived experiences through textualizing (Edge, 2011) critical events (Webster & Mertova, 2007) in a self-study space. We use the term *textualize* as in "to textualize an experience" to refer to an intentional stance in which a researcher "takes a step back from lived experience and examines it in a way similar to how a reader might objectify a text's construction, their own reading experience, or their process of understanding a text" (Edge, 2011, p. 330).

13.2 Creating Collaborative Self-Study

13.2.1 *An Invitation into Self-Study*

In 2011, we were new faculty members who were invited to join a group of faculty in our department who had previously conducted collaborative self-study research. We joined as strangers to the group, our university's culture, and to one another. We were transitioning from our work as K-12 educators into the academy as new assistant professors. The invitation from the existing group served to focus our "desires, understandings, and actions" (Novak, 2009, p. 54) in a manner that appreciated us as individuals and called forth our potential as researchers. It was in this group that we learned about and to do S-STEP in the environment of collaboration aimed to understand and to transform teaching practices and to support one another through living alongside one another as fellow learners and researchers of our lived experiences. After the initial years of our collaborative self-study research group, those members who extended the original invitation began to retire or move-on in other professional directions. We three remained, rooted in the foundation of what those before us had established and what we were learning to embody through our collaborative meaning-making interactions together.

13.2.2 *Constructing a Collaborative Framework*

Merging two broad areas of research, feminist and transactional theories, provided the theoretical framework for our work together. This framework created space for each of us to grow and to learn personally and professionally both individually and collectively. In transactional theory, learners are in a state of transaction with their environments including their own knowledge and experiences, sources of knowledge beyond the self, and with other learners. According to Rosenblatt (1978/1994), as readers interpret texts, they are changed by the texts as well as changing the meaning of texts through their interpretations. So learning occurs both from within the learner and from shared interpretations that expand the reader's questions, connections, and insights. We saw parallels between these two bodies of research and used both perspectives to frame our work together. This early act of constructing a collaborative theoretical perspective, woven through discourse, sharing, and a kind of slow yet purposeful teasing out epistemological perspectives enacted and represented in our histories as learners and teachers during the first year of collaborative self-study enabled us to create a shared perspective for our research together. Together, we aimed to read our experiences as texts so that we could explore possibilities and let our questions and explorations help us better understand and sharpen our interpretations of those experiences.

These theoretical perspectives became the foundation through which processes for learning from lived experiences and learning from and with one another were

articulated. We learned to attend to lived experiences and tensions as we captured them as texts to be read and shared. The use of a flexible collaborative conference protocol created a framework for supporting the development of a relationship that allowed us to learn from and with each other within a learning-teaching-research environment we came to call a public homeplace.

13.2.3 Creating a Public Homeplace

Belenky et al. (1997) describe spaces within which women learn together and move toward constructivist knowing as “public homeplaces” or places where “people support each other’s development and where everyone is expected to participate in developing the homeplace” (p. 13). In public homeplaces, participants feel safe enough to express their thoughts and envision possibilities beyond their current situations. Much as in Close and Langer’s (1995) ideas on “envisionment building” when reading literature (p. 3), as members of a “public homeplace” textualize and share their lived experiences, they begin to “explore the horizons of possibilities” (p. 3). When reading for information, Close and Langer (1995) suggest that the reader “maintains a point of reference” while:

...their envisionments are shaped by their questions and explorations that bring them closer to the information they seek and that help them better understand the topic. As people read, they use the content to narrow the possibilities of meaning and sharpen their understandings of information. Using information gained along the way (combined with what they already know) to refine their understanding, they seek to get the author’s point or understand more and more about the topic. (p. 3)

Although our meeting place, our public homeplace, began as a physical location, a conference room in which we could convene, it became more than a place to meet or even a sociocognitive space to understand our practice; it became a medium for making new meaning; it became a space where we could trust one another to listen without judgment, where we could be safely vulnerable to think out loud, wonder, take safe risks to share ideas as they formed, realizations not yet fleshed out, or share moments of “wobble” (Fecho, 2011, p. 53)—that is, moments of uncertainty when we were teetering between previous assumptions, feelings, or understandings and those that we were in the process of experiencing. Sharing moments of unfolding understandings or of disequilibrium with the group (McLeod, 2009), and openly considering them together through cross-disciplinary discourse, connections to literature, and others’ insights allowed us the cognitive, social, and emotional space to reform and to transform understandings. Environments benefited from the encouragement of care, authenticity, vulnerability, confidence in the process, and appreciation in one another. The care, intimacy, and insights forged in our collaborative meaning-making shifted the way that we utilized our time together in the homeplace. Initially, we individually prepared to report our progress to the group, much like a faculty member might prepare to share updates to a university committee. However, our collaborative interactions together evolved into a time for us to do

the work as we grappled with professional and then, over time, personal, critical events, celebrations, and wonderings together. The expectation of returning to our public homeplace as a place and space to collaborate and make meaning together resulted in a public homeplace as a medium for *power-with*. We conceptualized our self-study inquiries as multimodal texts, we composed together through discourse in the public homeplace.

13.2.4 Processes for Collaboration

The creation of a public homeplace was achieved through two distinct, iterative, and intertwined processes: textualizing lived experiences to capture individual perceptions of events in order to share beyond oneself and the collaborative conference protocol as a structure for verbalizing and communicating the often internalized or inchoate tensions in teaching, actively listening to others, offering opportunities to integrate the ideas, connections, and perceptions of others in order to more deeply understand a critical event, a tension, or an artifact from our individual teaching practices.

13.2.4.1 Textualizing Lived Experiences

We began our first year of self-study with the guiding question of: “What can we learn about our teaching by critically discussing the texts of our teacher education practices?” At the forefront of this research was a focus on the personal and professional tensions and wobbles we experience as teacher educators as a conduit for studying our individual practices. Through this study, we came to view ourselves as active meaning makers who can learn from our teacher education practices as “texts” which we can analyze and discuss with “critical friends” (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 819) through self-study methodology (Cameron-Standerford et al., 2013). We defined *text* in a broader sense to include the idea that lived experiences once textualized could then be shared, interpreted, reinterpreted, and analyzed. Textualizing our lived experiences and studying them through collaborative self-study methodology, we began to learn how to construct meaningful understanding about our teaching practices.

We embraced the personal and professional tensions identified in our initial study; as a result, we brought professional events to the forefront as we continued. Because of our experiences together exploring personal and professional tensions through self-study, we had built a foundation of mutual respect and safety. We trusted each other to be authentic, candid, and kind and our public homeplace enveloped Tschannen-Moran’s (2013) five facets of trust “benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability and competence” (p. 40). We knew that textualizing (Edge, 2011) our teacher education practices through the envisionment-building stances offered by critical friends in a public homeplace could help us to step back from events, to

critically consider them within the broader context of our life histories and professional literature (Cameron-Standerford et al., 2013; Edge, 2021). Making meaning with critical friends about our textualized experiences enabled us to reframe events, consider new details, connections, or vantage points provided by others' observations and experiences. As a result, we recognized that collaborative self-study is a space in which we could explore, and over time, come to deepen understandings of our teacher education practices (Cameron-Standerford et al., 2016; Edge, 2021). Collaboratively making meaning from textualized teaching events in our public homeplace enabled us to "step back into" an envisionment-building process from the stance of additional knowledge and vantage points—*power-with* insights, strength, budding confidence, and new wonderings afforded by discourse with critical friends about the texts of our teaching practices.

13.2.4.2 Collaborative Conference Protocol

Each year, we independently identified a critical event, tension, or artifacts from our lived experiences, formulated a self-study sub-question, and textualized the experience. Individual sub-questions were, at times, in response to a collective inquiry question; other times, the collective inquiry question was shaped from individual questions. This process of forming a shared and individual self-study question was iterative and resulted in both shared and individual commitments to improving practice and constructing understandings.

Through writing, each researcher situated a selected critical event within its broader context, engaged in meaning analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), and wrote to construct understanding (Richardson, 2000) of what she thought was happening in the critical event she studied. Next, we each orally shared the critical event within a "public homeplace" (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 13) using a flexible collaborative conference protocol (Anderson et al., 2010; Bergh et al. 2018; Cameron-Standerford et al., 2013; Edge et al., 2016; Sidel et al., 1997). The protocol guided us to see and re-see our critical event from multiple perspectives and form a new understanding of practice (Loughran & Northfield, 1998). This protocol included: listening to each individual's initial analysis of the teaching event and subsequent learning; taking turns saying what we heard or noticed while the individual who had shared quietly took notes; taking turns offering speculative comments, connections, and wonderings; inviting the individual back into the conversation to respond to comments or questions offered by the group or to offer additional details or insights sparked by listening to the group; and writing take-away reflections. Individual take-away statements became a way to attend to the themes developing from our collective work. The data collected included reflective journals; documented decisions during class sessions; conversations with critical friends; anonymous student feedback from course ratings; written and visual artifacts from our teaching and learning experiences; and peer-reviewed artifacts. As researchers, we used extended dialogue to wrestle with ideas. We listened to each other's ideas carefully and spoke our own emerging ideas, knowing that dialogue allows ideas to clarify, change, and

expand. As participants in a public homeplace, we developed self-respect, confidence, and a sense of agency through this process. Textualizing lived experiences (Edge, 2011) helped each researcher develop skills of constructivist knowers as we read our experiences, created new interpretations, and incorporated new insights constructed with critical friends.

The accountability and care of an authentic audience within our public homeplace motivated us and strengthened us through *power-with* self-study collaborators who returned to our data, who read professional literature, who (re)considered teaching events and tensions in the context of our personal histories, professional landscapes, and unfolding collaborative meaning-making. We created new understandings of practice and visions for possibilities together.

13.2.5 Strengthening Our Individual Efficacy and Teaching Practices

13.2.5.1 Personal and Professional Growth

Our first experiences with self-study as a methodology brought to light a commonality across the three of us as we examined our paths to higher education. From the outside looking into academe, our colleagues initially seemed to embody an ideal role of professor and researcher, “university rockstars”—experienced, knowledgeable role models whom we had unknowingly and respectfully othered. Through collaborative self-study, they modeled for us the process of continuously becoming professionals and the vulnerability needed to do the work of self-study. This allowed us to see the possibilities of exploring our own wobbles, led us to study tensions as texts and to see learning and professional identity as ongoing.

Despite feeling individual doubt in our abilities as new researchers and teacher educators, the collaborative nature of self-study research challenged us to re-see ourselves, our experiences, and the trajectory of our professional roles. The process of learning about ourselves and our practices provided us with a sense of agency and resulted in the purposeful exploration of collaboration across educational disciplines. As a result, we did not merely step into an existing university culture to close our doors and go about our work as lone scholars; rather we actively created space, crafted a shared understanding of disciplinary knowledge and language, and sought to build for ourselves as individuals and a collective of three, a new discourse community. Cross-disciplinary critical friends helped to make visible and call into question our, often tacit, knowledge rooted in our disciplines, including discipline-specific language, values, and assumptions. While the value of collaboration in self-study has been widely documented (e.g., Vanasse & Kelchtermans, 2015) for challenging one’s assumptions and biases and for expanding one’s interpretations (LaBoskey, 2004), we have also come to see how a collaborative self-study culture brings to light specific disciplinary foundations that, when articulated and examined amongst critical friends, resulted in transformative teaching practices (Bergh et al., 2018).

Over time, we three began to see ourselves as leaders who had much to contribute within our department, the university, and the broader research community.

13.2.5.2 Strengthening Individual Self-Efficacy

The capacity to improve and grow has not been done in isolation; rather it has been our collaborative community that has helped each of us achieve more personally and professionally than we could have alone. Success brings about feelings of self-efficacy, encourages continued learning, and develops confidence to take risks and reconceptualize professional roles (Ashton, 1984; Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Runhaar et al., 2010; Zumwalt, 1988). Our work within self-study as a frame and methodology highlights how our identities have evolved over time as we explored tensions in our personal and professional lives and blurred the compartmentalization of our roles, disciplines, and experiences.

13.3 Conclusion: Recognizing Collaborative S-STEP as *Power-With*

As we reflect on the role of collaborative self-study in our professional and personal growth, we identified the developmental nature of the work we have embraced over the last 9 years. This developmental process aligns with our experiences and subsequent belief in self-study as a continuous improvement process rooted in a growth mindset. The nature of 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). Over time questions we asked and data we analyzed shifted outward in relation to our developing agency, awareness, relationships, and experience facilitated through collaborative self-study methodology. Initially, our self-study research began with a focus on our personal selves—that is, our professional identities situated in the context of our broader life experiences as learners, then classroom teachers, and then as teacher educators who studied our individual practices. Our focus broadened out to consider our educational content disciplines, to empower our students, to reach across campus and invite colleagues to participate in transdisciplinary self-study of practice, and to lead through serving within and beyond the S-STEP community. Our knowledge, confidence, relationships, and identity deepened and broadened through collaborative envisionment building.

Collaborative self-study provided an envisionment-building space in which we expected to discover a deeper understanding of our teacher education practices. Our expectation, while subtle, is significant; it reflects our collaboratively constructed stance—our *power-with* position in relationship to our work as educators. As

Bullock (2020) notes, collaborative self-study, if considered lightly, might be perceived as a kind of “echo chamber” where one’s ideas would simply be valued in an effort to reach a simple consensus. Rather, collaborative self-study

...invites critiques from other points of view. Collaborative self-study, grounded in dialogue conceptualized as an interaction between partners, each moving, framing, and reframing their inquiries, is best understood as a dynamic process in which we invite others to extend themselves beyond a comfort zone. (p. 12)

Because of our stance, we positioned ourselves to step into the self-study space and willingly explore our practice through an authentic, vulnerable, and potentially transformative process. It is our dynamic relationship with one another—our friendship—forged from collaborative meaning-making while reframing experiences that empowered us *with* mutual respect, support, solidarity, influence, and collective action.

Our collaborative, meaning-making experiences enabled us to become purposeful practitioners who examined teaching and S-SSTEP research practices on a deeper level, much more so than what would have been possible if on our own. Collaboration empowered us to transcend the potentially isolated context of our academic silos (Allison & Zain, 2018). There was safety in a collaborative S-SSTEP space that allowed for vulnerability, encouraged us to take risks, formulate questions, and be open to the critical examination of the decisions we make in our teaching. Learning to see ourselves as self-study researchers, we created an environment—a collaborative homeplace—where we learned about S-SSTEP as a concept that later developed into a culture. Moving through the envisionment building stances (Langer, 2011), we began to embody S-SSTEP as something within us, as *power within*. S-SSTEP became more than an idea or even a methodology, but also a way of being. *Power-with* through collaborative self-study generated continuous becoming.

Our public homeplace gave, and continues to give, us a safe space to navigate the academy. It further allows us to turn our gazes from ourselves, from the inward, outward to embrace leadership roles and opportunities in our department, university, and S-SSTEP communities of practice. We experienced transformation of self, culture, and practice through the developmental process of envisioning, experiencing, and learning collaboratively. *Power-with* in collaborative self-study served as a kind of zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) through which we could gradually increase and amplify power to grow our knowledge, identity, efficacy, confidence, relationships, and respect for our own and others’ journeys. As we consider our own learning and growth through collaborative self-study, we now wonder how we might more deliberately frame our work with teacher candidates, practicing teachers, and school administrators around *power-with* collaboration for the purposes of creating spaces for teachers and their students to grow democratic spaces.

Power-with as strength to transform in collaborative self-study holds implications for teacher educators, teachers, and for social justice. S-SSTEP and teacher education can be seen as relational (e.g., Kitchen, 2005); enacting *power-with* through S-SSTEP research methodology and frameworks for teaching practices is to tap into generative power necessary for democracy, for moving beyond the many

silos in which we separate and are separated. Bell (2016) describes social justice as collaboratively reconstructing society in accordance with principles of equity, recognition, and inclusion. “Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others, their society, the environment, and the broader world in which we live (Bell, 2016, p. 3). *Power-with* can be seen as working toward and enacting social justice through developing agency and a sense of social responsibility with others.

One can learn to become a constructivist thinker in a public homeplace where such thinking is valued and modeled; a public homeplace offers a learning environment in which all members become one among equals and where power is amplified by each and shared among all. Through the synergy of collaborative meaning-making through S-STEP methodology, *power-with* can grow an individual’s ability to act and develop leadership capabilities, or *power to*, as well as individual and collective sense of agency, value, and efficacy, or *power within*. Educators who are constructivist thinkers are more likely to see their students as capable of thinking and constructing new ideas (Belenky et al., 1997) and to foster *power to* and *power within* to empower their students to see learning as continual growth through dynamic, symbiotic, and transactional relationships.

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Chapter 14

Game On! Collaborative Research and Resistance Through Play



Rachel Forgasz and Helen Grimmett

Abstract In 2019, we conducted a collaborative self-study using improv writing games as our method. Our game play became both a reflective device for our data generation and a structural device for our collaboration and our research writing. This form of collaborative self-study encouraged us to approach our research and our writing with the life-affirming and cooperative intent that personally motivates our work, rather than the self-aggrandising and competitive games of so much of academic life in the neoliberal university. In this sense, it offered not only an approach to collaborative self-study, but also an approach to scholar activism and an experience of genuine collaboration. In this conceptual chapter, we share our developing understanding of how improv game play can work to support purposeful collaboration in self-study research. Specifically, we explore the sense in which: play is a stance; play is a sense-making process; play is pedagogical; play is an attitude; play is a relational dynamic; and how particular kinds of games encourage reflection and discovery.

14.1 Introduction

*There once was research to be done,
But we both really wanted some fun.
We said, "What the hell,
Let's play games for a spell."
And we found we could do both in one!
The moral of this tale might be
To beware this false dichotomy.*

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*There need be no divides
Between play and work sides
To do research insightfully.* (Helen, Poem)

A lot has been written about the dehumanising and disempowering effects of neoliberalism on the work and lives of academics (Ball, 2012); how the publish or perish culture pits colleagues against one another (Hartman & Darab, 2012); and how performance metrics have domesticated us into docile citizens, complicit in our own oppression (Davies & Bansel, 2007). One troubling consequence is that various forms of practitioner research, including self-study, have been co-opted as instruments of audit culture, used to generate evidence of teacher effectiveness as measured by learner improvement over time. In the particular case of self-study research, Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015) warn that despite its “enormous potential to develop a substantial critical-political, pedagogical and epistemological understanding of the complexities of teacher education ... the focus of self-study on analysing one’s own practice in order to improve it or solve specific problems of practice” makes it especially appealing to “the instrumentalist and effectiveness agenda” (p. 521).

But self-study is in fact deeply rooted in scholarly resistance, developed as it was by teacher educators who were determined to “take control of their professional activity and professional status” (Berry & Forgasz, 2018, p. 4). Reminding us of this history, Berry and Forgasz (2018) call for a political (re)turn in self-study against the deprofessionalisation of teaching and teacher education. One way to respond to that call is through the content focus we choose for our self-study research. Another is through the methods we use to undertake that research. Our collaborative improv writing game method is one such example, in which adopting play as a stance towards research is an intentional and explicit “form of resistance” (Berry & Forgasz, 2018, p. 4) against neoliberal research cultures of academic performativity.

Our idea to conduct collaborative self-study using improv writing games was inspired by the infinite/finite game metaphor developed by Harre et al. (2017) to describe the impoverishment of academic work in the neoliberal university. For Harre et al. (2017), the infinite game is one “in which our heartfelt, personal response to life, our deep listening to others (especially those who don’t fit in), and our careful observations and thought about the social, natural and physical world come together to create and recreate our institutions” (p. 5). Finite games are the opposite: competitive scoring games such as institutional league tables, student satisfaction surveys, productivity measures, and research performance standards. Like Harre et al. (2017), we have found that “finite games often serve to distract us from all that initially attracted us to the academy as a place of radical possibility” (p. 8). In other words, they distract us from the infinite game.

In 2019, we contributed to an edited collection of work by women scholars challenging the status quo of the seemingly entrenched hierarchical and productivity (finite game) structures of academia (see Grimmett & Forgasz, 2021). In designing our study, we wanted to develop an infinite game play approach for conducting

research. With our background as arts educators, we immediately thought of theatre improv games, which we adapted and played as writing games instead. For those who are unfamiliar with the format, when actors play theatre improv games, they are not competing to score points or trying to knock each other out in a finite game of winning and losing. They are more like musicians in a jazz ensemble, collaborators in the co-creation of a cohesive and satisfying performance. In our case, this improv game play method supported powerful reflective sense-making and also contributed to the creation of a strong and structured framework for collaborating as self-study researchers.

In this conceptual chapter, we share our developing understanding of how improv game play can work to support purposeful collaboration in self-study research, an understanding which deepened in the course of researching, reading, and writing for this chapter. Through these processes, we came to appreciate even more than we had initially understood about the multifaceted ways in which our improv game play approach supports collaborative self-study. Specifically, we came to understand the sense in which: play is a stance; play is a sense-making process; play is pedagogical; play is an attitude; play is a relational dynamic; and how particular kinds of games encourage reflection and discovery. The substantive content of this chapter is structured around these six key dimensions.

14.2 The Games

To develop the content for our chapter, we began by reflecting on what we learned about using improv game play to support collaborative research through our original 2019 study. We had a couple of firm findings and a couple of hunches. To test those hunches, we decided to incorporate improv game play in our early planning and writing processes for this chapter too. As in our 2019 study, we were strategic in selecting games as part of the process of developing our chapter. Each game was chosen because we had an inkling of how it might support a particular aspect of our collaboration. Each week for 4 weeks, we met online for a two-hour ‘playdate’ during which we would play a writing game and then talk through our experiences of whether and how it ended up supporting the research process.

Throughout this conceptual chapter, we include extracts from the game play that supported us to develop our ideas, including the six dimensions which we go on to discuss. These extracts are intended to give you a feel for the games and the kind of thinking and writing they helped us to produce but should not be mistaken as an attempt on our part to report on our recent game-play as a stand-alone study. Here, we present a brief overview of the games themselves so that when you encounter the extracts, you will have some sense of their original context. They also contextualise our discussion of ‘games for discovery’ in the final section of the chapter. We also describe the games we played in the original 2019 study as a point of reference for our discussion of ‘games for reflection.’

Playdate 1: To structure our first formal conversation about our chapter, we played *Alphabet*.

How to play: Players take conversational turns by typing one sentence at a time. The first word of the first sentence must begin with the letter ‘A.’ The second player begins their reply with a word beginning with ‘B.’ Players continue taking turns, making their way through the alphabet, sentence by sentence, until they reach ‘Z.’

Playdate 2: By the end of our first meeting, we had identified four broad themes for our chapter. We took two themes each and agreed to do some deeper thinking and writing about them before our second meeting. To do that thinking and writing, we played *Poem*.

How to play: The players compose poems based on assigned topics.

Playdate 3: To engage in a deeper collaborative exploration of one of our themes, we played *Word-at-a-time-proverb*.

How to play: Players take turns typing one word at a time to create a proverb based on an assigned topic. Play continues until someone decides the proverb is complete and adds a ‘full stop.’ The next player begins a new proverb. Continue creating proverbs until you are done.

Playdate 4: To engage in a deeper collaborative exploration of a second theme, we played *In-the-style-of*.

How to play: Each player is allocated a style of discourse (e.g., a school report card, a defence attorney’s opening remarks). The players have 15 minutes to write about an assigned topic in the style of their allocated discourse. Both players write about the same topic, at the same time, but in different styles.

Helen’s game (2019): Fast Forward

How to play: Play begins by writing a short reflective narrative of an experience as it happened. The player is then invited to ‘fast forward’ or ‘rewind’ the scene to a different point in time and continues writing an (imaginary) narrative from that new time. They repeat this process several times.

Rachel’s game (2019): Genre Replay

How to play: Play begins by writing a short reflective narrative of an experience as it happened. The player is then invited to rewrite the same scene in the style of a nominated genre, with the characters, action and mood all influenced by the conventions of that genre. They repeat this process several times.

14.3 The Case for Undertaking Collaborative Research Through Play

In the remainder of this chapter, we make a case for the value of undertaking collaborative self-study research through play. It is organised around six key dimensions that simultaneously express both *why* we play and *how* we play as we do this

work. In our explication of the first three of these dimensions (play is a stance, play is a sense-making process, play is pedagogical) the focus is more heavily on our developing understanding of *why* we choose to play. The focus then shifts towards *how* we play as we discuss the dimensions of: play is an attitude, play is a relational dynamic, and how particular kinds of games encourage reflection and discovery. Using this structural approach, we hope to articulate the precise essence of each dimension, to emphasise the subtle but significant distinctions between them, and also to capture the interconnectedness between these six dimensions of improv game play as they support collaborative self-study research. To conceptualise each dimension, we reflected on our own experiences of collaborating through improv game play, and then looked to the research literature to locate our sense-making within relevant scholarly traditions. In each section, we combine this theorised discussion and reflective analysis of our own experiences as the twin bases of our practical advice to other researchers who might be interested in experimenting with the approach.

14.4 Play Is a Stance

All rules that contribute to inhumanity shall be broken by players who understand the power they have to corrupt the unfair endgame. (Helen & Rachel, Word-at-a-time Proverb)

The conceptual resonance – and delicious irony – of resisting the finite games (Harre et al., 2017) of scholarly research by conducting research through (infinite) improv game-play was enough for us to pursue the approach for our original 2019 study. It was only much later that we sought to theorise our understanding of play as an activist stance and how this relates to the aforementioned history of ‘scholarly resistance’ in the S-STEP field. We found Bakhtin’s (1984) notions of the carnival and carnivalesque very helpful in this regard. For Bakhtin, carnival is not seen merely as a time for letting off steam or momentarily escaping from the pressures of ordinary life. Rather, carnival holds “power to shape a complete world with its own space and time. ... Just as the space/time of the official world seems to enforce restraints, the coordinates of the carnival world conduce to freedom and fearlessness” (Holquist, 1982, p. 14). Viewing play in this way highlights its potential political overtones and recognises its possibilities for upending hierarchical, fixed, or oppressive structures.

Sicart (2014) explicitly links the concepts of carnival, play and politics: “Like carnival, play has a particular status in its relation to reality that allows political action while being relatively immune to the actions of power” (p. 75). In other words, the liminal context of play, in which rules and relationships are negotiated and agreed by the players themselves, creates an immune space that cannot be imposed upon by the power structures of the regular world. It’s just a game. Yet, as Sicart reveals, it is also much more:

Play is political in the way it critically engages with a context, appropriating it and using the autotelic nature of play to turn actions into double-edged meanings: they are actions both in a play activity and with political meaning and are therefore heavy with meaning. (p. 80)

Our original study provides a good example of this concept in action. By adopting play as a stance, we re-appropriated our relationship to scholarship in a way that subverted the norms and expectations of academic work in the neoliberal university. Its enactment also allowed us to engage in a particular kind of sense-making process, one that supported us to be inventive and bold in our research endeavours.

14.5 Play Is a Sense-Making Process

REPORT TO PARENTS:

Helen has made good progress this term in her ability to incorporate play into the important work of self-study research. This has enabled her to overcome her reluctance to engage in research and has helped her to reach out and connect with other classmates. This renewed sense of playfulness has enhanced her ability to put aside preconceptions, to take chances with new ideas and open her thinking to the notion of self-study as an opportunity for ongoing learning and development. Further work still needs to be done in overcoming her need to know how it is going to turn out before she enters the game. I suggest she draws on her growing number of successful experiences to remind herself that the learning comes through the doing, not the planning of it. She needs to remember to trust the process and allow herself to fully enter into the spirit of the game. Helen has consistently shown that once immersed in the game, ideas do flow and can lead to interesting insights and unexpected results. I encourage her to keep up the great work and look forward to seeing what she is able to produce next term. (Helen, In-the-style-of...)

Creative and arts-based approaches have been used as methods of data generation and representation in self-study since its very beginnings (Tidwell & Jónsdóttir, 2020). These include visual arts (e.g., Weber & Mitchell, 2004), drama (e.g., Bhukhanwala & Allexsah-Snyder, 2012), poetry (e.g., Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2013), and multi-arts (e.g., Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2015). In many ways, our improv game play approach can be understood through the lens of arts-based self-study. Indeed, later in this chapter, we go on to explore the role of creativity and imagination in improv writing games as reflective practices.

But as experienced arts-based researchers (e.g., Forgasz, 2015; Forgasz, 2019; Grimmett, 2016), we came to the end of our 2019 study with the feeling that, methodologically speaking, something else had also been going on. Initially, we struggled to pinpoint exactly what this ‘something else’ was. Our understanding crystallised during Playdate 2 as we discussed our experiences of just having played *Poem*.

Rather than ‘poetry as method,’ we framed our creative inquiry as ‘playing a game of *Poem*.’ Until we talked about it, we didn’t realise just how important this distinction had been. We were thumbing our noses not only at the need to produce ‘real research’ but also at the need to create ‘real art’ and we found real value in doing so. We had liberated ourselves – both psychologically and

methodologically – from the need to produce ‘good poetry,’ the kind that could stand alone and be judged as artful. Much like neoliberal prescriptions about quality research, these kinds of aesthetic judgements are also subject to oppressive systems of power and hierarchy. In this sense, our improv game play method offered something quite different from those creative and arts-based methodologies that emphasise aesthetic and artful approaches to knowledge production and dissemination.

Excited by our discovery, we scoured a range of literature on creative inquiry, and on play and playfulness in research, looking for ways to deepen our understanding. One important distinction that arose from that inquiry was our appreciation of how the liminal qualities associated with game-play create a safe space for exploration and risk taking. As Mainemelis and Ronson (2006) explain:

Play, as a liminality context, temporarily suspends social conventions and rules, giving way to ambiguity, joy, frivolity, and exploration of alternative behaviors (Turner, 1982, 1987). Between-and-betwixt the inner and the outer, the old and the new, or the true and the false, play has a threshold awareness that sets it apart from life as usual (Huizinga, 1955). (p. 87)

This setting apart from ‘life as usual’ encourages creative experimentation within game-play because the real-life consequences of mistakes or poor choices do not apply.

In the liminal space of the game, play is autotelic, i.e., its own end or purpose is itself (Sicart, 2014). What we produce through creative game-play is the game itself, not an artwork that is intended to communicate to others or align with the aims of aesthetics. This is not to say that play can never be beautiful or that artmaking can never be playful, but in these cases, each is co-opting elements of the other, just as bringing playfulness to research co-opts the attitudes of play to the goals and purposes of research (see Sicart, 2014, for further explanation of the difference between play as an activity and playfulness as an attitude).

14.6 Play Is Pedagogical

OPENING REMARKS AT A TRIAL

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury,

You are being tasked with a grave responsibility: to determine the legitimacy of my clients’ designation of play as their research approach.

Now, the prosecution will argue that play is an approach to learning.

And that may well be so. Indeed, it is precisely what this case is about: the relationship between research and learning.

And we will prove, that in the case of self-study, in particular, research is learning and learning is research. (Rachel, In-the-style-of...)

A good self-study research design does more than generate powerful data about our practice. It also engages us in powerful learning about our practice. In this sense, self-study research is also pedagogical in purpose, contributing to the development

of professional self-understanding. In our approach we adopt Vygotsky's (2016) well-known view of play as developmental:

Play is the source of development and creates the zone of proximal development. Action in the imaginative field, in an imaginary situation, the creation of voluntary intentions and the formation of real-life plans and volitional motives – all appear in play and make it the highest level of preschool development. The child moves forward essentially through play activity. It is in this way that play can be termed a leading activity that determines the child's development. (p. 18)

While Vygotsky was referring to children's play, Newman and Holzman (1997) argue that this powerful developmental activity should not be limited to young children, but in fact can be a source of development throughout the lifespan. This notion of play as a developmental activity is significant in thinking about the pedagogic purpose of self-study research in relation to teacher educator professionalism. The point is not merely to *learn* new skills or strategies or content to implement in our own classrooms, but to support our *development* as professionals. In line with Vygotskian understandings of the dialectical relationship between learning and development, professional *learning* is the activator or source of professional *development*, which is enacted in the qualitative changes to a teacher's understanding and practice of what they do, how they do it, and why, across multiple aspects of their professional role (Grimmett, 2014).

Berry and Forgasz (2018) argue that teacher education “cannot and should not ever be understood merely as the technical application of knowledge to practice” and that self-study should contribute “to broader conversations about the contextualized, relational and moral aspects of [teacher educators'] professional knowing as a form of professional resistance” (p. 242). Taking a developmental perspective ensures that our self-study research is not satisfied with providing technical solutions to problems of educational practice, but that it is concerned with the deepening understanding and transformation of our own motives and practices across our professional roles as researchers and teacher educators. This perspective is especially important when we seek to challenge dominant societal or institutionally valued ways of performing these roles. The mechanisms of different kinds of game-play support these ends in particular ways, but one common feature is that improv game-play as method encourages the embodiment of a particular attitude towards research.

14.7 Play Is an Attitude

She who plays never stays stuck in laborious drudgery. (Helen & Rachel, Word-at-a-time Proverb)

Smith (2016) points out similarities between children's creative play and terms used by inventors, such as tinkering, experimenting, subverting rules, and diverging from norms.

Children at play, like inventors at work, navigate freely among the different dimensions of play and processes of innovation; they fiddle around in active, self-motivated, and unstructured ways with materials and ideas, prototyping and solving problems, roleplaying, socializing, and learning different ways to see and interact with the world around them. (p. 248)

Bringing this spirit of playfulness to our work enabled us to delight in the creative aspects of inquiry. As a consequence, we found ourselves being much less caught up in the usual concerns regarding research outputs. As Helen observed during our first playdate, “Play is not bound up in productivity. The point of it is that it is pointless. ... So that’s a real juxtaposition with the productivity agenda in the academy.”

In this sense, adopting a playful attitude is a form of scholarly resistance through which we subvert some of the most basic assumptions about the nature of academic research: that it is serious, that it is hard, that it is work. Crowhurst and Emslie (2020) describe the “pleasurable non-normative space” opened up by playful research as “a productive type of passionate refuge—a refuge from the irrational centrist standardizations of the neoliberal university” (p. 23). Our play space was precisely this kind of safe-haven in which we felt comfortable to resist neoliberal productivity norms and to enjoy the research process instead.

Simple things like marking research meetings in your calendar as ‘playdates’ can support this reframing of ‘research’ from the burden of work to the joy of play. This kind of relanguaging can have a potent effect. As Brown and Leigh (2018) explain, the phrase ‘playdate’ evokes “the essence of joy, creativity and play” (p. 56). ‘Catching up for a playdate’ is something to look forward to, something you can expect to enjoy. In our experience, undertaking research with this playful attitude of enthusiastic anticipation enabled an experience that could not have been more different from the competitive, self-aggrandising style of play we had come to expect of “the Academic Hunger Games” (Lemon, 2018). When we engage in research through game-play, we are not only adopting play as an attitude towards research, we also deliberately enter the liminal space of play as a research activity, inclusive of all its attendant features and their effects. Significant among these are the implications of engaging in the relational dynamic of play.

14.8 Play Is a Relational Dynamic

The ultimate satisfaction of togetherness is like honey drizzled on sour dough; it adds sweetness to the staple of subsistence. (Rachel & Helen, Word-at-a-time Proverb)

Collaboration is one of the most prominent hallmarks of self-study methodology (Bullock, 2020), although it is defined and applied very differently by different self-study researchers. In the case of our 2019 improv game play study, the purpose of our collaboration was deeply connected to our activist stance against neoliberal dictates and our determination to enact that stance not only through the content focus, but also through the design of our study. In other words, the relational dynamic of our approach to collaboration was an expression of our ontological

intent. Inspired by Harre et al. (2017), we aimed not to *be* research stars, but to *deploy* them; we collaborated in order to “generate and enact slow, tiny acts of resistance [S.T.A.Rs] in the company of others whom we enjoy and whose thinking and conduct can teach us. Their companionship will comfort and sustain us” (p. 12).

This relational dynamic that emphasises companionship, comfort, and enjoyment is not to be mistaken for Bullock’s (2020) uncritical and untrustworthy “echo chamber where one knows one’s ideas will be valued in particular ways” (2020, p. 12). Rather, it is grounded in a politics of resistance that refuses the bifurcation of reason/emotion, and personal/professional in defining the nature and purpose of research collaboration. In this sense, our relational dynamic as ‘playmates’ has much in common with the “feminist epistemology of friendship” described by Taylor and Klein (2018, p. 102) and the post-human, “*more-than-critical-friendship*” that Mills, Strom, Abrams and Dacey (2020, p. 4) realised they had developed as collaborators and critical friends over many years and multiple self-studies.

The ultimate satisfaction of togetherness is more ideas. (Helen & Rachel, Word-at-a-time Proverb)

While the emphasis of collaboration in our improv game play method is on cooperation, companionship and enjoyment, the relational dynamic of play also provides a powerful framework for collaborative knowledge production, and for the enactment of critical friendship. Lunenberg and Samaras (2011) explain that because collaborative critical inquiry involves “receiving and offering honest, yet constructive, feedback that moves beyond technical advice and pushes the researcher,” it is dependent on the creation of “an intellectually safe and supportive community” (p. 847). Structured game play provides just this kind of environment. Rules offer the safety of structure; there are clear expectations and boundaries for what and how you share. Being ‘playmates’ affords another layer of safety as you are positioned to receive what is shared in a spirit of playfulness, rather than one of criticality and critique. Turn-taking in its various forms adds yet another form of support for the intellectual work of collaborative research.

In the original study, we each played an extended writing game, based on a theatre improv game format. Helen played *Fast Forward* and Rachel played *Genre Replay*. Adapting the rules as we went, we developed the following procedure for playing both games:

1. Player One writes a brief narrative account of the experience that is the focus of their reflective inquiry.
2. Player One revises their original narrative according to the rules of their nominated improv game. They write a reflective commentary on new insights generated through the rewriting, and pass all of this on to Player Two.
3. Player Two draws together their insights from Player One’s creative game play and subsequent commentary to offer a reflective analysis and an invitation for Player Two to take another turn at their own game.
4. Player One reviews the analysis, plays another turn as invited, and ends with a final reflection on their learning.

This turn-taking procedure provides a clear purpose and formal structure for collaborating in which Player One is the reflective practitioner and Player Two takes the role of critical friend, providing a collegial lens (Brookfield, 1995) for collaborative reflection.

In the process of writing this current chapter, we played spontaneous turn-taking games in real time. In these kinds of games, we discovered that turn-taking functions differently to support the enactment of a generative collaborative environment. Put simply, taking turns ensures that you really do share the intellectual work of knowledge production. *Word-at-a-time Proverb* is the most extreme example of this concept in action. As the excerpts from our game play attest, that degree of collaboration can support the development and articulation of new insights that are as profound as they are unexpected.

At the same time, we found that proposing and/or entering into real-time collaborative game-play entails an element of risk, and sometimes even discomfort. What if I can't see the point of the game? What if the other person doesn't want to play my game? What if I can't think of clever ways to respond in the game? We experienced these discomforts to various degrees a number of times during our research process.

A particularly impactful experience was during Playdate 4, when Rachel suggested that we develop our ideas around the theme 'play is pedagogical' by playing a game of *In-the-style-of*. We were both a bit hesitant. Rachel's hunch that it might help us to clarify our ideas was based on her experience of playing a similar genre game in the original study, but she struggled to explain her rationale. Sensing Helen's ambivalence, Rachel started second guessing herself and backed away from the suggestion. Meanwhile, Helen (who had not played a genre game before) was struggling to imagine how it would be useful. More significantly, perhaps, she was struggling to imagine how she would write in-the-style of any of Rachel's suggested genres.

Had we not been so committed to understanding our improv game-play approach, we might have chosen to play a different game or else abandoned game-play altogether in favour of a traditional conversational approach. It helped, at this point, to remind ourselves to approach things playfully, by committing to a process of going with the flow, refusing to take things too seriously, and acknowledging that we could always stop if we were no longer having fun. Attending to all these aspects of playful engagement eased the pressure of expectations and allowed unexpected insights to emerge. This was especially true for Helen, whose familiarity with the school report as a genre provided a framework for spontaneous creative writing. Using the individual sentence starters and overarching conventions of a standard school report, Helen was freed up to think expansively and write creatively about our nominated theme. In the next section, we unpack more of our thinking about how different categories of games can support different aims and purposes of self-study research.

14.9 Games for Reflection

I

*The idea of playing a game
And reflection as one and the same
Gives reason to rhyme
It's a research pastime
That can help us reflect and reframe.*

II

*Swans reflecting elephants,
That Dali painting's called.
You see swans. Me? elephants.
First glances overhauled
And we see both simultaneously,
The two things also-and.
Multiple perspectives:
Bird in bush and bird in hand
Both kept in play, for inspection.
That's collaborative reflection's
Greatest gift:
Helps us lift
Our gaze
And see ways through the maze
That we cannot see alone.*

III

*So, when did it happen first? Rewind!
Fast forward! What happens next?
Replay! the whole thing to see how you fare
with a different smile, a different walk,
a bit more silence? a bit less talk?
Imaginary mirror on the wall
Reflect, distort, reveal, recall
Remember the future, imagine the past
The ending unwritten, the roles not yet cast
Fast
Forward
Back To Back
To be continued. (Rachel, Poem)*

Extended writing games like the ones we played in our original study support focused reflective inquiry by using “imagination and playfulness” as windows through which you can “safely observe and make sense of experiences” (Grimmett & Forgasz, 2021).

Genre games (e.g., *Genre Replay*, *In-the-style-of*) facilitate reflective self-understanding as we reframe our experiences through familiar narrative and character tropes. This reframing can help us to clarify our understanding of complex concepts, as evident in our game-play excerpts from Helen's *Report to Parents* and Rachel's *Opening Remarks at a Trial*. More than this, genre games can function like the use of metaphors in self-study research (e.g., Garbett, 2011; Tannehill, 2016) to surface the subterranean attitudes and assumptions that are the otherwise invisible drivers of our decisions and actions (Forgasz, 2019).

Character games (such as Helen’s *Fast Forward* game-play in our original study) are opportunities to imaginatively experiment with new ways of being, and to access new ways of seeing the people and situations in your life (including yourself). Newman and Holzman (1997) argue that this collaborative, performative play allows us to disrupt our habitual (and often highly skilled) ways of acting which end up being “commodified, routinized and rigidified into behaviour,” tied up with our identity as “this kind of person who does certain things (not others) and feels certain ways (not others)” (p.129). They use play and performance as a form of social therapy that allows participants to realise the possibility of breaking free of old ways of being and to collaboratively create new performances of themselves that bring about different results. Similarly, Boal (1995, 2002) uses role play as a form of critical pedagogy which enables participants to imagine and rehearse their liberation from oppression in the safety of the aesthetic space so they can enact alternative ways of being in the context of their real lives. Character focused improv writing games provide access to the same kind of reflective-imaginative sense-making.

14.10 Games for Discovery

*Preschool teachers know the power of play
It causes development every day
It’s the chance to try on,
With no right or wrong,
A new way of being... Hooray!
In play we collaboratively
Create spontaneously.
We give and receive,
Embrace make believe,
And end up at unplanned destinies. (Helen, Poem)*

Through our recent experiments playing spontaneous turn-taking games in real time (i.e., *Alphabet* and *Word-at-a-time Proverb*), we came to appreciate how collaboratively generating content within particular game constraints provokes playful creative engagement with ideas and with each other. Playing together in this spirit of inquiry in turn supports the development of new discoveries and connections, which, as Brown and Leigh (2018) point out, we may not otherwise be able to access.

For example, when we met for Playdate 1, we had already agreed on a broad focus topic (What will this chapter be about?) but we had no set expectations about what we would produce or whether it would be helpful. Instead of generating ideas through unstructured conversation, we explored the possibilities through a game of *Alphabet*. We played together on Zoom in real time, typing our turns into the chat box. Below, you can see the textual output of our game play, but this text alone doesn’t really capture or express the quintessence of our game play. Critically missing are the facial expressions, giggles, gestures, thinking time, cheeky asides, groans, responses of assent, waiting time, joking admonishments and physical

actions, each of which made a vital contribution to the aesthetics of our play as “a mode of conversation” (Brown & Leigh, 2018, p. 54).

*An approach to collaboration that makes work fun
 Brandon has provided some helpful guidelines
 Certainly has
 Dodgy!
 Eventually we will have to get to it so ok I'm going to get serious now...
 Fun is one of the main points of the exercise though, so was good to begin with a chuckle!
 Guidelines are really helpful and I especially like the idea of being explicitly asked to critique self study.
 Hell yes! It's good to get to nitty gritty honesty rather than skating over problematic issues
 I reckon it's an invitation for us to talk about writing games as a way to address the problem with 'long distance' ss data generation (esp now with coronavirus limitations) that's increasingly become a bunch of emails, text messages, etc
 Just another way of bringing creativity to perceived limitations that makes us realise they are not limitations at all
 Keep looking back at guidelines and keep seeing things that give me a sense that this could be a really nice chapter with good ideas for people about what a 'collaborative ss' might be about
 Like shaking up expectations of what serious study has to be.
 Mmm yes, that reminds me that part of Brandon's enthusiasm was about our proposition about this being a chapter about research through PLAY
 Nice! Cos playing is fun and inherently about creating something new, and so that's a nice idea to bring into the academy
 Perhaps we can draw on ideas from play based pedagogy (wow that's a lot of p's!) And make a case that research (esp ss research) is also about learning [Helen protests here that Rachel has skipped O!]
 Oh dear Re – P -t
 Play has a serious side too. It allows you to try out different roles and ideas in a safe environment. That is the essence of play pedagogy
 Quite interesting that arts based research, and creativity are accepted parts of the conversation about research methods but play and fun are not things that I think I've encountered in those conversations
 Really! I wonder what the hang up is? Is it that play is associated with children and not serious enough for the grown-up business of research. Children are researchers extraordinaire. Imagine if we took our lead from them.
 So I can already see 4 nice ideas about collaborating by playing improv games: fun = life affirming as per stuff that came out of our chapter; the pedagogical value of play; maybe part of that but maybe separate is the idea that playing these games supports perspective taking (reflective practice); and lastly that the 'rules' of the games provide structure/rigour for data generation
 That's a terrific summary. Thanks!
 Ur welcome
 Very funny!
 Well this is going quite well actually
 Xciting proposition
 Yes and I do truly have a sense that this has been a productive way to open up the thinking about the chapter
 Zealot quant researchers may not agree with what we have done, but it has indeed helped us get to the task and shown that worthwhile ideas can be dug up out of playful activity.
 (Rachel & Helen, Alphabet)*

While you might imagine playing a game would be the opposite of serious contemplation, it actually formalised the structure of our research meeting and was a

surprisingly efficient and effective way to collaboratively generate data. The clear rules for structured turn taking encouraged us to maintain an unusually high level of focus and enabled us to do a surprising amount of deep thinking in a short space of time. The additional constraint of having a predetermined starting letter for each turn sparked lateral and divergent thinking through which we generated several new insights, without ever feeling pressure to be clever or creative.

14.11 Conclusion

We undertake play-based self-study research not just because it is fun (and it really *is* great fun), but because it embodies our value of collaboration and supports and empowers us to challenge the status quo. The presence of a ‘playmate’ in this form of collaborative self-study emboldens us to be brave and take risks as we push back at the neoliberal research culture of academic institutions. Through playing together we know we are not alone and that we have each other’s back when we bend expectations and choose different values to pursue in our work than those that are typically rewarded in academia. Through our exploration of the various interlinked aspects of play as stance, sense-making process, pedagogy, attitude, and relational dynamic, we have come to a deeper understanding of why games can support our reflection and lead to discovery of new insight into our professional roles. We invite readers to join our play and experience these joyful and invigorating possibilities too.

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Chapter 15

“Risky, Rich Co-creativity” Weaving a Tapestry of Polyvocal Collective Creativity in Collaborative Self-Study



Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan and Anastasia P. Samaras

Abstract We are teacher educators who facilitate transdisciplinary self-study research in our home countries of South Africa and the United States of America. We have worked individually and with others to guide communities of university educators and graduate students interested in self-study research. We understand this transdisciplinary, transnational, and transcultural work as *polyvocal professional learning*. Central to our work has been cultivating *co-creativity* (collective creativity). This chapter provides an overview of co-creativity in collaborative self-study practice and scholarship. Then we step back to explore and express through tapestry poetry and dialogue what we have learned along the way about polyvocal co-creativity in collaborative self-study. We demonstrate our self-study process to serve as an exemplar and consider what our work offers to others. The chapter shows how creative engagement in the company of diverse others can generate new ways of knowing self, with broader implications for educational and social change. Polyvocal co-creativity allows us to see others, our work, and ourselves in ways we could not see otherwise. As we collectively take the risk of exploring innovative methods, we can expand the possibilities for more fruitful learning and change the status quo for professional knowledge and practice globally.

We are teacher educators involved in facilitating and teaching transdisciplinary self-study research in South Africa and the United States of America. We have worked individually and collaborated with others to support and guide communities of university educators and graduate students interested in learning and enacting self-study research as their collective task, regardless of their professional practice. Having both served as chairs of Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices [S-STEP],

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a special interest group of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), has allowed us to experience and be close witnesses to the collective creativity of the global self-study community of scholars. Our collaborations with self-study colleagues have supported and extended our research. In turn, we each have a deep passion and strong commitment to mentoring newcomers to self-study research.

Working with colleagues and students from various disciplines and professions, we recognized that our collaboration was also valuable to those outside the teaching profession. Those experiences led us to purposefully enact and study collaborations beyond our network of teacher educators. We conceptualized our transdisciplinary, transnational, and transcultural network with interactions and reciprocal learning as *polyvocal professional learning* (Pithouse Morgan & Samaras, 2015; Samaras & Pithouse-Morgan, 2018). We co-constructed design elements of facilitating polyvocal professional learning communities in what we have called Paidiá. The elements emerged from the collaborative self-study of our repeated explorations of polyvocal professional learning in transdisciplinary higher education. They are informed by a strong theoretical and conceptual base (see Samaras & Pithouse-Morgan, 2020 for exemplars enacted and validated in practice).

Central to our work in facilitating transdisciplinary professional learning communities has been cultivating “ongoing, intellectually safe, dialogic collaborative structures for reciprocal mentoring to recognize and value co-flexivity (collective reflexivity) and co-creativity (collective creativity)” (Samaras & Pithouse-Morgan, 2018, p. 251). Our conceptualization of polyvocality made visible how dialogic encounters with diverse ways of seeing, knowing, and doing can generate new insights for self-study researchers.

We learned that participants are motivated to be co-creative when articulating their passion with a self-study research question. Our work supports and helps them refine their question and invites them into new ways of exploring it. We have also found that innovations are prompted by working with trustworthy colleagues and especially across disciplines to experience a widening of perspectives. Trust is built slowly in non-hegemonic groups with accountability and reciprocal mentorship. Facilitators lead from the inside as they work within the group conducting their self-studies along with participants. In polyvocal professional learning communities, many voices matter as participants’ voices “weave in and out of and harmonize with each other and yet remain independent” (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2018, p. 324).

Polyvocality can simply be understood as ‘multiple voices.’ But, in conceptualizing *polyvocal self-study*, we drew on Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1984) detailed analysis of polyvocality (which he discussed as polyphony) as a narrative approach in the novels of Russian author, Fyodor Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky interwove a tapestry of diverse voices and viewpoints in his fiction. Bakhtin described this polyvocality as:

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices ... with equal rights and each with its own world, [which] combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. (p. 6)

In our interpretation of Bakhtin’s (1984) study of polyphonic literary expression, we recognized three characteristics of polyvocality that are noteworthy for self-study communities. These are (a) *plurality*, in which “the boundaries of a single voice [are] exceeded” (p. 22); (b) *interaction and interdependence* between “various consciousnesses” (italics added, p. 36); and (c) *creative activity* (italics added, p. 97) through polyvocality as “an artistic method” (p. 69) and as “artistic thinking” (p. 270). The research presented in this chapter exemplifies *collective creative activity* within our international network of self-study colleagues.

We begin with a brief overview of collective creativity in collaborative self-study practice and scholarship. Then, we step back to explore and express through poetry and dialogue what we have learned along the way about polyvocal collective creativity in collaborative self-study. Informed by Mishler’s (1990) model of trustworthiness in inquiry-guided research, we demonstrate our self-study process to serve as an exemplar. To close, we consider what our work offers to others.

15.1 Collective Creativity in Collaborative Self-Study

Self-study methodology is characterized by particular traits. These include critical collaborative inquiry, openness, reflection and reflexivity, transparent data analysis and process, and improvement-aimed exemplars of professional learning, ways of knowing, and knowledge generation (Barnes, 1998; LaBoskey, 2004; Samaras, 2011). While all self-study research should have some collaborative or interactive elements, there is a distinctive body of *collaborative self-study* scholarship in which “two or more people intentionally [work] together as ‘co-scholars’” to explore a shared self-study research question or topic (Pithouse et al., 2009, p. 27). And, as Pithouse et al. (2009) emphasize, “more and more, [self-study] scholars ... are making the ‘what,’ ‘how,’ and ‘why,’ of this scholarly collaboration the focus of joint self-study research” (p. 29). Likewise, in this chapter, we focus on understanding the polyvocal collective creativity or *co-creativity* (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2020a, b; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2018; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2018a) that is at the center of our collaborative self-study. We pause to look back over our portfolio of co-authored self-study scholarship to ask, “*How can we deepen our understanding of polyvocal co-creativity in collaborative self-study research?*”

Our enactments of co-creativity have taken place against a backdrop of a rich history of shared methodological inventiveness in the international self-study community (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2020a, b; Tidwell & Jónsdóttir, 2020; Whitehead, 2004). Since the S-STEP special interest group’s founding, self-study researchers in teacher education have worked together to play with a multiplicity of innovative forms and processes. These inventive modes and methods have been inspired by diverse knowledge fields including the visual, literary, and performing arts (Galman, 2009; Weber & Mitchell, 2002; Weber & Mitchell, 2004), popular culture (Weber & Mitchell, 1995), and digital literacies and digital media (Garbett & Ovens, 2017). Co-creativity has been a distinguishing feature of much of the

collaborative self-study scholarship of teacher educators working as duos and trios. To illustrate, Weber and Mitchell (2002) jointly performed their research, Hamilton and Pinnegar (2006) collaboratively explored possibilities through collage making, Tidwell and Manke (2009) made meaning together through metaphor drawing, and Berry et al. (2015) created dialogues for meaning-making. Co-creativity has also characterized the scholarship of larger groups of teacher educators. For example, Makaiau et al. (2019) explored fiction as a literary arts-based research mode in self-study.

Over the last decade, while we have enacted and studied the impact of collaborative self-study for faculty professional development, we have also explored our role in facilitating it. Our work in leading and supporting polyvocal co-creativity has taken place at our individual universities (e.g., Masinga et al., 2016; Samaras et al., 2014a), across our universities (Samaras et al., 2015), as well as with self-study colleagues outside our home institutions (e.g., Lunenberg & Samaras, 2011; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2018a; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2015). Within those professional learning communities, we have examined how the exchanging of ideas in creative formats prompts individuals to reimagine their pedagogies (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2018b; Samaras et al., 2014b). Moreover, as Smith et al. (2018) found: “Through such meditations, participants articulated a reconfigured professional and personal identity, hinged not on an expertise honed in competition but on a shared openness and vulnerability” (p. 291).

We have been involved in diverse forms of exploring creative activity with fellow teacher educators and in transdisciplinary groups with faculty from various disciplines. These are exemplified in published pieces containing diverse creative genres, including:

- collage (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2018a);
- dance (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2016);
- dialogue (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2015);
- drawing (Van Laren et al., 2014);
- mood boards (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2017);
- narratives, research artifacts, and sketches (Samaras et al., 2014a; Samaras et al., 2019);
- poetry and poetic performances (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2016; Samaras et al., 2015);
- play scripts and dramaturgical analysis (Meskin et al., 2017);
- readers’ theater (Van Laren et al., 2019);
- vignettes (Hiralaal et al., 2018);
- visual exegesis of a painting (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2018b);
- visually rich digital work (Smith et al., 2018); and
- working with objects (Dhlula-Moruri et al., 2017).

The work in self-study groups has also included graduate students. They have used the visual and literary arts as a mediating tool, individually and then collectively as a learning community of emerging self-study scholars (Johri, 2015;

Madondo et al., 2019; Mittapalli & Samaras, 2008; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019; Racines & Samaras, 2015; Samaras et al., 2008; Woitek, 2020).

As self-study community facilitators, we see ourselves creating professional frames for individuals, including ourselves, to weave tapestries, shaping, informing, and transforming into a collective one. Thus we chose to share an anthology of our joint creativity using a tapestry poem format, which zigzags our thinking, playing with ideas, and making something new together (Sawyer, 2013).

15.2 A Poetic Tapestry of Polyvocal Co-creativity

Forms and processes of the visual, performing, and literary arts have enabled much of our collaborative self-study work. For this chapter, we used the literary arts-inspired mode of found poetry as a starting point to explore polyvocal co-creativity. We are building on our portfolio of poetic self-study scholarship (e.g., Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2017; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2019; Samaras et al., 2015). Our work also feeds into scholarly conversations with other self-study researchers who have used the artistic, metaphoric, and rhythmic qualities of poetry to enhance professional learning and practice (see Grimmett, 2016; Hopper & Sanford, 2008; Johri, 2015).

Found poetry is a method that gathers words from written texts and arranges them into poetic form (Butler-Kisber, 2005). To source material for our found poetry, we looked back over our published work in which we had conceptualized and exemplified polyvocal co-creativity in self-study. We selected six of our recent co-authored publications that spoke to the focus and purpose of this chapter (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2018; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2019; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2020a, b; Samaras & Pithouse-Morgan, 2018; Samaras & Pithouse-Morgan, 2020). We then chose relevant excerpts from the six selected publications as raw material for creating found poetry.

We arranged the found poetry using the innovative tapestry poem design, which is a form of collaborative, transcontinental poetry developed by Avril Meallem in Israel and Shernaz Wadia in India (Meallem & Wadia, 2018). To create our tapestry poem, we followed Meallem’s and Wadia’s guidelines. In summary, their instructions are as follows: *using email to communicate, two poets interweave together the multicolored threads of two independently composed nine-line poems – one from each of them on a title selected by one of them – into a composite 18-line poem.*

To begin, Kathleen created a nine-line found poem. She emailed her poem’s title to Anastasia, who then composed her nine-line poem inspired by Kathleen’s title. Kathleen and Anastasia then read each other’s poems. Next, Anastasia wove all 18 lines into one composition and emailed it to Kathleen. Lastly, Kathleen suggested a change to the title based on the 18-line tapestry poem’s final line.

Although we have often composed found poetry together using various poetic forms, tapestry poetry was a new co-creative adventure. We found that it worked quite seamlessly. The clear guidelines offered by Meallem and Wadia allowed for

this fluid process. Our years of experience in creating poetry together via email, mutual trust, and shared ability to relax into co-creative processes were added enabling factors.

Through composing our tapestry poem, “Risky, Rich Co-Creativity,” we were able to make visible and available our fluid, dialogic “understanding in flow” of polyvocal co-creativity in collaborative self-study (Freeman, 2017, p. 86). We invite readers to experience “the felt space” of our poetic thinking (Freeman, 2017, p. 73).

15.2.1 Risky, Rich Co-creativity: A Tapestry Poem

We put on our imaginative lenses
To see more critically
Knowing this artful pathway
Stirs a deep uncertainty
And promises tension and risk

There is a gravitation toward
A collective discovery
For triggering ideas
For connecting with others
Transdisciplinary

We listen and relax
We enact and invent
With reciprocal mentoring
More than collaboration
Risky, rich co-creativity

15.3 A Transcontinental Tapestry Dialogue on Polyvocal Co-creativity

Our tapestry poem served as a research poem (Langer & Furman, 2004) to condense research data (excerpts from the six selected publications) and offer a combined representation of our subjective responses. As we composed the tapestry poem, we saw how each stanza could serve as an entry point for dialogic meaning-making (Freeman, 2017).

In many of the polyvocal self-study pieces we have co-authored with university faculty from South Africa and the USA, we have used dialogue as a literary arts-inspired mode to explore and communicate our collective creative endeavors. In the literary arts, dialogue can allow readers to empathize with the characters in a story and witness interpersonal character development (Coulter & Smith, 2009). Correspondingly, self-study researchers have used dialogue to engage readers and represent professional learning through conversations with trusted peers (see Bullock & Sator, 2018; Martin et al., 2020). Building on this, in response to the

tapestry poem, we created a new dialogue by combining excerpts from our collaborative creative work with colleagues from seven of our published pieces (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2015; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2018a, b; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2018; Samaras et al., 2014a, b, 2015; Smith et al., 2018), lightly edited for flow and coherence.

In what follows, each stanza of our tapestry poem is extended by an exchange between our voices and the distinctive voices of colleagues who teach and research on different continents, in varied contexts, and across diverse professional and academic domains. By bringing together the poem and dialogue, we became more conscious of co-creativity’s specific contributions to collaborative self-study research. Using each stanza and the accompanying dialogue as an interpretive stimulus, we discuss these contributions for our further exploration and for consideration by other collaborative self-study researchers.

*We put on our imaginative lenses
To see more critically
Knowing this artful pathway
Stirs a deep uncertainty
And promises tension and risk*

Lynne Scott Constantine: Our interest was in getting ourselves and other academics outside of the predominant ways of thinking, learning and communicating that academics are trained in: the word, the book, and celebration.

Theresa Chisanga: For me, in the beginning, I was just feeling completely lost. I was wondering, “But what’s going on here?”

Seth Hudson: It was a shock to the system; I was forced to think without words. That was a breakthrough.

Laura Lukes: You have to be open to the process and not necessarily understanding the process initially, and you have to be OK with that. So I think it kind of levels the playing field a little bit, where people have to get comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Star Muir: The beginner’s eye is a particularly special place. We reach an area of greater density, reach conceptual difficulties, learn new ways of perceiving and expressing, and learning is hard, but it also offers new growth.

Laura Poms: It’s about taking a risk and taking a chance and not worrying about whether you fail or not, but what you learned from the process.

E. Shelley Reid: I don’t often get to be in a room where everybody else is talking about being out on the edge, and being risk-taking in that way. It made it easier for me to think about the work that I’m doing, all of which has entirely not gone according to plan.

Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan: But, you shouldn’t enter into it too lightly. You have to have a certain amount of ...

Daisy Pillay: Courage ...

Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan: And resilience.

Lorraine Singh: It seems to be light and effortless. Yet we know otherwise.

Daisy Pillay: For some people, maybe it’s just too scary.

Anastasia P. Samaras: It’s complex, isn’t it? It is more than messy.

Thenjiwe Meyiwa: It was very humbling. I had genuine fearful moments.

Lynne Scott Constantine: You've got to be willing to be vulnerable and let it all hang out. You can't really learn, and you certainly can't find a path to self-improvement without being willing to just let the mess spill out there. Because then you can really see what it is.

Lesley Smith: It captures that idea of the impossible being possible, but also the capacity to enter a seemingly dangerous and alien environment and thrive there through letting go of preconceptions.

Delysia Timm: I have learned the importance of providing opportunities to explore areas where we are not necessarily comfortable to go because it is there where our true creativity is unleashed.

Discussion As we step back and take stock of our work in polyvocal co-creativity, we acknowledge that collective creativity asks us as researchers to be open and trustful of one's capacity and that of our colleagues and students. It also requires a sense of vulnerability and risk to explore old questions with new methods and diverse voices. Embracing the uncertainties, complexities, and elisions of practice in the company of trusted others through unexplored means can lead to fruitful results, as collaborative self-study requires both courage and vulnerability (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2016; Smith & Samaras, 2011).

*There is a gravitation toward
A collective discovery
For triggering ideas
For connecting with others
Transdisciplinary*

E. Shelley Reid: When you're in a room pushing together, it's fabulously fun and turns my brain on.

Thenjiwe Meyiwa: I discovered that playing and scholarship can coexist.

Laura Lukes: People aren't looking for the right answer. They're looking for the right process.

Inbanathan Naicker: Yes. There's no blueprint. It takes on a life of its own and develops organically.

Chris de Beer: The whole process was emergent and messy; many of the decisions were made on the fly but slightly guided. There was a very slender thread that held it all together. And, I think at times, it was almost like we wanted more order but then abandoned ourselves to the process and, lo and behold, something manifested!

Thenjiwe Meyiwa: In so doing, each person enriches and contributes to the collective journey.

Relebohile Moletsane: Our multiple perspectives, debated and sometimes agreed upon and at other times diverging, have the potential to enable us to arrive at more "trustworthy" claims.

Daisy Pillay: I think that's what happens because each of us responds with our knowledge, and when we put it together, we produce different knowledges, and the way we come to produce it is changing as well.

Anastasia Samaras: Each participant brought their unique talents to our whole group, and collectively we changed. We worked in overlapping circles, using our expertise and talents to support each other’s efforts. We found that we were a resource for each other because of our unique disciplinary lenses.

Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan: As we bring our diverse disciplinary knowledges in, we offer ideas that we weren’t all necessarily exposed to before.

Lee Scott: I also think we must never underestimate the teaching that we’re doing. We are teaching each other. That’s really important. And it’s quite a natural way to learn as opposed to reading.

Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan: And, because of our dynamic, creative collaboration, we keep learning and discovering.

Thenjiwe Meyiwa: It leads to making a much more growing, developing contribution towards knowledge.

Anastasia Samaras: The methodology centers all of us in a set of very diverse contexts that we bring to the table. If this methodology makes so much sense to a group of very different professions and is not limited to teaching, but includes theatre directing or lab work or whatever, it validates the methodology.

Lynne Scott Constantine: With the rich possibilities of self-study methodology in these multidisciplinary, risk-taking research communities, the data we are collecting, and the studies we are producing, are like images in a photomosaic, where individual images are fitted together to create a larger image that only emerges from the proper arrangement of the small originals.

Discussion We have found that making time and space to be playful together is essential to the process of discovery and a powerful portal for mutual learning and innovation (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2019; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2020a). Regular play dates remind us that teaching and learning is not a problem to be solved, but a human experience that can be enjoyed and continually reimagined. There is no guarantee or certainty of the outcome, but trust and confidence in the shared, dynamic process. New understandings and new ventures unfold in non-linear, sometimes almost inexplicable ways. Embracing play in our daily work involves re-encountering each other and ourselves spaciously and with a sense of possibilities and imaginative awareness, leading to improving practice.

*We listen and relax
We enact and invent
With reciprocal mentoring
More than collaboration
Risky, rich co-creativity*

Thenjiwe Meyiwa: Co-learning requires participants to listen to each other and accommodate various views of how each participant perceives learning to have occurred.

Delysia Timm: As we work and interact together over time, we can be co-creators of knowledge through caring and listening. We share ourselves as resources for each other.

Autum Casey: Part of it is just having that nurturing environment; when you sit in a room with people who have identified as wanting to do better, there’s no chance you are going to say something, and they’re going to be like, “Whhhat is she doing?”

Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan: What happens in our group makes me a lot more confident in being creative and thinking outside the usual. When you're able to discuss it with a group of like-minded people, then you can see that there is some merit in this idea that might be considered thoroughly "off the wall" by other people.

Delysia Timm: The journey happens with others, who are friends. So, it is a safe journey.

Lorraine Singh: There's a lot of healing that happens that way. You must be there with someone else. Because the breathing and energy that you release help the next person.

Anastasia Samaras: We started with thinking about "How do we go about it?" And then we ended up also talking more about *why* we do it.

Theresa Chisanga: For me, there was support and genuine cooperation with a community that encouraged and reminded me constantly that my role was critical and mattered. This way, I was more productive, and my job more meaningful.

Jill Nelson: And, I'm changing my teaching because of my experience with the process.

Lynne Scott Constantine: I was not in a repair shop at all, but rather in a place where my task as teacher of the arts and the humanities was not to tinker with the mechanics of classroom experience but to be a lifelong learner—to engage in self-transformation as a means of becoming an agent of change. It has emboldened me to seek transformation and be transformed to be a better vector for students' self-transformation.

Anastasia Samaras: I've just been continually enriched by my experiences in moving out of my lens. So that's been where I've been able to really grow and be inspired.

Delysia Timm: We co-learn. We change. Doors open, and we venture into new areas.

Daisy Pillay: And I think that changing what we do here is changing us as people.

Lorraine Singh: Yes. It's about improving your practice, and so, in doing that, you are changing the self. You change yourself so that the situation around you changes.

Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan: And, witnessing others' growth and learning from and with them is restorative.

Discussion The impact of giving ourselves permission to step outside the norm of research methods and to work collaboratively and creatively outside of our comfort zones with colleagues from other disciplines, institutions, and continents, has allowed us to grow professionally and advance the knowledge base of teaching and learning. We have recognized first-hand that crossing the threshold into collective creativity is not merely something nice to do. It has been vital to expressing ourselves and weaving a dialogue with colleagues in a commonality of purpose (Hawke, 2020). It has not only changed us, but it has given us entry into an alternative academic universe. Over years of polyvocal co-creative activity, we have come to see our practices, our networks, and ourselves as changing and fluid, full of possibility. Creative action across our transnational networks has advanced understandings and the impact of collaborative self-study in culturally relevant and pluralistic ways that echo the global self-study community's increasingly rich diversity.

15.4 Scholarly Significance

We share our tapestry as an invitation to others to consider designing polyvocal, co-creative spaces within their contexts for non-linear production and towards exciting, risky, abundant pathways for learning and professional development. We trust our work will offer encouragement to self-study scholars, whether beginners or more experienced, who might feel uncertain about collaborating with others to try new ways of doing things. Our creative partnerships with students and faculty across contexts and continents have validated our conviction that creativity is an intrinsic human quality that prompts innovations in practice. We have experienced how self-study researchers from diverse cultural and academic backgrounds, who might not necessarily perceive themselves as creative, can gain confidence and insight through hands-on experience of playing with innovative forms and processes in safe spaces. There are outlets for such work, and our S-STEP community is continuously creating new ones.

In the warp and weft of our transcontinental tapestry dialogue, we see how imaginative engagement in the company of diverse others can produce new ways of knowing self, with broader implications for educational and social change. As Eisner (2002) reminds us, “Imagination gives us images of the possible that provide a platform for seeing the actual, and by seeing the actual freshly, we can do something about creating what lies beyond it” (p. 4). Polyvocal co-creativity allows us to see others, our work, and ourselves in ways we could not see otherwise. As we collectively take the risk of exploring new methods, we are expanding the possibilities for more fruitful learning. Forming polyvocal co-creative spaces for collaborative self-study can contribute to changing the status quo for professional knowledge and practice on a global level.

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Part III
Self-Study Communities of Practice

Chapter 16

Critically Inquiring as Community Through Self-Study Communities of Practice



Julian Kitchen

Abstract Collaboration among teacher educators has emerged as a fundamental feature of the self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP). Although collaborative self-study and critical friendship can involve any number of people, most self-studies involve two to three teacher educators. This chapter, considers the potential of self-study communities of practice (SSCoP) of four or more, as defined by Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker, to build capacity and community. This is particularly important today for two reasons. First, S-STEP needs to look beyond the individual stories to larger theoretical, methodological, and practical questions in the field. Second, there is a need to improve teacher education programs, not just individual courses. This chapter reviews the history of self-study communities of practice and considers how these larger-scale collaborations can contribute to advancing self-study as a discourse community and to the improvement of teacher education programs. After SSCOps are introduced, four standards for quality offered, and eight characteristics of SSCOps identified. The author's experiences in a SSCOps from 2007 to 2012 are used to illustrate the strengths, challenges, and possibilities of such communities. The chapter conclude by highlighting two recent self-studies, one by an established team and the other by an emerging community of practice.

The self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP), according to Loughran (2004), began as “a ‘coming together’ of like-minded people with similar interests, issues and concerns” regarding teacher education (p. 13). They were open to employing “a remarkable range of methods to address questions arising from their own practices and teacher education contexts (p. 17). Given the strong sense of community that developed among these like-minded teacher educators, collaboration soon emerged as a fundamental feature of S-STEP (Lighthall, 2004). LaBoskey

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(2004) included interactivity with colleagues among the five criteria for designing well-executed self-studies. While LaBoskey's (2004) conception of "interactions with our colleagues near and far" included students and educational literature (p. 859), critical friendship emerged as a popular methodology for demonstrating this design feature, while also contributing to trustworthiness. Although collaborative self-study and critical friendship can involve any number of people, most self-studies involve two to three teacher educators. In this chapter, I suggest that self-study communities of practice (SSCoP) of four or more, as defined by Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker (2009), are a natural extension of critical friendship and collaborative self-study, one that has the potential to build capacity and community.

This is particularly important today for two reasons. First, S-STEP needs to "look beyond individual stories of practice to the bigger theoretical, methodological, and practical questions that should engage the field in the 2020s and beyond" (Kitchen, 2020b, p. 1025). Second, to improve teacher education programs, not just individual courses, S-STEP practitioners need to engage with each other locally, nationally, and internationally to improve the teacher candidate experience across courses and field experiences (Kitchen, 2020a).

I review the history of self-study communities of practice and consider how these larger-scale collaborations can contribute to advancing self-study as a discourse community and to the improvement of teacher education programs. I begin by introducing self-study community of practice, offering four standards for quality, and identifying eight characteristics of SSCO. My experiences in a SSCO from 2007 to 2012 are used to illustrate the strengths, challenges, and possibilities of such communities.

While I look back on my own experiences of collaboration in community, my intent in this chapter is to draw attention to SSCO as a conception of larger-scale collaboration. I propose that its terms and insights might support current and future teacher educators as they engage in the deeper and larger-scale collaborations necessary to the advancement of self-study as an approach to improving practice within and across teacher education programs. With this in my mind, I conclude by highlighting two recent self-studies by an established and an emerging community of practice.

16.1 What Are Self-Study Communities of Practice?

The term *self-study communities of practice* was coined by Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker (2009) for "groups of at least four members committed to working together to study their teacher education practices" (p. 108). The term was inspired by the popularity of professional learning communities (PLC) at the time (e.g., DuFour & Eaker, 1998). PLCs were notable for improving teaching practice through shared expertise, collaboration, life-long learning, care, respect, and commitment to and reflection of continuous renewal (Elmore, 1997). While acknowledging many

notable collaborations in the self-study community, we observed that most were pairs or triads within an education college or across institutions. We suggested there was “a need to widen [self-study’s] influence within education colleges and across the field of teacher education” (p. 108). We were inspired by the examples of the Arizona Group and the self-study group at University of Northern Iowa to develop a self-study community at Brock University. We envisioned larger scale collaborative teams as a means of “supporting existing self-study practitioners” and “draw[ing] more teacher educators into self-study” (p. 111). The activities of our group of nine of teacher educators, which started upon my arrival at Brock in 2006, was featured as an exemplar of how to establish a community of practice and of the inquiry process in such a community.

At the time, there was little research published on the work of collaborative self-study teams of four or more practitioners. As we had formed a group of nine at Brock, we were aware of the challenges collaboration presented on a larger scale. Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker (2009) wrote:

It is our belief that communities of four or more members possess different characteristics and need to be distinguished from smaller, more close-knit groups. Each additional member increases the complexity of the web of relationships and increases the likelihood that not all members will have their personal and professional needs addressed. Also, as membership widens to include individuals from different research traditions, there is a greater need to negotiate group dynamics and shared understandings. (p. 110)

We recognized, through reading the dialogue among members of the Arizona Group (e.g., Guilfoyle et al., 2004), that effective communication was essential to the creation of our self-study community. We noted that the establishment of trust and the structuring of a self-study process were critical to the formation of a self-study community involving a diverse instructional team at George Mason University (Samaras et al., 2006). At the University of Northern Iowa, key members were deeply concerned with ensuring that the *necessary conditions* for effective self-study communities of practice were maintained despite the overlapping and intersecting self-study teams, (East & Fitzgerald, 2006). Our Brock group of nine, many of whom were new scholars and unfamiliar with self-study, documented our collaborative processes over several years.

Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker framed SSCoP around four standards for quality is derived from Bodone et al.’s (2004) chapter on collaboration in the *International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices*. We also identified eight characteristics of effective communities, adapted from Clark’s (2001) characteristics of authentic conversation, which were organized under the four standards. These characteristics, as well as strengths and challenges, are illustrated below through examples from papers by Kitchen, Ciuffetelli Parker and Gallagher (2009), Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker (2009), and Gallagher (2011) on the Brock SSCoP. Consideration is also given to the challenges of sustaining s over a longer term.

16.2 Standard 1: Establishing Conditions for Research

The first standard for quality SSCoP is the establishment of conditions for teacher educators to improve and study their practice. While many teacher educators may be receptive to self-study as a means of researching practice, most are not afforded structured opportunities and, thus, do not develop a program of research on practice. The Arizona Group, the first SSCoP, was formed by four doctoral students who recognized an absence of such conditions (Guilfoyle et al., 2004). Their eagerness to widen the circle even further contributed to the formation of S-STEP (Loughran, 2004). A SSCoP at University of Northern Iowa with an amorphous membership continues to thrive after 20 years thanks to the conditions of fellowship and productivity established by core members (East & Fitzgerald, 2006). For over 20 years, Samaras has been at the centre of multiple self-study clusters, often transdisciplinary, at George Mason University, as well as with partners at other institutions (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2015). The self-study community at Brock was formed in 2007, after two co-chairs (Darlene Ciuffetelli Parker and Tiffany Gallagher) identified a need for a support group a large group of new tenure-track hires over three years. As I was a newly hired faculty member with experience in self-study, I joined them in inviting colleagues to join a self-study group for pre-tenure faculty. The four characteristics of authentic conversation (Clark, 2001) in this section offer insight into how to establish conditions for a self-study community of practice.

16.2.1 *Characteristic 1: Self-Study Community Involvement Is Voluntary*

It is important that engagement in conversation and collaboration be voluntary and based on a common sense of purpose (Clark, 2001). The 12 A group of nine recently hired teacher education professors had “already bonded well, wished to strengthen these relationships” (Kitchen et al., 2008, p. 161). They volunteered to attend monthly meetings because they had a common purpose: a desire to improve their teaching while becoming published scholars of practice. Smaller clusters were formed to help community members explore their distinct fields of practice.

While affinity brought the group together, there were challenges that diminished commitment. “Time constraints were a source of tension from the outset” (Kitchen et al., 2008, p. 162), as it was difficult to find convenient meeting times with faculty spread across two campuses and several people living at least an hour from either campus. Also, the pressing compulsory duties of professors—teaching, scholarship and service—diminished interest in a voluntary, non-essential group. After one year, three members withdrew for these reasons. After four years, the SSCoP disbanded as all members were involved in independent and pressing projects. I, for

example, was heavily involved in a large Indigenous teacher education research project and was writing a textbook in education law.

16.2.2 Characteristic 2: Self-Study Community Happens on Common Ground

Common ground is a second characteristic of well-established SSCoPs. Good conversation, as evidenced in the Arizona and Northern Iowa groups, requires a space in which the authority of each member's voice is valued and there is a respectful sharing of values, ideas, and fears (Clark, 2001). Although the nine original faculty came from varying backgrounds and disciplines, we shared "a need for our voices to be heard beyond the formal... meetings and recognized the potential for us to get to know each other and to support each other's work" (Kitchen et al., 2008, p. 162). We also committed to providing common ground by establishing norms of respect and a safe space in which to examine our ideas and practices. We set a positive tone through our individual interactions with group members and modelled respectful discourse in the first few sessions.

During the first year, individuals and groups presented perspectives on teacher education practices or the experience of being a new professor that resonated with the discussions at hand. Darlene's discussion of her duty as coordinator of the teaching methods courses, for example, resonated with Tiffany's duty as coordinator of the educational psychology courses. Illumination of the tension of new faculty assuming these roles was made evident through sharing stories regarding the responsibilities that were associated with being a course coordinator. Relating to others' experiences contributed to the cohesion of the group. Participation afforded members the opportunity to reflect critically on their respective roles in the department and to move forward from this new perspective.

Establishing common ground is critical to establishing the conditions for authentic conversations about teacher education research and practices. Once this common ground was established, members used this space to probe more deeply into their individual and collective self-studies of teacher education practices (Gallagher et al., 2011).

16.2.3 Characteristic 3: Self-Study Community Requires Safety, Trust and Care

The authentic quality of our conversations as a self-study group would not have been possible without the characteristic of safety, trust, and care (Clark, 2001). As we wrote after our first year:

The opening presentations by Julian and Darlene, in which they made explicit their tensions as teacher educators, encouraged openness. The thoughtfulness of the oral and written responses, modeled in part by the facilitators, also created a safe place for sharing and further research. (Kitchen et al., 2008, p. 163)

Finding time to meet in a safe place was particularly challenging given the competing and ever-pressing demands of teaching, scholarship, and service. Darlene reflected:

I think everyone appreciated the natural extension and flow of conversation that linked our last session with this one. It was a nice feeling of communal effort/safety in sharing our work. I am noticing that the more we gather in our group, the safer, more collegial, friendly and exciting it is becoming. (Kitchen et al., 2008, p. 163)

Although a safe atmosphere must be cultivated not commanded (Clark, 2001), one of the factors that contributed to a trusting and caring atmosphere was a predictable structure for meetings during the first year. Unfortunately, while safety and sharing remained meaningful when we met, distances and other priorities made it difficult to structure regularly meeting, which led to a falling off after several years. Closer proximity, combined with a committed core, has allowed SSCoPs at the University of Northern Iowa and George Mason to remain robust.

16.2.4 Characteristic 4: Self-Study Community Members Share Struggles Through Conversation

As a self-study community becomes established, it needs to engage in meaningful dialogue related to more sensitive topics and experiences. As Guilfoyle et al. (2004) emphasize, “Conversation moves from beyond mere talk to become dialogue when it contains critique and reflection—when ideas are not simply stated but endure intense questioning, analysis, alternative interpretations, and synthesis” (pp. 1155–1156). “The issue that bound members and surfaced in most group conversations over the first two years was the promotion and tenure process,” according to Gallagher et al. (2011, p. 884). This issue was particularly pressing as Brock had recently transitioned to being a comprehensive university with heightened research expectations for faculty. In this article, Gallagher and peers illustrated how a day devoted to discussion about the evolving institutional context and teacher education culture led to shared understanding and a collective resolve to work through the issues. Self-study was of particular interest as it had the potential to increase research productivity while improving practice. While sharing struggles was important, it is crucial that all members participate actively in group conversations. The initial group sessions were led by experienced facilitators attentive to the verbal and non-verbal cues from others and committed to engaging all members. As Guilfoyle et al. (2004) wrote, “Dialogue is not owned by any participant...The one ‘requirement’ is that it be sustained through active participation, keeping the ball in the air” (p. 1333).

For a self-study group to become a scholarly learning community, members need to reveal their struggles and engage in critique and reflection.

16.3 Standard 2: Creating Educational Knowledge

At the heart of self-study is creating educational knowledge and improving our teacher education practices. As Clark (2001) stresses, “the heart of conversational learning for teachers is about ourselves” in relation to the learning needs of our students (p. 177). Extending this to tenure-track faculty, conversation in community should also lead to research on practice.

16.3.1 *Characteristic 5: Self-Study Community Members Explore Their Teaching Through Collective Dialogue*

As academics in the Brock group, we sought to be both practical and scholarly in our inquiries. The tone was set in the first session with my presentation of a published self-study into providing reflective feedback. (Kitchen, 2008). This and subsequent self-study presentations on issues emerging from members’ teaching practice, resonated with members of the community. A particularly lively collective dialogue was prompted by Louis Volante’s collaborative self-study inquiry with Darlene on preparing feedback to teacher candidates during practica. After Louis critiqued the assessment tool, Darlene encouraged him to use self-study to probe further. Together, they documented their experiences and reflected on the frustrations they experienced using the same detailed checklist used by supervising teachers. Dialogue in response to this presentation was lively, as everyone had just returned from evaluating the first practicum. Each of us had experienced frustration with this assessment tool, with some drawing on experiences in other universities to bolster the call for reform. “All members are intently listening to this conversation. This discussion had the potential to alter the very purpose of our role as faculty counsellors and require a complete examination of the whole organization of the department,” wrote Tiffany (Reflection, December 13, 2006). In Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker (2009), we recalled, “Although Louis was new to self-study, he was able to combine his expert knowledge of assessment with reflection to present a forceful, scholarly and personal inquiry into practice” (p. 122). After further data collection, reflection and critical analysis, their article was accepted for publication (Ciuffetelli Parker & Volante, 2009) by *Studying Teacher Education*. The journal editors identified the pairing of self-study and assessment as a valuable new contribution to the field. This served as a further indication that our self-study dialogue fostered meaningful scholarship.

Studying our teacher education practices in a self-study community both deepened our understandings of practice and developed a mutually respectful

community of practice among new faculty. We modelled collegiality within a scholarly learning community and, through our publications in peer-reviewed journals, received external validation for our explorations of teaching through collective dialogue. The sharing of such dialogue, along with reflection and critique as a SSCoP, has the potential to inform engagement by other groups.

16.3.2 Characteristic 6: Self-Study Communities Critically Examine Their Group Processes and Dynamics

As conversation groups develop, according to Clark (2001), “participants find their voices, the conversational floor opens to greater complexity, depth, and tolerance of uncertainty” (p. 179). In the first year, members increasingly found their voices as they became comfortable in the group and with self-study. This was most evident when the four members least familiar with self-study formed their own self-study group to explore their professional identities as teacher educators, leading to a conference symposium (Figg et al. 2007).

Just as the Arizona Group “walked through a variety of discourses’ in their “progression” in “discourse as a way of knowing” (Guilfoyle et al., 2004, p. 1135), we examined our group processes and dynamics in order to make adaptations in our second year as a self-study community: For example, we reflected on the interactions in a session Tiffany led on co-authoring with graduate students. Some questioned the value of such work, with one questioning the ethics of taking credit for student work. Nonetheless, reflections on the session indicated that “members left the meeting feeling empowered, as well as “open to diverse views, able to cope with uncertainty, and... [able] to work through conversational differences in opinions” (Kitchen et al., 2008, p. 166).

16.4 Standards 3 and 4: Recreating Teacher Education and Contributing to the Public Discourse of Communities of Practice

At the heart of self-study as a research methodology is the creation of knowledge that can improve teacher education practices internally and in the wider teacher education discourse community. . Research on self-study communities of practice should illustrate by example and in scholarship how self-study leads to deeper to understandings about teacher education as practiced in our classroom contexts. Belonging to an international self-study community offers a “liberating shift of perspective” and validation from the self-study community enhances “commitment to collaborative engagement with colleagues” (Fitzgerald et al., 2002, p. 214).

16.4.1 Characteristic 7: Self-Study Communities Explore Teacher Education Reform

As new faculty in a department undergoing a significant program review, we were eager to transform a respected yet dated teacher education program. As team leaders for our disciplines, we recognized we were well positioned to reform teacher education at the classroom level. Yet we felt thwarted by resistance to change among senior faculty and sessional instructors from the field of teaching.

A session of the SSCoP was devoted to reviewing and critiquing the faculty retreat on teacher education. In our session the retreat's discussion was characterized as "definitely set, ... close ended and administrative in nature" (Gallagher et al., 2011, p. 886). Our stories of the retreat resonated as we related to "each other's struggles and triumphs as teacher educators and [felt] the conflicts together" (p. 886). This meeting featured sharing practices, particularly related to cohorts and practice teaching, and resolved many members to push for dramatic reform.

Studying teacher education practices through self-study enhanced our understanding of the intricacies of teacher education and promoted a community of practice within our faculty. Our work as teacher education reformers, however, would lead us to the initiative in a major overhaul of the program when the province extended the length of programs in Ontario (Kitchen & Sharma, 2017).

16.4.2 Characteristic 8: Self-Study Communities Move Toward the Future

Authentic conversation, in addition to contributing to the immediate personal and professional needs of the participants, "becomes a means for organizing ourselves for future action in our classrooms and schools" (Clark, 2001, p. 180). The SSCoP helped develop among us a sense of identity as scholars of teacher education, with many members studying their practice over the coming years. As our scholarly identities evolved, however, we each became increasingly involved in discourse communities related to our areas of specialization as teacher educators and scholars. This had the effect of dramatically increasing the research contributions of faculty, but largely outside of self-study. Others have been more successful in this regard. The University of Northern Iowa group, despite shifting membership over the years, continues to introduce. Anastasia Samaras at George Mason University continues to partner with colleagues internally and internationally. Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan, a long-time collaborator with Samaras, has developed a strong network of self-study practitioners in South Africa (e.g., Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2015). Even when a SSCoP had run its course, as was the case with the Arizona Group, key members continued to study their practice and contribute to the development of self-study (e.g., Pinnegar et al., 2020).

16.5 Self-Study Communities of Practice Today and Tomorrow

“While collaboration is a hallmark of S-STEP, more could be done to make this explicit in our scholarship,” wrote Kitchen and Berry (2019, p. 93). In addition to “including such terms in article titles and in the keywords that are critical to searching online databases” (p. 93), there is a need to distinguish among critical friendship, collaborative self-study, and larger communities of practice. This will be crucial as self-study becomes increasingly collaborative, and as collaborations become larger in scale.

First, the term self-study communities of practice is useful in understanding the dynamics in existing collaborations among self-study collectives of four or more teacher educators, such as the team surrounding Tim Fletcher and Déirdre Ní Chróinín. Fletcher and Ní Chróinín have established a substantive body of work as critical friends and collaborators in self-study and in physical education. While their “six-year collaboration with self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP) and critical friendship” began with a critical friendship between pen pals (Fletcher & Ní Chróinín, 2020), their work became increasingly collaborative and widened in scope to include multiple collaborators and co-authors, as well as a wider circle engaged in parallel work. They have written extensively with Mary O’Sullivan (e.g., Fletcher et al., 2016; Ní Chróinín et al., 2018), as well as a wider group of physical educators (e.g., Ní Chróinín et al., 2019). Their circle has widened to include other teacher educators who also explore dimensions of their practice through self-study. Notable examples of this are two recent articles in *Studying Teacher Education*. O’Dwyer and Bowles “acted as critical friends for each other” while Ní Chróinín served as an external critical friend (O’Dwyer et al., 2019). In O’Dwyer et al. (2020), O’Dwyer, an early career teacher educator, engages simultaneously in self-studies of science teaching and football coaching with critical friends. While the terms critical friendship and collaboration accurately convey the dynamics within individual studies, they do not capture the complexity and richness of the larger collaborative community that has developed around Ní Chróinín and Fletcher. Self-study community of practice is a term that more fully captures the complex and interconnected body of work being emerging from this productive collaborative cluster. It would also be interesting to learn more about how they navigate the standards and challenges identified by Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker. Indeed, they could probably offer deeper insights that would advance SSCoP research.

Second, and more importantly, the term is useful as a guide to emerging self-study collaborators and critical friends. One of the joys of being an editor of *Studying Teacher Education* is discovering new talent and interesting new work. One source of such joy was Appleget et al. (2020). This diverse team of four early career American teacher educators met at a national conference, at which they discovered a shared commitment to extending “culturally responsive pedagogies into [their] literacy methods courses” (p. 286). This led them to form a self-study as “a beneficial way for us to examine our teaching practices and exchange ideas with the support

of critical friends who were on the same journey” (p. 286). Their article makes an important contribution to self-study by introducing culturally proactive pedagogies and through their use of a critical friend collective as a means for accountability in social justice work. In editorial feedback to the authors, I wrote, “You could stress the significance of being a team of four. If I was looking at this at an earlier stage [before acceptance], I might have suggested framing yourselves as a ‘community of practice.’” I then drew their attention to SSCoP as an alternative framing that might better capture the complexities of working as a large collaborative unit. In their concluding thoughts, the authors touched upon the term and indicated an interest in studying their collaboration in relation to the SSCoP literature. Later, I drew the unpublished article to the attention of the editors of this volume, who offered them the opportunity to write a chapter on their work as a self-study community of practice. Appleget et al. (in this volume) draw on four standards to help frame their self-study on their journey as collaborators and critical friends. As this team continue to study their use of culturally proactive pedagogies, it will be interesting to see how they develop as a self-study community of practice. By sharing the story of their journey, they hope to “inspire other scholars to follow research paths using SSCoP.”

If self-study is to move from small-scale initiatives to a movement involving large numbers of teacher educators within institutions, nationally and internationally, more attention needs to be devoted to developing self-study communities of practice and critically inquiring into the work of these communities. Such communities, in addition to supporting existing self-study practitioners, could draw more teacher educators into self-study. Inquiry into practice on a larger scale could, in turn, lead to the further development and enactment of a pedagogy of teacher education (Russell & Loughran, 2007). The conception of SSCoP outlined in Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker (2009) can serve as a traveler’s guide to the journey.

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Chapter 17

Self-Study Communities of Practice: A Traveler's Guide for the Journey



Carin Appleget, Courtney Shimek, Joy Myers, and Breanya C. Hogue

Abstract This chapter describes the experience of four literacy teacher educators located at different universities across the United States as we embarked on our journey towards a self-study community of practice (SSCoP). Initially, we came together as a study group interested in researching the ways we were implementing culturally proactive pedagogies in our methods courses. Our research interests led to a community of practice and ultimately created a pathway to self-study. SSSCoP has become invaluable to us as teacher educators. In this chapter, we explain the theoretical foundations for our SSSCoP, share the story of our journey, and provide a travelogue of our experiences for others considering SSSCoP. Our hope is that our experiences and reflections will inspire other scholars to follow research paths using SSSCoP.

As authors of this chapter, we are pleased to share our recent journey in research as a self-study community of practice (SSCoP). We are four literacy teacher educators and researchers situated in different institutional contexts who came together to better understand how to incorporate culturally proactive pedagogies in our undergraduate literacy courses. Like Geursen et al. (2016), we have chosen “traveling together on a journey” as a metaphor for our work because it best represents “an important thread in connecting and cohering our collaborative learning experiences” (p. 157). When planning a trip, travelers often ask: How will we get there? How long will it take? What are the suggested routes? When the four of us began

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our work together we had these same questions. Our journey began in 2017 when we met at an annual conference for literacy research and formed a study group that we would become an SSCoP. Over the next 2 years we followed advice from fellow travelers, took a detour or two, and enjoyed unexpected scenic views. In this chapter, we explain the theoretical foundations for our SSCoP, share the story of our journey, and provide helpful tips for others considering SSCoP. Our hope is that our experiences and reflections will inspire other scholars to follow research paths using SSCoP.

17.1 Seeing the Path Others Have Taken

The path to SSCoP was traveled long before the four of us. The history of SSCoP has included the coming together of research methodologies and theories related to teacher education, teacher educator communities of practice, and the traditions of self-study. Which came first? Community of practice or self-study? We acknowledge that while answers to these questions writ large have been addressed in literature reviews (see Kitchen & Parker, 2009; Loughran, 2004), the reality is that when teacher educators begin research together their initial identities and aims may favor working as a community *or* engaging in self-study. Like others who have found themselves identifying as a SSCoP, these two traditions converged for us.

The four of us met when we attended the same Teacher Education Research Study Group (TERSG) session at the annual Literacy Research Association (LRA) conference in 2017. At the time, Joy was an assistant professor and Carin, Courtney and Breanya were all doctoral students. The year we met, Joy and Courtney were serving as TERSG leaders and Breanya and Carin were new to the group. While Joy and Courtney were already aware of the research and publishing potential of a TERSG, Breanya and Carin were surprised at how quickly they were welcomed and found themselves taking an active role in conceiving and planning a research study based on their shared interest in culturally responsive pedagogy for and with preservice teachers. We will discuss our TERSG later, but it is important to note that our identity as a community came early.

Wenger (1999) defined communities of practice as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (p. 1). He proposed that in *the community* “members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other” (p. 2). He further proposed that in *the practice* members “develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction” (p. 2). Wenger further recognized that communities of practice existed for many different purposes, were made up of various sizes, and were situated both locally and globally in various locations. In our work, we first identified ourselves as *a community of practice* because this label and definitions resonated with our desire to learn from one another, engage in a study of

literacy methods in our field of teacher preparation, and collaborate with teacher educators in other parts of the country.

Our community began at the conference and our first interactions were centered on exploring and designing practices we could implement as a way to learn collaboratively, support one another in changing practices, and document our successes and challenges. We met weekly after the conference to agree on our shared actions as a community of practice. We needed a methodology that would work with our community of practice and decided our research together would be best explored and documented if we engaged in self-study. Self-study has a strong history (Kitchen & Parker, 2009; Loughran, 2004) and is best defined by its purpose “to better understand the problematic worlds of teaching and learning have led to an increasing focus on their work so that researching their practice better informs them about their teaching and enhances their students’ learning (Loughran, 2004, p. 9). Self-study was a natural choice for us because it provided “a focal point for those pursuing a better knowledge of their particular practice setting and the work of those with a concern for teaching and learning in parallel fields” (p. 9). In our research together we wanted to challenge ourselves to model our teaching in ways we asked teacher candidates to teach. We wanted to do more than talk the talk, we wanted to walk the walk. Russell (1997) challenged teacher educators to do more than just walk the talk, however, “because the most powerful initial influence on each new teacher’s classroom practices may be the millions of images of teaching that go with them into the practice teaching setting” (p. 10). This is a long standing for teacher educators. We are in a constant state “of getting our practices to catch up to what we say and write, and to catch up to what we say we believe about teaching and learning (p. 11). It is also a matter of credibility. As Berry (2004) stated, teacher educators ask themselves, “How can I be credible to those learning to teach if I do not practice what I advocate for them?” (p. 1308).

Self-study methodology made sense for us. In their comparison of self-study methodology, narrative inquiry and autoethnography, Hamilton et al. (2008) described self-study as most useful “for educators looking to improve their practice, [because] self-study can prove helpful in raising the particular questions that drive educational change” (p. 26). Our next “aha moment” came when we discovered the work of Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker (2009) who “coined the term *self-study communities of practice* (SSCoP) to refer to groups of at least four members committed to working together to study their teacher education practices” (p. 108). This was us! We had been an SSCO P all along but did not have a name for it. We share our story of this convergence of identities because we want to reiterate that our novice understandings and experiences were very much a part of our journey. We hope in this chapter to reflect on the things we learned so others might benefit from our experience.

We were inspired by the journeys of self-study travelers before us. Tuval et al. (2011) formed their community of practice in response to a university mandate for the development of a teacher education program. They described their relationship as “a working relationship that has moved through operating as *staff*, then as *group*, and finally as *team*” (p. 201). Other stories of collaborative success included

university football team coaches engaged in self-study of their implementation of player-centered coaching pedagogy (O'Dwyer et al., 2019), doctoral students who used their doctoral seminar space to document the ways their scholarly identities evolved through self-study (Gregory et al., 2017), co-teachers at a single institution who examined their collaborative process of changing practices in their writing methods courses (Martin & Dismuke, 2015), and even polyvocal researchers engaged in shared drawings and found poetry to creatively invent an arts-based methodology for self-study across continents (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2016). Other examples of SSCoP (e.g., Branyon et al., 2016; Gallagher et al., 2011; Miller-Young et al., 2015), guided us because they emphasized the value of working as a community to overcome barriers and make sustainable changes in teacher education. We were grateful for the opportunity to learn from their journeys and now honored to add our story to the collection.

Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker (2009) acknowledged the lack of extant literature about groups of four more collaborators both within and across institutions and provided the following key features, or quality standards, as a guide: (1) establishing conditions for research, (2) creating educational knowledge, (3) recreating teacher education, and (4) the public discourse of communities of practice. Readers of this chapter will learn how we relied on these four features throughout our journey.

17.2 Our Journey

We discovered that one common thread in collaborative or community research based on self-study methodology is an origin story. Where did it all begin? How did we meet? Who are we and why are we working together? Because engaging in self-study requires a sense of vulnerability and a willingness to take turns in leading and following, the relationships formed are part of the story. When self-study collaborators are successful in bringing their work all the way through to the publishing stage there is often a universal feeling of “we did it” and a reflective look back at how it all began. When the four of us met in December 2017 at the Literacy Research Association conference, little did we know our journey would continue through two doctoral dissertations and graduations (Carin and Courtney), a doctoral candidacy (Breanya), to three new universities (Carin, Courtney and Breanya have each moved into tenure-track positions at new institutions), and a pandemic. We feel privileged to share our journey as SSCoP research colleagues and friends.

17.2.1 Establishing Conditions for Research: Our SSCoP Is Formed

The first key feature recommended by Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker (2009) was to establish conditions for research. They acknowledged these conditions may be unique to each SSCoP. Looking back, we recognize our conditions for research were part of how and why we met. As previously mentioned, we met at the LRA conference in 2017. When the larger Teacher Education Research Study Group convened on the first day, we joined the same professional learning group, or subgroup. In the beginning, we were guided by the conditions for research already outlined in the aims of TERSG.

TERSG began in 1991 and has a strong history of promoting and supporting literacy teacher educators striving to conduct and share research about effective literacy teacher education. For almost three decades, TERSG has provided the attendees of LRA each year to connect with literacy scholars with similar research interests during the lunch hour study group sessions at the conference. The daily professional learning groups followed a pattern that has evolved over the years.

During Session 1, members review questions/topics from the previous year and share issues or topics they want to discuss and divide into smaller professional learning groups based on these topics of interest. In Session 2, members return to the Session 1 topics and small groups begin to conceptualize how they might design research projects together to conduct once the conference ends. Finally, in Session 3, members extend the established collaborations from the first 2 days of the conference and complete an actionable research plan. In these plans, members make timelines and set goals to extend their collaborations beyond the conference to organize/refine research projects, conduct planned research, draft conference proposals, and publish findings.

During Session 1, one of the professional learning groups was formed around the topic of embedding culturally proactive pedagogies (CPP) into literacy methods. The four of us, along with several other TERSG members, focused on this topic during the daily study group sessions and by the third day we had a broad research question, a list of ideas for changing our pedagogies in the spring semester, and a data collection plan in place. There was still a lot of work to do, but our conditions were established and our journey was about to begin.

17.2.2 Creating Educational Knowledge: Our SSCoP Travel Begins

It can be difficult to sustain the energy and personal commitment to change that are a part of the conference or professional development experience, but our TERSG group left LRA with a vision and a plan to continue our work together. In our experience, having newfound travel partners increased our commitment and

accountability. Our next step was to review and confirm a foundation of scholarly literature that matched our research questions and plan our research methods. According to Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker (2009),

At the heart of self-study as a research methodology is the creation of knowledge that can improve teacher education practices. Research on self-study communities of practice should illustrate how collaborative efforts to understandings about teacher education as practiced in our classroom contexts. (p. 111)

Like many teacher educators, our efforts to prepare teacher candidates with culturally responsive practices were often followed by uncertainty about how to systematically examine the content we taught and the ways we taught it (Cutri & Whiting, 2015; Gort & Glenn, 2010). Our research was founded on theories of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010) and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2014) to support teacher educators in their mission to understand and address the challenge to teach and model culturally proactive pedagogies (CPP) in their university classrooms. We embraced the term CPP because it more clearly highlighted the need for teacher educators to be proactive, as opposed to simply responsive, when planning for instruction (Appleget et al., 2020).

17.2.3 Recreating Teacher Education: Pedagogy and Process

In our research, recreating teacher education involved deep conversations about theory and practice. It meant constant reflection on what was working and what was not. We planned learning events that each of us would enact in our literacy methods courses and then accepted our roles as critical friends when we shared our experiences. We have previously published work about our pedagogical journeys as teacher educators (see Appleget et al., 2020; Hogue et al., 2020). Our goal here is to focus on *how* we used SSCoP to keep us connected and on track. In our experience, recreating teacher education meant creating spaces to talk, collecting and analyzing data, and using the methodology of SSCoP as a vehicle to document our pedagogical changes along the way so others might learn from our process as well as our published work. For us, the details of our process seemed as important to us as the final results of our research.

17.3 Our Process

Whether we were at a large institution with multiple colleagues in education, or at a smaller institution with just a few in our field, our SSCoP offered a safe space to vent, critique and celebrate our teaching. As junior and emerging scholars it was important to have one another's support as we created the research questions, thought through data collection and planned joint assignments. Our varied past

experiences and backgrounds allowed us to gain insight and knowledge from one another. We decided early on to record our meetings via Zoom and later had these transcribed and included as data. Reflection was central to the success of this group because we were working to improve our practice while meeting the needs of our students. The nature of the topic, CPP, that brought us together, was not an easy one to discuss and at times we had to be vulnerable as we reflected on our bias and identities as Black and White women as well as our struggles with teacher candidates who sometimes responded and/or pushed back in unexpected ways. We found that SSCoP was especially suited for communities exploring uncomfortable or challenging topics and recording our Zoom meetings was an effective way to capture these conversations. We were able to discuss our concerns and document them at the same time.

In addition to our recorded Zoom meetings, we made sure as a group to establish regular times for written reflections. As part of our research design, our group established a series of readings and assignments for our preservice teachers to reflect upon in our courses. We decided to complete these readings and assignments alongside our students and included our reflections in our data collection. We think it is important to emphasize how valuable working as a SSCoP can be to increase accountability, extend and deepen data collection, and address unforeseen challenges. As evidenced in reflections collected during research, we depended on one another not only in academic endeavors, but for moral support. Here is an example of a written reflection from Carin when classroom conversations about CPP with her preservice teachers was challenging:

I think that having awkward conversations, challenging norms, asking students to think twice about the dominant narratives in stories and in society is my job! I have to start with me... I let them know there is a level of unconscious bias that is ALWAYS there and must be confronted...

Later, when we were discussing the hard parts of our semester Carin acknowledged how valuable working as a SSCoP had been. We wrote, "She believed that being a part of the self-study gave her the confidence to include herself as a learner with her students and see the benefits of sharing in the vulnerability she was asking her students to embrace as well. Her colleagues were a source of accountability and support" (Appleget et al., 2020, p. 294).

Likewise, Courtney expressed her appreciation for the advice and support that comes with engaging in SSCoP. After one of our monthly meetings when she shared her discomfort with enacting new CPP pedagogy, Courtney realized that

other teacher educators have these feelings, too, which made her feel less alone. In particular, Breanya's reflections on being more open about her past teaching experiences with her PSTs inspired Courtney to share some of her own stories. Although this did not remove Courtney's feeling of unease, it made her realize that these concerns are a part of teaching process and she was more willing to embrace those feelings after hearing the perspectives of her colleagues. (Appleget et al., 2020, p. 297)

Along with moral support, our CoP also offered a renewal of energy and motivation each time we met. We looked forward to our Zoom meetings and the push they provided to keep our research journey moving forward in a timely manner.

Another way we stayed motivated as an SSCoP was taking advantage of conference deadline. We intentionally collected a large amount of data and then strategically focused on three particular parts of the data (e.g., students' perspectives, faculty perspectives, and our self-study journey). First, we developed a conference proposal, then we shifted our focus to analyzing the data for that proposal and we drafted the paper to present at the conference. After the presentation, we took the feedback provided by discussants and participants and refined the papers for publication. This cycle continued for each of the three foci. Needless to say, our reunions at conferences were a highlight in our collaboration. As a community we divided up the work of preparing and delivering conference presentations without much stress. We designed our slide presentations asynchronously using Google Slides and then split the presentation into equal parts. We encourage others to think through the ways work is shared, but in our experience, we naturally fell into roles and responsibilities. There was a lot of, "I feel comfortable with What would others like to do?"

When it was time to analyze our data, we considered as a group what technologies we had access to at our respective institutions and what would work best for the group. Some members of our group had to explore new technologies, so we worked with one another to help each other navigate those challenges. For example, we realized that we all preferred different kinds of qualitative software and that our institutions did not have access to programs that spoke to one another. We decided that purchasing a month to month subscription to Dedoose would be our best option because it was cloud-based so we could collaborate without restrictions, very reasonably priced (three of us qualified for student pricing at the time) and offered a user-friendly, intuitive interface. Carin taught herself Dedoose and created a screencast for the group so we could complete our analysis. To this day, Courtney and other team members refer back to Carin's screencast when they need to operate Dedoose and we have sent this screencast to other groups that engage in similar communities of practice. This was just one of the fringe benefits of our learning as a community that we attribute to our positive experience with SSCoP.

Through our process and commitment to recreating teacher education practices within and across our classrooms, we found it important to establish inter-rater reliability to demonstrate rigor and coding consistency between us. We began our analysis process by open coding as a whole group one piece of data together. As we went through the process of open coding, we discussed at what level we wanted to code and created a codebook inclusive of all codes with agreed upon definitions. Although this was time-consuming, it became invaluable when we began coding our data individually. Later, once all of the data was coded by us as individuals, we established procedures for coding one other's data, which established reliability. Throughout this recursive and iterative process, we continued to meet frequently and discuss problems, questions, and other concerns that inevitably arose during the

research process. Once data was collected and analyzed we began the final stage of our journey - sharing what we learned.

17.3.1 Public Discourse of Communities of Practice: Scholarship and Leadership

Finally, the opportunity for public discourse of communities of practice centered itself as the final destination. Again, we refer back to Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker (2009) and their positioning of this key feature as a final measure of quality in SSCoP work.

Improving one's teaching and contributing to teacher education reform in our institutions are reasons enough for teacher educators to engage in self-study communities of practice. The need to improve teacher education on a larger scale, however, means that self-study communities can contribute to the public discourse of self-study. (p. 110)

A significant benefit of working as a SSCoP was that it enhanced our productivity and ability to share our research more widely. We became more meaningfully immersed in public discourse about SSCoP because we talked about it with one another all the time. Our conversations and scholarly work demanded a continued discourse about what was working and this pushed us forward into conversations with other scholars either directly or through deeper reading of their work.

We believe our opportunities for public discourse in the field of SSCoP was also extended because of our commitment to taking turns in leadership within the group. Joy joined a TERSG when she was a doctoral student, so she tried to remember the support experienced group members had given her and tried to replicate those actions when working with Carin, Courtney and Breanya. The mentorship opportunities continued as each group member developed their confidence and moved into new positions throughout the study and process of writing the manuscripts. For example, Joy became a department head, Carin and Courtney finished and successfully defended their dissertations and secured tenure track positions, and Breanya continued to work on her dissertation proposal while also applying and accepting a visiting assistant professor position. In the midst of these changes, we published two articles, wrote this chapter, and had a third article under review. The public discourse of our community extended beyond our conference presentation into new teaching and job spaces as well as into our published work.

17.4 A Travelogue of Tips

Looking back on our journey, our favorite memories have been our conference presentations, the virtual meetings that were a welcome distraction from institutional obligations, and the moments that moved us from research colleagues to friends. We

value the ways SSCoP supported our work across unique contexts and valued the ideologies, pedagogies and personalities of each of us individually and as a community. Replication is not a goal of SSCoP because each community has its own conditions, context, knowledge and style of discourse, but we suggest there are generalizable ways of working together that we offer as tips for those new to the SSCoP journey. What follows is our travelogue which includes ways to find your community of practice travel companions, how to use technological tools to stay connected and analyze data, and to strategies for building upon the strengths of your members. We offer our lessons learned not as a map to follow, but as friendly advice other SSCoP's might keep in mind as they embark upon their own journeys.

17.4.1 Details and Destinations: Who's Coming? Where Are We Going?

One of the first steps in forming an SSCoP is identifying your community. Who will you travel with? Where are you going? As you learned in our journey, the community came to us because it was supported by the framework of study groups at our national conference. It is not uncommon for national or regional conferences to provide this sort of opportunity and we enthusiastically encourage others to seek out avenues of collaboration already in place in your field of study and scholarship. This is especially valuable as a way to form a community that includes persons across geographic locations and may allow for a more diverse collection of voices and viewpoints, but you may find similar success by reaching out to colleagues in your department, in other disciplines at your institution, or colleagues in your field outside of your institution. Joining in social media conversations is also a way to expand connections and to provide a rich source of research potential.

The format of TERSG, within the LRA conference, allowed us to cover a lot of groundwork in just a few days. Others may find this three-session plan as a valuable model to launch a new SSCoP, even outside a conference setting. We suggest using the general TERSG agenda items as points for a series of meetings via Zoom or in person to brainstorm and identify research goals (see [Appendix](#)). Ultimately, there is not a single way for a SSCoP to form, establish guidelines, or engage in scholarly work. The key is to explore shared interests, consider goals of group members, and then be explicit about the intended path. We suggest making the size of the SSCoP large enough so that it can sustain some attrition. Life happens and there may be members who need to leave the group or take on smaller roles as time passes. Sometimes as the research focus and design details become clearer there may be those in the group who change their mind about participating. There should be open dialogue about the direction the research will go and opportunities for members to make their final commitment after the details are discussed.

17.4.2 Taking Turns at the Wheel: Meetings and Building on Member Strengths

Every journey inevitably requires pit stops, snack breaks, and fuel to keep the vehicle moving. In our SSCoP, our meetings were the pit stops to check in with one another and refuel for the next leg of the journey. Although each of our meetings looked different, we found they went through the same general routine. This cycle was flexible but it ensured that the group set regular goals, met consistently, and established new goals to be accomplished by a specific time and date, which forced our group to move forward in the research process. Depending on where we were in our research process, we established how frequently we wanted to meet. For example, during data collection we met once a month to check in and see how things were going, however, during data analysis and the writing of our findings we met on a bi-weekly or weekly basis, depending on our deadlines.

We attributed part of our successful scholarship to our organic approach to leadership. We took turns so each of our voices could be heard. Due to group size, it is likely that a SSCoP will have several projects going on at once, so the group may be writing a manuscript, analyzing data for another research focus, and getting ready to submit a conference proposal all at the same time. Members will need to take on tasks they feel comfortable with and work with other obligations. Communication about personal expectations and setting realistic goals as a group is essential.

We relied on our meetings to discuss questions, share challenges, analyze data, bring literature sources, set deadlines, and/or propose new opportunities for the group's research efforts. We wrote down individual responsibilities and tasks on a shared document that was easy to access so that we could refer back to it often. Lastly, we agreed on the next meeting times and set calendar reminders. We found that sometimes we were so engaged in our conversations during meetings that our notes were not complete. Our solution was to save our discourse by recording our Zoom meetings. As mentioned earlier, this became a data source and was also key to tracking our experience as an SSCoP. We strongly recommend new groups do the same so your process can be shared in the field of SSCoP.

When we began our scholarly writing, we divided our scholarship efforts so each of us could take the lead on a different project. When a colleague's project was progressing, they led the corresponding meetings. Their job was to oversee the work being done, present progress and next steps, and keep the work moving forward in a timely manner. The leader of the project also created an agenda for the meeting in a shared document that established goals, provided points of discussion, and presented items the group needed to resolve. In sharing these responsibilities, we distributed the workload more evenly between us, we dedicated ourselves to projects that fit their current career and life situations, and ultimately, we accomplished more together. Each member of our SSCoP brought different strengths to the group and we capitalized on the ways our competencies and experiences complimented one another.

17.4.3 Are We There Yet? Scholarly Work and Publishing

Although our suggestions may seem neat and tidy, anyone who has written multiple papers at one time, even with the same data set, knows this is not the case. What made our SSCoP truly sustainable was rotating the leadership of preparing conference presentations and manuscripts. This also allowed each group member to be first author, which mattered at some institutions. Rotating the leadership allowed members to experience organizing the group, setting meetings, and deadlines, which led to each of us being better group members in general. We each had different styles of leadership, however, knowing up front who was the leader of each paper reduced confusion and contributed to the overall productivity of the group. We suggest taking the time to notice and name member strengths and to determine early on who will be lead author and the order of other authors for each focus area. This goes a long way toward avoiding awkward conversations about authorship later. Our original goal was to improve our individual practices as teacher educators, but we also wanted to provide insights to others about ways they might engage in the process of SSCoP, and our journey culminated with contributions to both teacher education and SSCoP.

17.5 Final Thoughts

For us, there were many benefits in choosing SSCoP as a vehicle for our journey. We were able to develop lasting personal relationships with one another, grow as teacher educators, and contribute scholarly work to our field. In working together for nearly 3 years, we experienced one other's joys, shared some sorrows, and celebrated professional successes. Our SSCoP provided opportunities for those of us who were novice scholars to learn first-hand a methodology that bridges practice and scholarship in ways we will continue to draw upon for future research. More importantly, working as a SSCoP reinforced our ability to reflect upon our teaching, examine our own and each other's biases, and made us more confident and culturally proactive educators. Whatever bumps in the roads we experienced, we found solace in having each other to lean on and seek advice.

The benefits we experienced as a SSCoP are clearly outlined in this chapter. Much of our journey was navigated without a compass due to our lack of experience with this methodology. Although self-study is an established field within teacher education, even having several Handbooks, it was not something we learned about in our teacher education doctoral programs which we all graduated from, or will, within the last 6 years. Furthermore, self-study has a strong presence and support at national conferences such as the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) yet until we began looking for outlets to present and publish our work, we had no idea.

However, this did not hold us back, and we hope it does not discourage others. In fact, often a lack of expertise can sometimes result in unforeseen opportunities. For

example, as a result of our work we were asked to write this chapter and Joy has accepted a role as co-chair of a self-study SIG at ATE. We enthusiastically encourage others who are passionate about supporting professional learning through self-study to engage in SSCoP with our travel tips to enhance the quality and experience of the journey.

Appendix: Example of Study Planning Form

You may opt to use this form for brainstorming and planning. Feel free to modify it to help you map out the proposed collaborative study.

- Map out the study.
- Decide which group member(s) will be responsible in the various tasks.

Team members (names & email addresses):

Study organizer(s) (The organizer(s) will coordinate group members and tasks to move the study forward):

Plan for future collaboration (What technologies will you use, when will you meet, how frequently will your group plan to meet?):

Project title:

Purpose of the study:

Rationale:

Ideas for theoretical framework(s):

Methodology:

Proposed participants & setting(s) (including recruitment):

Data sources (including duration, time line, etc.):

Data analysis ideas (time frame & collaboration ideas for coding, such as Google Hangout):

Projected timeline (including IRB process):

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Chapter 18

The Power of Autobiography in Building a Self-Study Community of Practice



Angela Branyon, Mark M. Diacopoulos, Kristen H. Gregory,
and Brandon M. Butler 

Abstract Using self-study methodology, four teacher-educators describe how trust was built within a self-study community of practice (SSCoP) by sharing educational autobiographies and engaging in critical exploration. We collected the following data during a doctoral seminar: course documents, student work with instructor feedback, reflection-on-action instructor posts, and transcribed audio recordings of course sessions. Analyzing multiple data sources provided insight into how the SSCoP was created and sustained, how each of us grew in our commitment to the community, and how sharing our autobiographies strengthened our group. We identified three overarching themes: using the past to create community, using the present to establish community, and using the future to maintain community. In the following narrative, we describe how our sharing of autobiographies strengthened our SSCoP during all three stages. This experience led us to confirm, question, unpack, and reconsider our educational beliefs, values, and practices.

Self-study as research method brings together many aspects of qualitative research, such as action research, narrative inquiry, and autoethnography (Tidwell & Jónsdóttir, 2020) to examine the formation of teacher educator identity and reflect upon and share that examination with other educators (Ritter & Hayler, 2020). Self-study research focuses on the complexities of professional practice forcing us to

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examine the certainties and uncertainties, beliefs and doubts, and satisfactions and frustrations integral to teaching (Pinnegar et al., 2020; Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015). Because self-study is a collaborative methodology (e.g., Bodone et al., 2004) communities of practice (CoP) are often used within it. Self-study communities of practice (SSCoP) are normally composed of four or more members who come together to explore their teaching practice and redefine their identity as teachers and teacher educators (Loughran, 2007). Building trust within SSCoPs promotes openness and sharing among members (Schuck & Russell, 2005). In this chapter, four teacher educators (Angela, Mark, Kristen, and Brandon) describe how trust can be built by becoming vulnerable within the group. We describe our experiences in creating an SSCoP within a doctoral seminar space where we shared our educational autobiographies.

18.1 Using Autobiography to Create Self-Study Communities of Practice

According to Kitchen and Ciuffetelli-Parker (2009), “Conversation, collaboration, and community can have a powerful impact on teachers’ confidence, capacity for professional growth, and willingness to share their practices with others” (p. 107). One avenue for developing an SSCoP occurs through writing and sharing a critical incident autobiography (Ritter & Quiñones, 2020). The autobiography should explore the experiences that led to teaching and/or teacher education, record moments when one realizes what teaching really involves, and follow the story into the complexity of teaching (Hughes, 2009; Nespor & Barylske, 1991). Knowledge creation and individual learning happen when people combine and exchange personal knowledge with others (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). When telling a story, we reassess our lives, and when listening to other people tell their stories, we acquire ingredients for personal growth (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Stories create shared experiences linking us to the storyline and the characters within the story, but more importantly to the human condition (Kane, 2019). It is through an examination of these stories/incidents that shaped us and our choices that we realize who we are as individuals, as teachers, and as teacher educators.

Sharing autobiography is valuable in understanding the transition from teacher-to-teacher educator. By studying the past we can understand the present and begin to reframe our perceptions of the future. When utilizing an autobiographical approach to understanding practice, educators must ask themselves from where their teaching philosophy evolved. According to Butler et al. (2014), “There is evidence that personal and professional biography directly influence...the reasons why classroom teachers enter teacher education...and how they perceive their identities” (p. 257). The sharing of autobiography becomes an experience which alters the perception of personal and professional identities and informs the development of SSCoPs. Creating communities where members first share autobiographies can lead

to increased trust and security within the community (Kosnik et al., 2006). Autobiography provides a basis for conversations where critical incidents lay the foundation for critical pedagogy and connections to practice (Samaras et al., 2007). Loughran (2007) notes that,

Framing and reframing are important to reflection for they have to do with coming to see a situation, being able to define it, to describe and account for its features, then to be able to view the situation from different perspectives. (p. 96)

The intentional practice of reflecting on each other's autobiographies and critical incidents can lead to a deeper understanding of one's practice.

18.1.1 Autobiography and Self-Study in Teacher Education

In our doctoral program, students are typically practicing educators preparing to transition to the role of teacher educators. These past experiences form the basis of their practice as developing teacher educators by using autobiographies to make connections between past and present professional experiences (Shields, 2019). Teacher educators attain insights concerning the uses and contributions of critical autobiographies as a paradigm of research and practice (Walker, 2017). From this perspective, the reflexivity of using autobiography for teaching and learning is examined and situated within transforming identities. Bailey et al. (1996) note that autobiographical inquiry helps teacher educators rediscover memories, develop new perspectives on teaching, discover reasons behind personal belief systems, and form new belief systems.

Teacher educators have used autobiography in self-study research to specifically investigate teaching practice (e.g., Bashiruddin, 2006; Pereira, 2005), clinical practice (e.g., Butler & Diacopoulos, 2016), research practice (e.g., Gregory et al., 2017; Strong-Wilson, 2006), and critical stances of practice (e.g., Coia & Taylor, 2013; Ragoonaden, 2015). In these studies, educators shared, unpacked, and/or critically reflected upon personal narratives to deeply investigate their practices. This process helped them identify and make sense of autobiographical themes to impact future practice. Further, when teacher educators model the sharing of autobiographical experiences and tensions with their education students, they can have “an impact on the way the teachers talk about their teaching and promises to change how they teach” (Pereira, 2005, p. 69).

Self-study blends elements of biography and history in the context of teacher education (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Teacher educators can examine incidents in their lives that shaped their teaching and then set them in context within a particular time and place (Hamilton, 1998). In this study, we focused on the following research question: How did the sharing of autobiography help develop a viable, effective, and sustained SSCoP for emerging teacher educators? To do so, we began by writing and sharing our autobiographies to examine our teaching experiences

and personal histories. Making those ideas and values public allowed us to examine and challenge them for the what, why, and how of our own pedagogical actions.

18.2 Methods

The purpose of self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP) is to seek improvement in teacher education practice by examining one's development (e.g. Dinkelman, 2003; LaBoskey, 2004; Zeichner, 2005) and analyzing one's practices (Kitchen, 2010; Loughran, 2007; Zeichner, 2005). However, we remain mindful that self-study in and of itself is a process, not a product (LaBoskey, 2004). Brookfield (2017) suggested four lenses to critically examine and develop one's practice: self, colleagues, students, and professional literature. We shared our autobiographies in an SSCoP to reflect through each of these four lenses.

For us, it was possible to purposefully direct our professional development through the conscious self-examination of our actions (Samaras, 2002). By sharing journals, reflections-on-action, and critical autobiographies, we elicited feedback on our practices from colleagues in our SSCoP. This collaboration was imperative as we learned from each other throughout self-study. As a search for meaning, self-study afforded opportunities to connect research to practice (Dinkelman, 2003; Loughran, 2007). This experience led us to confirm, question, unpack, and reconsider our beliefs, values, and practices.

18.3 Context

Our self-study focused on the use of autobiography in building and sustaining an SSCoP of future teacher educators (Bodone et al., 2004; Kitchen & Ciuffetelli-Parker, 2009). Angela, Mark, and Kristen were enrolled in Pedagogy of Teacher Education (PTE), a six-week doctoral seminar on teacher education pedagogy and self-study research led by Brandon in Summer 2015. We met for three-hour sessions twice a week. In our first session, Brandon invited us to participate in a self-study situated within our course.

Angela, a first year, full-time doctoral student in library science had approximately 40 years' experience as an educator. Mark, a third year, full-time doctoral student in social studies education had approximately 20 years' experience as a social studies educator and technology specialist. Kristen, a second-year, part-time doctoral student in literacy education had approximately 15 years' experience as a literacy educator and administrator. Brandon, an assistant professor of social studies education at the time, had taught the seminar previously (see Butler, 2014; Butler et al., 2014). In both seminars, he assigned an educational autobiography due before the first session. However, in this iteration, he did so with the intent of strengthening

the group's sense of community early in the seminar. We did not have a history from previous courses or research, and none of us had used autobiography in the past.

18.3.1 Data Collection and Analysis

To better understand how writing, sharing, and reflecting upon our autobiographies impacted our experience in an SSCoP, we collected the following data: course documents (course syllabus, assignment directions, and planned in-class activities), student work with instructor feedback (initial and revised educational autobiographies, written critical summaries of course readings, and student weekly journals), reflection-on-action instructor posts with student responses focused on Brandon's pedagogical decision-making throughout the course, and transcribed audio recordings of course sessions.

Our initial session focused on sharing and unpacking our autobiographies. Based on Bullough and Gitlin's (2001) work, the assignment directions were as follows:

Write an "education-related" life history, a story of how you have come to teacher education. Describe how you came to your current decision to become a teacher educator. Identify important people or "critical incidents" (Measor, 1985) that significantly influenced your decision and your thinking about the aims of education, about the proper role of teachers, and about yourself as teacher and teacher educator. Consider your "experience of school," how school felt, and how you best learned and when you felt most valued, connected, and at peace – or least valued, most disconnected, and most at war with yourself and with school.

By beginning with our autobiographies, we focused on our development as educators and the key moments that influenced our journeys in becoming teacher educators. Brandon felt that examining our interpretation of our professional and personal development would help us make meaning of our current practices (Kitchen, 2010; Samaras et al., 2007; Taylor & Coia, 2009). He also hoped that examining student work, seminar work products, transcriptions of course sessions, and our weekly journals could reveal "insights in the moment" that arose as we went through the self-study process (East et al., 2010).

Practitioners can realize potential for personal reflection when they engage in rigorous analysis (Kitchen, 2010). With this in mind, we collected over 80 pieces of data and stored them in a shared digital drive. Brandon's reflection-on-action posts and student responses totaled 27,798 words. Students wrote 43 journal entries with 18,447 words. Approximately 36 h of seminar conversation were recorded and transcribed. As we participated in the course, and following the course's conclusion, we conducted a constant comparative analysis of data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). We collaboratively coded the first few data sets to identify a coding protocol. We individually, then collaboratively, coded documents to identify common patterns and themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). After identifying a set of initial codes, we engaged in a series of collaborative discussions to derive focused codes. This was an iterative process of comparing our initial and focused codes over multiple sessions to verify consistency.

We then returned to the literature to corroborate our approach and to seek insight into how our past informs present and future practice (Charmaz, 2014; Coia & Taylor, 2009). We identified the focused codes, noted repeating themes across those focused codes, and condensed the repeating themes to three main themes with several subthemes. We revisited all data sources to confirm the applicability of themes and subthemes. In analyzing the data, we noticed that journals provided an opportunity for individual reflection on class discussions and provided the foundation for future class discussion. Thus, we have supported the findings with quotes from our journals.

18.4 Creating a Self-Study Community of Practice

The PTE seminar afforded the opportunity to develop and participate in an SSCoP that emanated from the pre-class assignment: writing and sharing an educational autobiography. From reading the autobiographies, we gained knowledge of our classmates, and it became apparent from the course outline and first class discussion that there was a connection between our autobiographies and developing an SSCoP. The sharing, and subsequent unpacking, of our autobiographies provided the foundation upon which our SSCoP was built. Analyzing multiple data sources provided insight into how the SSCoP was created and sustained, how each of us grew in our commitment to the community, and how sharing our autobiographies strengthened our community. We identified three overarching themes: using the past to create community, using the present to establish community, and using the future to maintain community. In the following narrative, we describe how our sharing of autobiographies strengthened our SSCoP during all three stages.

18.4.1 Using the Past to Create Community

Sharing in-depth autobiographies before the course provided a jump-start to building community in a private, safe environment. We focused the first class session on unpacking key elements of our autobiographies utilizing a critical incident protocol (National School Reform Faculty, 2007). We noticed our immediate connection to this activity. Mark noted, “The autobiographies let some layers of protection be dropped so that we were able to create an open space for dialogue.” Sharing autobiographies and evaluating critical incidents exposed our personalities, teaching experiences, and developing identities in a protected environment.

Additionally, the assignment laid the groundwork for developing our SSCoP. Mark added, “We’ve got some value if we look at how we use the protocol to open up the discussion and break down barriers. Autobiographies are a great way to go forward. Studying and sharing them is a good starting point.” We each chose one critical incident from our autobiography to share and discuss during the initial

class session. We then individually created and asked clarifying questions about each incident and raised further questions about what the incident might mean, leading each of us to examine our histories within a professional caring context.

As the sense of community grew, so did the trust we placed in each other to become vulnerable about our practices, open to critical input, and eager to collaborate. Angela wrote, “My feelings about teaching, my triumphs and low points have been just that...mine. It will be interesting to see if and how sharing our autobiographies affects the building of our community.” The experience of trusting our colleagues to become collaborators in our professional and personal growth as educators was echoed by Kristen when she wrote:

I was really pleased how the first night went. My nervousness about feeling connected to my classmates dissipated as we got to know each other and talked about our journeys. I feel we let our guards down some as we talked. We understand that it is necessary to do so to complete the self-study and grow together as future teacher educators.

By applying the critical incident protocol to our autobiographies, we immediately felt connected through reading and unpacking important parts of our stories. In sharing our stories, we displayed our vulnerabilities from which a common sense of trust and purpose was built. We understood that it was necessary to build this trust and in doing so we created a forum to safely share our experiences and learn from one another. This became a vital component of our approach to self-study. We were starting to understand that teachers make sense of themselves by stressing the importance of relating the personal with the professional realm, as well as teaching and learning in the everlasting quest for self-understanding (Serna, 2005).

18.5 Using the Present to Establish Community

As we established relationships based on our autobiographies, we strengthened our community by sharing and reflecting upon individual and collective work. Angela wrote:

...the real conversations occur when I see you in the classroom, see your expression immediately, and know how we are communicating. Part of my practice is not just to role model building relationships, but to actually build them. Isn't that the way collaboration has to begin?

Angela expressed how essential it was for her to build relationships with the group during class sessions, and discussing and reflecting as a group was powerful in establishing community.

As conversations continued, we became familiar with each other's professional needs, which created the context for even more authentic communication. We provided honest critique of one another's practice, and we felt ready to reframe our identities as emerging teacher educators in the context of our experiences. Mark explained his thoughts:

We gain insight into each other's professional tensions and developments, which is affirming as it shows that I am not alone...We are able to ask good questions of each other that make me think. I also appreciate the level of support...They are there to help me improve.

Mark acknowledged the group's support as they unpacked and reframed his developing identity.

Further, Kristen noted that we opened up more than she would have ever imagined, enabling her to share some things she might not have if the group had not built these relationships. She appreciated the feedback from the others and was grateful for the opportunity to reflect upon her own practice through their lenses. Crucially she observed that, "I didn't feel threatened in that process, but almost relieved that it was okay to bring those issues out. I am excited to continue down this path with Mark and Angela."

As we continued to meet, we further examined our practices through authentic conversations, written contributions, and professional and personal support. We developed relationships among ourselves, our work, and our identities. We attributed this growth to the connections established through the autobiography assignment and subsequent discussions. Kristen was particularly positive about how we worked together as a community. She credited that as a reason to

...let go and put myself out here more than I thought I would. I know that as I continue to get used to the process and the feeling of being vulnerable, I will grow not only in my ability to conduct self-study research but also in my practice.

Each of us agreed that it was the feelings of safety provided by the community that allowed us to reveal both our successes, assurances, and certainties, and our failures, insecurities, and doubts about our practices. This safety grew from the professional and personal security we felt within the group structure.

Another unexpected product of our SSCoP was the sense of responsibility we felt for each other. Because we committed to collaboratively analyze data, we felt compelled to come prepared; otherwise, the entire project would stall. Kristen wrote:

There was an added layer this time [in class] however, as I felt an obligation to Brandon, Angela, and Mark to be present for data. We have committed to this class and this self-study, and I hated the thought that I wasn't pulling my weight.

Mark, in addition to taking the class, was also working on his comprehensive exam and editing articles for submission. He expressed his concern about the responsibility of being in a community by stating, "As well as the support and critique, there is a negative aspect to a community of practice: the pressure to perform and bring my 'A' game. When I don't, then I am letting the team down." Mark's sharing and unpacking of his concerns led us to realize that we each experienced the same sense of pressure. In this moment, our community was further strengthened. Through this process, we stepped out of our individual comfort zones into a caring and supportive SSCoP where we could safely and honestly investigate our developing teacher educator identities.

18.6 Using the Future to Maintain Community

Toward the end of the seminar, we realized our investment in an SSCoP was an important aspect of our journey through the doctoral program. This caused us to examine other relationships outside our CoP. Mark reflected:

In such a short period of time we have developed a trusting, comfortable community, learned a research approach, participated in a research project that required complete buy-in and trust among the participants, and identified valuable feelings...our findings will not only inform our future practice, but will provide a point of reference for future doctoral students in their transition from teacher-to-teacher educator.

Through class discussions, our sense of responsibility to future doctoral students grew. We discussed how we might include other doctoral students in future spaces to discuss professional growth with colleagues. For us, the transformation of identity from teacher-to-teacher educator did not have to be solitary. This prompted Kristen to question her practice by asking,

How often have I kept my curtains drawn to protect myself? What has it taken for me to open those curtains and let my peers see into my mind? I am a confident person, but am I confident enough to allow my students and peers to see me vulnerable?

Kristen realized she may have to change her willingness to be vulnerable and trust her peers. This lesson, coupled with our SSCoP's realization that sharing of our autobiographies built community, led us to brainstorm how we could improve our personal and professional interactions with colleagues. Reflecting critically on our practices confirmed that we needed others during the journey to become teacher educators.

In our last session, we discussed how we might support and refine our developing practice as emerging teacher educators. Further, we each identified future self-study topics to investigate. For instance, Mark wanted to further explore the question of his changing professional identity, "Am I an emerging scholar? Or am I still punching above my weight? When will I feel like I am a scholar? Will that ever happen?"

For Angela, the course ended with her continued exploration of vulnerability as an ingredient to building trust. She compared her own vulnerabilities to Mark's questioning of his professional identity. "I don't want it to be discovered that I don't belong here either." Angela, however, also reflected on the affirmation that participation in the seminar brought her:

I realize the importance of collaboration and having a group of people to critique your practice but also give you the courage to change...feeling accountable to a group who you are working with...and to dare to step out of your own comfort zone and make a change in your practice.

We expressed the desire to continue meeting beyond the required seminar dates. Kristen journaled, "I am excited that we are all willing to continue our space. I know it will not only benefit our future research together, but it will also help us to maintain this community."

Working collaboratively, we revisited and reframed our autobiographies, looking to incorporate them into future research. To accomplish this end, we continued meeting on our own time and recording our sessions with the purpose of continuing to collect data and collaborate. Angela described our decision to continue our SSCoP: “Collaboration comes more naturally when it grows out of mutual interests and mutual respect.” Ultimately, we established an SSCoP which revealed a mutual interest in our approach to learning about education. As a result, our community has maintained itself beyond our doctoral studies and into our faculty lives.

18.7 Discussion

18.7.1 *Developing Practice and Identity*

This chapter described the process of sharing our autobiographies and committing to an SSCoP. We explored some of the tensions we experienced such as feelings of vulnerability, inadequacy, and trust. This allowed for honest introspection and intrinsic change. As we unpacked our autobiographies, stories of personal development, realizations about ourselves, and assumptions about our teaching emerged. We learned to understand that our assumptions were “barriers to learning to teach” (Russell, 1997, p. 41). By telling our stories, we exposed our vulnerabilities and our fears and then found affirmation and a sense of community. Our experience aligned with Choi’s (2013) statement: “A life story may represent the outward articulation of a teacher’s inner scrutiny, and demonstrate the ‘we-experience’ of a professional learning community arising out of its social structures and processes” (p. 822).

Writing and sharing our autobiographies was challenging on many levels. Kitchen (2010) notes, “Writing an autobiography, particularly an extended version, is not easy. It is, however, an excellent way of examining how one’s personal history informs one’s present practice and plans for the future” (p. 42). Our personal histories not only informed our present and future practice, but also helped build trust so we could view our seminar as a safe place to hold conversations.

Bullough and Gitlin (2001) explore the common themes that cut across practices and reflect “wider contextual issues” (p. 225). By unpacking the critical incidents in our autobiographies, we were able to explore common themes and reveal more about our emerging teacher educator identities. As we examined our critical incidents (Measor, 1985), or “nodal moments” (Tidwell, 2004), we began to see how each other’s life stories contained elements that resonated with our own. For example, both Angela and Kristen were driven personally by events that happened in their childhood, while Mark and Angela were professionally driven to pursue a doctorate in order to better understand the field of education and address questions about their practice. We realized how our life stories interconnected, and through these interconnections we understood the transformative power of autobiography on self-identity and the process of developing teacher and teacher educator practice.

As educators, we learned we were not alone in our practice but rather part of a community that examines the complexity of knowledge creation from established truths. Samaras et al. (2004) pose that "...self-study is informed by the widely shared belief that teaching is fundamentally an autobiographical act" (p. 906). We noticed how we were at our best when we made our lives and our search for meaning within our practices available to each other, knowing also that we would share our understanding with the scholarly community. It took trust and courage to open ourselves up to this examination. Nielsen (1994) states, "Looking at ourselves up close, we risk exposing our insecurities, revealing bad habits, and dangerous biases, recognizing our own mediocrity, immaturity, or obsessive need to control" (p. 35). Even realizing this, we each decided to take that step to share our stories and our practice with the larger scholarly community.

18.7.2 Challenges and Tensions

Autobiography provided impetus for developing our SSCoP and achieving an open, trusting space quickly. Beginning with our first session, we reflected on our practices considering who we were, are, and might become. The latter was the most frightening part because we all portrayed a public, professional identity and felt comfortable in that role. By opening our lives and practices to critical scrutiny, we were concerned about becoming too vulnerable. Larsen (2007) describes the "seemingly contradictory potential of self-study research to illuminate our fears, anxieties, tensions, and uncertainties as teacher educators whilst acting as a catalyst for community building" (p. 173). Similarly, Margolin (2008) notes how communities are built through resistance to change and dependence on the familiar, then a movement from dependence to interdependence, and finally from interdependence to connectivity. Our community mirrored this development.

Through the sharing and unpacking of autobiography, we were able to develop the sense of trust and professional purpose that afforded us the opportunity to explore our evolving identities. Our SSCoP evolved from the context of the seminar to an ongoing space beyond. In sharing reflection-on-action posts, Brandon revealed his own tensions and insecurities regarding issues he encountered when being too honest about critiquing institutional practices. His sense of trust in the SSCoP afforded him a space to reflect on his future practice. Moreover, as we collected data and researched the form and function of autobiography in the creation and sustainability of a community, each of us knew that our growth was spurred through sharing and reflecting on our autobiographies. Subsequently, we developed a sense of responsibility to and for the other members of our community. Angela wrote,

I talked about the value self-study had given to my summer course. I was only beginning the journey to understand the process and the effects of self-study, I knew that it had changed my worldview about becoming a scholar and a teacher educator.

Autobiographical discussions rooted us in the past as teachers and helped us to understand our evolving identities as we transformed into teacher educators who use reflective practice in preparing new teachers. The critical incident protocol rooted in our autobiographies formed the basis for us to choose to continue our work together. Mark summarized our feelings when he stated, “I like it because generally, it is a bit *avant garde*. It is a dangerous way to work as it encourages the participant to question the status quo. This is the sort of thinking that can start revolutions.”

Mark’s thoughts were representative of our growing confidence to challenge systemic and societal assumptions about teaching and learning, providing a foundation for our future practice as teacher educators. Unpacking and reflecting upon our autobiographies started a revolution in us as we questioned the systems of education from which we came and the organizations toward which we were moving. Belonging to an SSCoP provided a safe space to explore multiple topics in the future, including the development of our scholarly teacher educator identities. Our SSCoP has remained strong in large part due to the foundation built from collaboratively exploring our autobiographies. Throughout the rest of our doctoral program, graduation, and the transition into our teacher educator roles at four separate universities, we have continued to explore questions of teacher educator identity and practice, conduct self-study research, and publish together.

18.8 Conclusion

Ragoonaden (2015) states that, “By virtue of its nature, self-study methodology, in particular autobiographical analysis, provides a powerful mechanism for teacher educators exploring how their lived lives have effects on practice, praxis, and society” (p. 92). This chapter describes how autobiographical sharing and critical exploration strengthened the development of an SSCoP. By examining our past, we were better able to make sense of our present situations and subsequently work together as an SSCoP in our future as teacher educators. Crucial to this was acknowledging times when we felt vulnerable, as we did not yet trust the process and were wary of critique. However, as trust grew, we adopted a shared sense of responsibility for one another and found a belonging which afforded our continued professional growth together.

This chapter has implications for both teachers and teacher educators who are looking to build trust in their professional communities. Analyzing autobiographical writing through a critical incident protocol provided a shared experience and common ground from which we were able to get to know each other professionally and personally. Teacher educators, course instructors, doctoral students, and administrators may find that a similar process of sharing and unpacking autobiographical information at the creation of a professional community, is a powerful way to connect the participants. Unpacking our autobiographies made our SSCoP, “vital, effective, and productive” (Wenger et al., 2002, p.10).

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Chapter 19

Contributing to and Learning Through an Evolving Self-Study Community of Practice: The Experiences of Two Science Teacher Educators



Karen Goodnough and Saiqa Azam

Abstract Self-study communities of practice are groups of teacher educators who work collaboratively through critical inquiry and mutual engagement to improve teaching and learning in particular socio-cultural contexts. In this chapter, we adopt Etienne Wenger's principles for cultivating communities of practice to report on how we, two science teacher educators, contributed to the evolution of a self-study community of practice and how it supported our professional learning as science teacher educators. The self-study community of practice consisted of seven adult/teacher educators from different education sub-disciplines. We draw upon data – individual and collaborative reflections, artifacts, and field notes – from our own self-study, which was conducted within and supported by the larger self-study community of practice. The chapter does not utilize data from the larger self-study community of practice. Outcomes related to the work of the larger group are reported elsewhere.

19.1 Introduction

Teacher educators play a pivotal role in preparing future teachers and contributing to the quality of educator preparation programs (Goodwin & Kosnik, 2013; Liston et al., 2008; Vanassche et al., 2019). It should also be noted that teacher educators are situated differently in terms of their work and experiences and assume varying roles in supporting teacher candidates in initial teacher education. For example, White (2019) reported that teacher educators may be university, school, or community-based teacher educators. In many higher education institutions, the

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professional learning of teacher educators may not be a priority and tensions exist in navigating the competing goals of research and teaching (Berry, 2009; Murray, 2005). While research is emerging on the perspectives and practices of teacher educators in relation to their work, less research exists about the what (content of professional learning), how (professional learning activities), and why (reasons to engage in professional learning) of teacher educators' professional learning and needs (Ping et al., 2018).

In this chapter, we, the authors, adopt the notion of communities of practice and principles for cultivating communities of practice (Wenger, 1998, 2012; Wenger et al., 2002) to report on how we contributed to the evolution of a self-study community of practice (SSCoP) and how it supported our professional learning as science teacher educators. We focus mainly on “how” and “why” as it relates to a SSCoP. In other words, we examine and share our insights as we participated in a SSCoP and how being members of this SSCoP supported our professional learning. The SSCoP described here consisted of seven adult/teacher educators from different education sub-disciplines. We draw upon data from our own self-study, conducted within and supported by the larger self-study group. The chapter does not utilize data from the larger SSCoP. Outcomes related to the work of the larger group are reported elsewhere.

19.2 Context

This study occurred in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Canada. Our self-study occurred with two groups of teacher candidates. Saiqa worked with a class of 29 enrolled in a science methods course focused on learning and teaching grades 7–12 students (intermediate/secondary), while Karen worked with a class of 31 primary/elementary teacher candidates enrolled in a science methods course focused on learning and teaching Kindergarten to grade 6 students. The intermediate/secondary teacher education program is a three-semester, undergraduate post-degree requiring the completion of 51 credit hours. The primary/elementary program is an undergraduate post-degree as well requiring the completion of 72 credit hours, which extends over a two-year period with a summer break. Both programs immerse teacher candidates in several early school-based experiences, while they complete university courses. The programs culminate with a longer 12-week internship in schools.

Before becoming part of the SSCoP, we worked together to review science education courses, revise curricula, and to discuss assessment and teaching and learning approaches in science. We had also collaborated on two research projects. Karen has been a science teacher educator for 20 years, having started her teaching career as a high school science teacher. She is a full professor and has been a faculty member at Memorial University since 2003. Her interest in self-study started early in her career after attending several self-study sessions at the American Education Research Association conference in 2001. Throughout her career, she has engaged

in systematic inquiry into her practice. Saiqa, currently in her sixth year as an academic, taught high school physics and had worked as a science teacher educator in several universities over the previous 10 years. Since 2015, she has been a faculty member at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Like Karen, she was attracted to self-study and became part of the Faculty of Education SSCoP.

The SSCoP was initially started by Karen in 2015, with open invitations for faculty to attend regular meetings and to explore the nature of self-study. Eventually, the self-study group was established in 2017 with seven core members. Six females and one male comprised this group; three members are untenured, while four members are tenured faculty members at varied stages of their academic careers. Our first shared inquiry focused on inclusion and, more specifically, on Universal Design for Learning (CAST, or Center for Applied Special Technology, 2017) and how it could serve as a reflective framework to enhance our work and classroom practice as teacher educators. Karen is no longer a member of the SSCoP because she assumed an administrative position within the faculty as the dean.

19.3 Theoretical Perspective

Communities of practice have been adopted as a means to engage educators in professional learning. Wenger et al. (2002) define communities of practice as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4). According to Wenger (1998), communities of practice have a domain or a set of common interests, competencies, and/or commitments, not shared by others, that serve to guide learning and participation. Through sharing common practices such as information-sharing and collaborative problem-solving, members of the community of practice establish and nurture community, bound together and situated to interact and share ideas. The practice of a community involves community members in creating a shared repertoire of tools, frameworks, language, stories, etc. that group members have developed over time. Communities develop specific foci around which to develop their collective knowledge (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

Individuals are often members of many communities, although all communities are not communities of practice. The domain, community, and practice components of a community of practice need to develop for communities to grow and be productive; they may be cultivated if they have access to resources, time, and the removal of organizational barriers.

We adopted the seven principles, as proposed by Wenger et al., (2002), to describe our professional learning and how we contributed to the cultivation of a SSCoP. When *designing for evolution*, varying design structures may be adopted to foster community growth and engagement (e.g., regular meetings). *Opening a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives* is equally important. Insiders are critical to community development and functioning, while outsider perspectives and

knowledge may fuel new ways of thinking for the community. Within a community of practice, *inviting different levels of participation* is needed. A robust community invites different levels and types of participation (e.g., some members are involved in all core activities, some members participate for a limited period of time in the community, or members may be involved peripherally). *Developing both public and private community spaces*, another guiding principle, fosters connections amongst members through both public events such as presentations and meetings and private spaces such as one-on-one interactions and networking. *Focusing on value* is needed so community members may recognize “how they are doing ... to guide ongoing efforts to become more vibrant and effective” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 167). *Combining familiarity and excitement*: fosters an environment where members can share and explore ideas. Both engagement and routineness are essential for communities to remain alive and dynamic. In addition, communities of practice, as they evolve, should focus on *creating a rhythm for the community*. The beat of a community needs to ensure it does not stagnate by being too slow. Likewise, a community needs to ensure it is not moving too fast, causing members to become overwhelmed.

Numerous research studies have been reported in the literature focused on communities of practice and the learning of teacher candidates and practicing teachers (e.g., Daniel et al., 2013; Kirby et al., 2019; Kitchen & Ciuffetelli Parker, 2009; Luguetti et al., 2019; Van As, 2018). Fewer studies exist that seek to understand the work of teacher educators in the context of SSCoPs (e.g., Haniford & Pence, 2017; McClam & Diefenbacher, 2015; Tuval et al., 2011; Williams & Ritter, 2010).

In this chapter, we conceptualize SSCoPs as groups of teacher educators who work collaboratively through critical inquiry and mutual engagement to improve teaching and learning in particular socio-cultural contexts (Gallagher et al., 2011). Within SSCoPs, critical friendships may develop, becoming a feature contributing to the cultivation of a strong community. According to Costa and Kallick (1993), a critical friend is:

A trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person’s work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context or the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working towards. (p. 50)

Critical friendships may encounter some challenges such as power relationships, communication problems, and time limitations (Pettigrew, 2003; Tilbury et al., 2004). Swaffield (2007) identified three criteria for a successful critical friendship, which include: (a) trustworthiness, (b) engagement and commitment, and (c) knowledge of context.

19.4 Methodology

We adopted self-study methodology in this collaborative inquiry and employed five general principles established in the literature on self-study research. Our collaborative inquiry was (i) self-initiated, (ii) interactive in nature, (iii) grounded in self-trust and critical friendship, (iv) geared towards improving our teacher education practices, and (v) employed multiple qualitative methods to collect evidence of our professional learning (LaBoskey, 2004; Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015).

Using each of the seven principles for cultivating a community of practice (Wenger et al., 2002) as a lens, we examined our roles in cultivating our SSCoP and how the SSCoP influenced our professional learning. In reporting outcomes in this chapter, we draw upon several data sources including individual and collaborative reflections, artifacts, and field notes. We wrote reflections to document our experiences of cultivating a SSCoP. Each reflection was approximately 1000 words. Collectively, we completed 16; these became a source of data for our self-study inquiry. In addition, we created collaborative reflections, sharing our written reflections about our teacher education practices through Google Docs and engaged in a dialogue about effective science teacher education practices. We collected artifacts about our teacher education practices, such as lesson plans and student work samples. We used these as secondary sources of data to corroborate our findings. A third source of data was the field notes we recorded, based on classroom observations, while we were engaged in our self-study inquiry project and used these as secondary sources to corroborate findings.

We compiled text from the various sources of data as described above. First, we used analytic memoing (Patton, 2002) and created memos, which enabled us to not only describe our roles in cultivating the SSCoP, but also to highlight our thinking about our professional learning as inclusive educators. Second, we used deductive coding and reviewed texts, searching for evidence of our learning using seven principles for cultivating communities of practice (Wenger et al., 2002). We highlighted segments of texts that aligned with each principle. Third, we used open coding and reviewed texts to identify evidence of our professional learning and highlighted segments of text. We reviewed both inductive and deductive codes and generated categories for each principle. Subsequently, for each principle, we share our individual voices about contributing to the evolving SSCoP and our professional learning as teacher educators. While we wrote each section individually, drawing upon the analyzed data and coded categories, we reviewed each written section collaboratively to offer each other feedback on how we represented our voices.

19.5 Design for Evolution

19.5.1 *Karen*

During the first two years of the group's existence, I adopted an open-door-policy; all faculty were welcome to attend our weekly meetings. As I noted in one of my reflections, "Our community was in flux for a considerable amount of time; however, I need to be patient and allow things to evolve organically." Eventually, a core group of faculty committed to being part of the self-study group. As the designated leader of the group, I was conscientious about strategies that needed to be adopted to ensure we continued to build rapport and collaboration as we moved our shared agenda forward. In addition to strategies such as having regular weekly or bi-weekly meetings and negotiating meeting agendas amongst group members, we used check-in boundary breakers and check-out activities to allow group members to get to know each other. To build community and group identity, I proposed we consider engaging in a shared self-study inquiry. This was supported by the group, resulting in an inquiry focused on how to incorporate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into our classroom practice. UDL is a curriculum design framework that recognizes learner variability and provides a blueprint for creating instructional goals and strategies that are attainable by individuals with wide differences in their abilities (CAST, 2018). UDL guides teachers' inclusive practices and promotes "flexible approaches to teaching and learning" and rejects "one-size-fits-all solutions" (CAST, 2018).

There are three core principles of UDL that guide teachers' implementation of UDL: (1) Provide multiple means of engagement, (2) Provide multiple means of representation, and (3) Provide multiple means of action and expression (CAST, 2018). Each of the UDL principles is further broken down into three guidelines and several checkpoints to guide teachers as they plan curriculum, instruction, and assessment (CAST, 2018). The UDL framework creates opportunities for teachers to "acknowledge learner variability" and "offers more options and alternatives—varied pathways, tools, strategies, and scaffolds for reaching mastery" (Meyer et al., 2014, p. 7).

This focus on inclusion and UDL was important to me as I felt my courses needed more of an emphasis on how to engage pre-service students in considering their dispositions and beliefs in relation to inclusion and how they might create inclusive K-12 learning environments in science. UDL also provided a framework to guide an overall shared focus for the SSCoP on embedding principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion into our curricula.

19.5.2 Saiqa

Our critical friendship was built on our pre-existing connection that arose naturally through our discussions about preparing effective science teachers and science methods courses. Our critical friendship evolved organically as we shared our common goals for science teacher education during our regular self-study meetings. This critical friendship was strengthened subsequently by becoming members of the Faculty of Education SSCoP.

As described above, we started collegial conversations long before our self-study group was founded, which helped us develop a trusting relationship. Karen generously shared her course outlines and experiences with me when I joined the faculty and was planning to teach science methods courses. Within a short period of time, we became trusted colleagues, visiting each other's classrooms, and started having open discussions about our science teacher education practices. For example, as part of a larger project in the self-study group, Karen and I initiated a self-study inquiry on culturally relevant science teaching. It captured our co-learning as science teacher educators regarding indigenizing a science methods course in the context of my teaching in our Inuit Bachelor of Education Program (IBED) for Indigenous students. We engaged ourselves in reflective scholarship with regard to transforming the curriculum of the science methods course and making it culturally relevant for pre-service science teachers, which resulted in changes in our practice and a publication (Azam & Goodnough, 2018).

We have similar foci in our science methods courses (e.g., scientific literacy, inquiry, nature of science, etc.) and we both were committed to improving science teaching practices in K-12 classrooms. Karen was the founder of the self-study group and invited all faculty members to join the group. She continued leading regular weekly meetings until she became the Dean. I joined the self-study group, becoming a core member, because I was interested in improving my teacher education practice, and had some background in action research, another action-oriented approach to learning. We both demonstrated a commitment to the self-study group and continue to conceptualize new self-study projects together.

19.6 Open a Dialogue Between Insider and Outsider Perspectives

19.6.1 Karen

While all members of the group were tenured or tenure-track faculty within education, we were from different sub-disciplines in education, such as educational technology, post-secondary studies, science education, and special education. This provided an opportunity to share different views, perspectives, and ideas as it relates to research, teaching, pedagogy and student learning. For example, over a period of

several months, before establishing the group shared inquiry, we examined the nature of collaborative self-study by completing a variety of readings about the nature of self-study – goals and purposes, methodologies and methods, etc. We also developed a better understanding of collaborative self-study by comparing it to other research paradigms and methodologies. During one meeting, to do this comparison, I suggested we create a large-scale mind map on a white board that compared self-study, ethnography, participatory action research, narrative inquiry, and qualitative research. I was the only group member who was comfortable with self-study and had engaged in self-study inquiry. While we did not invite others from outside the faculty to be part of our self-study group, we were able to utilize the publications of others to inform our work. Furthermore, we networked with self-study scholars at conferences to gain an outsider perspective. I did comment, at a planning meeting with Saiqa, that “there may be others we could invite to our meetings periodically to offer feedback on self-study work and to act as outside critical friends.”

19.6.2 Saiqa

When distinguishing insider and outsider perspectives, I consider Karen an insider. We both have a background in science teacher education and the experience of being classroom teachers in K-12 settings. In our SSCoP, Karen supported my professional learning by becoming a critical friend and supportive colleague who opened the doors of her classroom for me and observed my inclusive practices.

Our SSCoP consisted of members from the area of special education; these group members provided an outsider’s perspective on inclusive education, which included lengthy discussions about UDL principles. These perspectives helped me in considering how to apply UDL principles in my science methods course, which further expanded my learning about inclusive teacher education practices. I realized that certain aspects of UDL needed more emphasis; I needed “to improve my student teachers’ engagement” through “fostering collaboration and community” and “increasing mastery-oriented feedback.”

19.7 Invite Different Levels of Participation

19.7.1 Karen

Group members assumed different roles in the SSCoP as the group evolved. I remained as chair of the group, as group members were comfortable with me taking care of the logistics of scheduling meetings and coordinating group activities. When working on the UDL inquiry, role differentiation emerged. As I noted after one group meeting, “while we are very busy and time is always a factor, I feel we are distributing our work equitably and we are all contributing ideas to the study.” Our

contributions to the group were also informed by the meetings Saiqa and I held before and after observing each other's teaching. As critical friends, we shared ideas, posed questions of each other about our actions, and offered suggestions about how to better support student learning. For example, we had several conversations about modelling as teacher educators and the best ways to model inclusive practices. We both agreed "it is crucial that teacher educators help students connect theory and practice and that we make our thinking [as teacher educators] explicit." We would later share our ideas with the larger group, thus expanding the circle of sharing and creating more opportunities to receive feedback about our teaching practice and student learning.

19.7.2 Saiqa

Our SSCoP, founded and coordinated by Karen, encouraged all faculty members to participate and extended multiple invitations for faculty members to join the group. The level of participation varied for different faculty members: "Some of us have been there since the beginning of the group, and a few of us have almost left the group, while some new members are always dropping by and staying for a while." Seven faculty eventually emerged as a core group. I reflected after one meeting on the nature of group memberships, "I think the members who stayed contributed to the strength of the group by promoting a set of values, and implemented self-study research in their classrooms" with a common interest and focus on improving teacher education practices. However, even within this core group, the levels of participation varied. Being a member who had stayed in the group from the beginning, I had the opportunity to implement self-study research in two of my courses.

Reflecting on my experience, I think an experiential piece of learning as a result of being involved in self-study is important and cannot be equated to just attending meetings or having theoretical discussions. During a group meeting, I stated, "These practical learning experiences increased my level of participation, as peer-mentorship was always necessary to successfully implement self-study research."

19.8 Develop Both Public and Private Community Spaces

19.8.1 Karen

Within our self-study group, we created many opportunities for sharing and collaboration through public spaces and events such as regular weekly and bi-weekly meetings, contributing to shared Google documents, and holding periodic socials. Simultaneously, private interactions among dyads or triads outside the larger group events provided venues for one-on-one conversations and planning related to individual classroom events. For example, Saiqa and I were able to strengthen our

critical friendship as we established more trust and developed more insight into each other's perspectives and beliefs. As I noted in one of our debriefing meetings, "Our work together is allowing me to further my thinking about inclusive pedagogy and to become more comfortable with how our different styles complement each other." Through our collaborative reflection and dialogue, I began to realize that my teacher candidates were enhancing their awareness of inclusivity, but they still lacked confidence in their ability to create inclusive learning experiences for K-12 students. This resulted in me placing more emphasis on Universal Design for Learning and modelling how the guidelines and principles may be adopted to teach science. Moreover, our private interactions positioned us well to contribute to strengthening the network of relationships that were developing within the larger self-study group.

19.8.2 Saiqa

Our SSCoP cultivated both public and private community spaces. I view our (Karen and Saiqa) professional relationship between two science teacher educators as a private space within a larger SSCoP. We established one-on-one networking and interactions through our critical friendship. The SSCoP became a dynamic group with strong connections amongst group members. I learned from the public space of the SSCoP, contributed to its strength, while developing an understanding of how to implement UDL principles in my science methods course. This enhanced my inclusive teacher education practices. While engaged in a self-study project with Karen in our science methods course, I reflected deeply on inclusive practices and highlighted my vision for inclusive science education for science teachers:

I always argue that introducing the idea of inclusive education as a general concept across the curriculum is not enough to prepare future science teachers to become inclusive teachers. The work of science teachers revolves around science concepts/ideas ... this is crucial to connect inclusiveness with science content such that inclusive practice become the every-day business of a science teacher.

The public and private dimensions of my learning as a teacher educator were intertwined and helped me develop as an inclusive teacher educator.

19.9 Focus on Value

19.9.1 Karen

Since being introduced to self-study at a conference in 2001, I have consistently recognized the many benefits of engaging in self-study, such as "integrating theory and practice, improving one's own practice, gaining insight into how to better support teacher candidate learning, and marrying teaching and research" to name a few.

In the early stages of the self-study group, I was not convinced that group members recognized its potential value. I attributed this to their underdeveloped understanding of the nature of self-study and how to engage in self-study. Through many discussions about self-study, its purposes and methods, the group eventually recognized the value of “systematic inquiry into one’s own practice.” As the group matured, I suggested we talk explicitly about how the group and its activities were helping each of us as teacher educators. These frequent check-ins about the value of our collaborative work provided a guidepost as we changed directions and examined group needs (e.g., do we need more frequent meetings, should we spend more time talking about this topic, etc.). The merit of sharing our evolving thoughts about UDL, the focus of our inquiry, and analyzing our data together were recognized as being extremely important to “fostering connectedness and collaboration” within the group.

19.9.2 Saiqa

Like any community of practice, participation in the self-study group was voluntary, and faculty members dropped in and out of the group until seven of us found value in this SSCoP, which may not have been apparent to others who did not stay in the group. During one of my meetings with Karen, I noted that the source of value was “to enhance our teacher education practices through cultivating an understanding of self-study as a form of inquiry and implementing in the teacher education context.” Also, over time, most of the group members started sharing the problems of practice, and the group shaped into a peer-mentor group, which was evidence of the common value recognized by the group. As I noted in an individual reflection, “For me, these conversations were very useful regarding implementing ideas and practices in my course. So, learning from each other was not limited to actual self-study research, but the group structure also allowed this critical interchange.” After having a more committed, core group, “the conversations around the role of a critical friend became important for us.” The notion of critical friendship became popular and valued, and “we certainly learned through various forms of critical friendship.”

19.10 Combine Familiarity and Excitement

19.10.1 Karen

“I enjoy our meetings and always look forward to sharing with others and hearing others’ ideas and thinking. This causes me to reflect on my own perspectives and to gather new ideas for teaching and learning. The strong collaboration and the positive energy of the group are motivating.” I recorded these comments in a reflection after the group had been functioning for at least two years. While I welcomed this

familiarity of regular group meetings, I was keenly aware of the need for the group to experience new events. Planning for and conceptualizing a shared inquiry was energizing. This was especially true within the context of the larger group, but also with my colleague Saiqa. We scrutinized our teaching and student learning carefully as we planned and embedded UDL principles into our pre-service classroom practice. After a full cycle of inquiry focused on UDL, we felt we were ready to share what we were learning with other scholars. We prepared a conference proposal and presented in the following year at the annual conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education. The ensuing collaborative writing project injected excitement into our established patterns of functioning.

19.10.2 Saiqa

After almost one year of drop-in weekly meetings, we were able to achieve familiarity through establishing a core group of seven faculty members. With this familiarity, the self-study group became a safe place for sharing our ideas to support each other and clarify our teacher education pedagogies. For me, this familiarity was gradual and involved many intertwined factors. Moreover, it takes some time to build trust within communities of learning. While we matured as a SSCoP, our procedures became regular with consistent agenda items, as compared to our initial meetings, which were more drop-in sessions for many faculty members. Another factor that influenced familiarity was the frequency of our regular meetings. We tried both weekly and bi-weekly meetings. For me, as I recorded in a reflection, “weekly meetings kept me more excited about sharing my classroom stories as compared to the meetings planned every two or three weeks. I think with the prolonged time in between, the less frequent meeting timeline diminished the joy of a success story or the urgency of an issue to be discussed or shared timely.” So, our collaborative group discussions became a source of excitement. The conversation and exchange of ideas between Karen, my critical friend, and me were especially informative. She was able to understand the context of the issues and provide an eloquent solution.

19.11 Create a Rhythm for the Community

19.11.1 Karen

Like any productive community, time is needed for a community to establish itself and grow. Our SSCoP developed organically and was slow to reach a point where we had a core set of members. At times, I felt discouraged as it seemed the community was not making any progress. Some people had conceptualized research

inquiries, but no one has actually moved to the next step of action. Eventually, as core members committed to the group, we examined our frequency of meetings based on the needs of the group. I recorded my thinking on the progress of the group after a meeting, “The pace of events has slowed; I am happy we are consulting collaboratively to determine where we are and what our needs are...” Thus, moving forward, we scheduled weekly meetings rather than bi-weekly meetings to ensure the rhythm of the community was appropriate. Periodically, faculty members continued to drop in on meetings out of curiosity and/or to learn more about self study.

19.11.2 *Saiqa*

It took almost two years for our SSCoP to establish enduring relationships among seven members, creating a rhythm of productive weekly meetings leading to self-study inquiry projects. During these two years, many members dropped in and left, and at times we had a big group of 15–20 members. I noted in a collaborative reflection that “addressing dynamics of a big group is very difficult and challenging;” however, Karen tried to provide “multiple opportunities for group members to be involved, based on their level of interest in the community.” While our self-study community was picking up rhythm, Karen and I established a critical friendship and embarked on our first self-study inquiry project. We created a close critical friendship that enhanced our contributions to the dialogue and growth of the SSCoP.

The SSCoP gained more rhythm after seven group members engaged in a collaborative self-study group project. Reflecting on our community of learning, I recorded my thoughts after a meeting: “I am happy to be part of our SSCoP because it has provided me with a network of supportive colleagues and a research group that is engaged in improving teacher education practices.”

19.12 Implications and Conclusions

In this chapter, we reported on how a SSCoP contributed to our professional learning and how in turn, we took responsibility for contributing to cultivating the SSCoP. While our critical friendship existed prior to the establishment of the SSCoP, our participation inside and outside the SSCoP strengthened our collaboration, supported by other group members. The critical friendship provided alternative perspectives through carefully listening and helping to draw attention to the aspects of our teaching that are sometimes ignored or less considered (Kember et al., 1997). This was beneficial to the overall group as we shared our experiences and insights with other members of the SSCoP.

Teacher educators are fundamental to improving the quality of initial teacher education. One means through which they do this is by creating learning experiences for teacher candidates that enable them to develop knowledge, skills,

dispositions, and teacher identities that create a strong foundation for their beginning years of teaching. Likewise, teacher educators need opportunities to engage in professional learning that will enhance their knowledge, skills, and dispositions and help them develop their identities as teacher educators. Unfortunately, limited opportunities may exist for teacher educators to access professional learning within their institutions. For example, Bain and Gray (2018) reported that teacher educator professional learning is often self-determined. The SSCoP described here was self-driven and the professional learning was self-determined. It was cultivated from within the group. However, it is equally important, that teacher educators have opportunities and support to engage in professional learning that is fostered and encouraged from within their respective faculties and higher education institutions.

One of the key features of a successful community of practice is the development of the community itself through sharing ideas, collaborative problem-solving, and building rapport and trust. Explicitly adopting strategies to cultivate a SSCoP is necessary to fostering belonging, a key feature of a community of practice. As members of the SSCoP, we experienced this sense of belonging, through mutual engagement, imagination, and alignment to practice. Wenger (1998) notes, "Given a community, one might wonder what the possibilities for mutual engagement are, what material supports imagination, and how alignment is secured. Such questions focus not on classification but on mechanisms of community formation, as well as on the trade-offs and kinds of work involved" (p. 183). Careful attention to the principles for cultivating a SSCoP has the potential to support the professional learning of both new and experienced teacher educators.

Saiqa, an early career teacher educator and Karen, a late career teacher educator, both benefited from being members of the SSCoP and contributed to its growth and development. Self-study communities of practice can play a pivotal role in supporting novice teacher educators' professional learning as they transition from school teaching to teaching teachers (Williams & Ritter, 2010). It is our hope other teacher educators and those in university contexts who support the professional learning of teacher educators consider self-study communities of practice as a viable option for teacher educator professional learning and recognize the importance of cultivating such communities. Combining the attributes of self-study and communities of practice provides a means for teacher educators to focus on teaching, systematic inquiry, and community, while being attentive to the unique institutional contexts that may offer both affordances and barriers to professional learning through SSCoPs. This study provides insight into the potential benefits of SSCoP for fostering teacher educator professional learning. While every learning context is different, this study also adds to the literature that highlights the importance of understanding the local context of learning in higher education institutions and how this may influence teacher educators' learning and classroom practice.

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Chapter 20

Learning in a Self-Study Community of Practice: A Collaborative Journey in Coaching and Teaching



Richard Bowles and Anne O'Dwyer

Abstract Learning to teach, and learning to coach, are complex pedagogical processes underpinned by social interaction. In this chapter, the authors discuss the development of a small self-study community of practice (SSCoP) centred on our volunteer Gaelic football coaching activities in an Irish university. As we are also teacher educators in this university, we explore how our participation in this SSSCoP enabled us to better understand our coaching practices, while simultaneously providing us with insights into our professional identities as teacher educators. Accordingly, our perspectives are framed by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (Learning in a landscape of practice. In: Wenger-Trayner E, Fenton-O'Creevy M, Hutchinson S, Kubiak C, Wenger-Trayner B (eds) Learning in landscapes of practice: boundaries, identity, and knowledgeability in practice-based learning. Routledge, 2015, p. 13) definition of a landscape of practice as a "complex system of communities of practice and the boundaries between them". We describe how our coaching roles evolved over the course of five seasons, and identify instances where our deeper understanding of sports pedagogy and practice helped us to become more empathetic teacher educators. The themes of *caring* and *discomfort* were developed to explore our learning across our landscape of practice. By exploring the boundary area between coaching and teaching, we gained a deeper understanding of our practice in both.

Anne and Richard are teacher educators in an Irish university, lecturing in science education and physical education (PE), respectively. We are also volunteer coaches with the university's Gaelic football team. Richard has been a teacher educator for 16 years and has coached the team for 12 seasons. Anne has worked in teacher education for five years and was still playing football at an elite level when our

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collaborative self-study community of practice (SSCoP) commenced. This chapter describes our shared learning experiences over five seasons coaching together and examines how these shared experiences deepened our understanding of pedagogical practices in teacher education also. In doing so, we acknowledge the shared characteristics that underpin sports coaching and teaching practices (Jones, 2006), because effective practice in both depends on the development of sound educational relationships (Wikeley & Bullock, 2006). Coaches typically learn in a mix of formal and informal situations (Cushion & Nelson, 2013), and it is recognised that reflective practice and mentoring opportunities can support coach development (Hall & Gray, 2016).

We position the learning in our SSSCoP within the broader context of what Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) describe as a landscape of practice (LoP). We discuss how our experiences of learning *within* a coaching SSSCoP informed and enhanced our professional learning *between* our coaching and teacher education communities, and explore how our self-study orientation facilitated this learning.

20.1 Landscapes of Practice

Vinson et al. (2020) suggest the LoP concept is the third phase of Etienne Wenger-Trayner's social learning theory. It has been developed to help understand the complexities evident in practitioners' learning trajectories (Bertram et al., 2016). Participation remains central to this revised notion of CoP, and is a key constituent in the processes of the negotiation of meaning. It refers to action (taking part) and connection (relationship with others) within a CoP (Wenger, 1998). In this sense, social learning occurs through engagement with others (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020). Teacher education practice (TEP) is dynamic and social, thus teacher educators' learning should be situated in the social contexts where they work (Bronfenbrenner, 2004). Since the complexity of teacher education is shaped by the context in which it occurs (Loughran, 2007), it is important that we explore the context(s) that surround our CoPs. In our practice context, we suggest teacher educators (or coaches) do not just work within the boundaries of separate, closed CoPs, but instead operate and move between communities, as they interact with different individuals and groups.

Handley et al. (2006, p. 650) argue "the site for the development of identities and practices is not solely *within* a community of practice but in the spaces *between* multiple communities" (p. 650, italics in original). Accordingly, LoPs encompass learning *within* CoPs and at the boundaries *between* them (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). They contend that "the notion of a single CoP misses the complexity of most bodies of knowledge", rather, an LoP encompasses the complexity of a "social body of knowledge" (2015, p. 15). Most professional occupations, including teacher education, span a complex landscape of different practices.

Hence, there is potential for learning at the boundaries of these communities, as practices inform and influence each other.

Boundary crossings and encounters open possibilities for learning within an LoP (Williams et al., 2012). Because “communities of practice have particular processes and ways of doing things which may not be shared between different parts of the landscape” (Kubiak et al., 2015, p. 81), crossing a boundary or introducing ideas from elsewhere can be difficult. Because boundaries can be places of confusion and misunderstanding, brokering is important to enable successful cross-boundary encounters resulting in sharing of ideas from different practices (Kubiak et al., 2015). Cross-boundary learning experiences involve brokering to enable collaborative working and sharing of practice across the landscape. Brokers work at the boundaries and support boundary crossing by facilitating the translation, coordination and alignment of different perspectives and meanings (Wenger, 1998). Boundary spanning requires individual qualities and skills, involves risk-taking, and recognises the potential for learning (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). For us, as teacher educators and coaches interested in self-study, this potential to improve our practices in these different contexts was matched by a commitment to contribute to scholarship in these fields (Gallagher et al., 2011).

20.2 Context of Our Boundary Crossings

Given that “participation in a landscape provides the constitutive texture of an experience of identity” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 19), our identities embody the landscape through our personal learning experiences as we journey through it. Hence, our identities as coaches and teacher educators are neither fixed nor detached but are evolving and integrated. As we coached the university team, many of the players we coached were student teachers who we taught. In our dual roles, we crossed the boundaries of curricular and co-curricular practices with these students. Just as TEP is complex and involves multiple practices, student-athletes also participate in multiple domains (Galipeau & Trudel, 2006). As boundary spanners, we were suitably positioned to support them, as they faced the challenges of their academic, sporting and personal lives (Kim et al., 2016).

Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) have identified *engagement*, *imagination* and *alignment* as three components through which to position learning within LoPs. *Engagement* in practice is a vehicle for learning about the competence of a community. This involves action and participation but can be at varied levels. In our case, we coached together for five seasons. Over the first 18 months Richard, as the more experienced coach, took a lead role and was responsible for the planning and preparation of the coaching sessions. In contrast, Anne observed initially before assisting with some of the coaching duties. In the following three years, our engagement in the community became more equal, as we shared planning and coaching tasks.

Imagination involves the construction of an image of the landscape that helps us to understand who we are in it (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). For us, imagining the possibilities prompted our mutual engagement and participation. Teaching and coaching have many common features (Bergmann Drewe, 2000); both are complex social practices (Cushion, 2013) and caring activities (Cronin & Armour, 2019), underpinned by a distinct pedagogical focus (Jones, 2007). Light and Harvey (2017) propose the term *positive pedagogy* to describe learner-centred teaching and coaching approaches. A positive pedagogy facilitates dialogue, problem-solving and shared learning experiences within a “supportive socio-moral environment in which making mistakes is accepted as an essential part of learning” (Light & Harvey, 2017, p. 277). This pedagogical orientation underpinned our teaching and coaching identities, as we sought to “get better at making a difference” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020, p. 14). Our desire to be learner-centred in our work with student teachers resonates with social constructivist theories of learning that underpin athlete-centred approaches to coaching (Kidman & Penney, 2014), and helped us to understand our learning across the boundaries of these practices, as we sought to use positive pedagogy in our coaching and teaching.

Alignment is a two-way process, which ensures that such intentions are implemented (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Negotiation and collaboration are recognized features of alignment. In our case, we used a collaborative self-study methodology to support our sharing of perspectives and interpretations of our coaching practices. This mutual, professional dialogue supported our learning within the coaching CoP and between our coaching and teaching practices. *Knowledgeability* is a consequence of involvement in multiple practices across a landscape (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Our knowledgeability of our own landscape developed through the combination of engagement, imagination and alignment, supported by our collaborative self-study approach.

20.3 Our Self-Study Community of Practice

Self-study offered considerable potential to explore our personal and professional identities through the interweaving of different experiences within our LoP (Casey et al., 2018). While self-study is used extensively in TEP (e.g. Bullock & Sator, 2018), the approach has had a limited, but growing, use within coaching (e.g. Bowles & O'Dwyer, 2019; Mead & Gilson, 2017). Our initial self-study focus was to improve our practice as coaches. However, as this inquiry deepened, we noticed how our potential learning extended to our teacher education practices as we collaborated in an atmosphere of trust and safety (Kitchen & Ciuffetelli Parker, 2009). Establishing trust is a crucial process in the early development of a CoP, and its longevity depends on the motivation of the members (Pemberton et al., 2007). Frequently, the time needed to establish trusting relationships can mitigate against the formation of lasting CoPs (Penney & Kidman, 2014). In our case, coaching together for a substantial time enabled us to build up the personal and professional

relationships that are important to support collaborative practice (Hostetler et al., 2018). It provided us with opportunities to discuss issues relating to our teaching and coaching experiences, enabling us to build the trust that eventually underpinned our critical friendship within our self-study context (Fletcher et al., 2016). This involved a significant weekly time commitment because the twice weekly coaching sessions (each lasting approximately 90 minutes) were accompanied by a similar amount of time engaged in collaborative planning and reflection. This commitment, however, enabled us to explore our learning within a supportive social learning space (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020). Importantly, it provided a sound foundation for the development of our SSCoP.

A CoP involves “a social process of negotiating competence in a domain over time” (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 143). Like other small CoPs (e.g. Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004; Patton & Parker, 2017), ours was composed of just two committed members. Nevertheless, our learning relationship was underpinned by the traits of imagination, engagement and alignment that are also present in larger groups. In addition, the development of our individual roles within the SSCoP aligned with the concept generally. For example, our SSCoP began and evolved organically, and was sustained by a “desire to learn communally” in the context of a relevant challenge (Kerno, 2008, p. 72). As we coached together, our interactions provided us with meaningful learning opportunities that we could incorporate into our future practice (Culver & Trudel, 2008).

The development of our SSCoP was informed initially by the work of LaBoskey (2004) and Samaras (2011). It was self-initiated and focused on understanding ourselves and our actions, arising from informal conversations about teaching and coaching. We sought to better understand and improve our positive pedagogical approaches in the coaching and teaching practices within our LoP. Our research was interactive and collaborative. We shared our written coaching philosophies and weekly reflections with each other, and used these to inform our weekly discussions and planning. We included two layers of critical friendship, providing us with “supportive and challenging feedback” (Fletcher et al., 2016, p. 304). Internally, we gave each other immediate and frequent feedback, and externally two colleagues provided more detached perspectives helping us gain a deeper understanding of practice (see O’Dwyer et al., 2019). In addition, we gathered focus group feedback from our student-athletes and arranged meetings with two other coaches who had experience of the athlete-centred approach. The data were analysed thematically using the six-step approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2013). Initially, each of us carried out a separate, inductive coding of the data before we compared codes and developed candidate themes. We were mindful that data analysis is “selective”, because it tells a “story about the data, a story that answers your research question” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 230). In our case, our final themes centred on *caring* and *discomfort*, as these were important features of our teaching and coaching experiences and enabled us to share our particular story about ourselves-in-practice (Casey et al., 2018).

20.4 Outcomes

Our dual roles as teachers and coaches provided us with experiences that resonated beyond our core CoP, and our self-study orientation helped us to recognise the “potential learning opportunities” occurring at the boundaries (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2019, p. 322). By exploring how we learned to coach better, we identified issues that were also relevant for our TEP and developed two themes that exemplify our collaborative experiences across our coaching and teaching landscapes.

20.4.1 *Caring as a Component of Coaching and Teaching*

Cultivating a caring approach underpins the development of positive coach-athlete relationships (Jones, 2009). In particular, nurturing a caring environment in university sport settings is important because this is a pivotal time in the lives of student-athletes (Knust & Fisher, 2015). In educational contexts, Noddings (2012, p. 777) argues “a climate for care” should permeate teaching and learning interactions (p. 777). The examples we present here indicate how our collaborative self-study helped us to identify our outward care for the students we coach and teach, and the inner care we demonstrated for each other within our SSCoP.

20.4.1.1 Student Care

Within our LoP, our interactions with athletes and students span our teaching and coaching practices. This prompted students to seek our advice on academic matters, thereby positioning us in pastoral or caring roles (Cronin & Armour, 2019). Informal discussions happened before and after training, while travelling to games, and during incidental conversations on campus. Hearing about our students’ concerns, and about their lives on campus and away from it, required us to engage in “receptive listening” (Noddings, 2012, p. 780) as we became a sounding board for their questions on, for example, how to negotiate aspects of university bureaucracy. Coaches can significantly influence student-athletes’ experiences in university (Bloom et al., 2014). As we recognised this, our caring role as coaches and teacher educators prompted us to examine our interactions with our student-athletes. Anne (Year 3) recognised this might necessitate changing her own coaching demeanour: “I think I need to make myself more approachable to them - I have been trying to do the same as teacher educator”. This identifies a clear link between her coaching and teaching, suggesting her learning to coach is relevant elsewhere in the LoP. Later that season, she highlighted the ensuing positive impact on her practice: “getting to know the players, as students also, has helped with my teacher education too” (Anne, Year 3). Similarly, Richard (Year 3) noted “our role as teacher educators is enhanced through the relationships we build up with the players on the football field”.

As boundary spanners, we gained a better understanding of how athletic, academic and social concerns affected our athletes, thereby helping us to establish a stronger care ethic in the classroom and on the playing field. Our experiences suggest our underlying coaching philosophies developed within this SSCoP, because building that ethic became a key objective for us. Anne's comment early in Year 3 expressed an intention to attend to players' learning at an individual level: "my coaching philosophy is that all players have potential to improve and develop (irrespective of their beginning / current position)." Later that season, traits of a supportive "socio-moral environment" (Light et al., 2014, p. 74) were evident when she wrote: "I value the importance of creating a positive and encouraging culture where individuals can experience enjoyment as well as challenges in their learning." Similarly, Richard (Year 5) identified value in the time spent facilitating a positive environment for learning:

This got me thinking about the "interweaving" of my teaching and coaching – getting to know players on the football field helps me to build rapport with students in my class. I'm in a unique position – coaching players in an extracurricular context, and teaching them in class.

Building relationships is a key aspect of effective coaching (Shanmugam & Jowett, 2016). Our coaching experiences have made us more aware of the potential to enrich our teaching by extending these relationships into the classroom.

20.4.1.2 Caring for Ourselves

As we explored the development of our SSCoP, we identified examples of where we cared for the athletes in different ways. On reflection, this prompted us to question what supports were in place to care for us as coaches. Richard highlighted this during Year 3:

We care for the players by trying to be player-centred. Players care for each other too – as evidenced by their team spirit, even in defeat, [and by] developing bonds and friendships that support their journey through college. But who cares for the coaches? Does a CoP provide supports that might be otherwise absent?

Anne's response identified the "shared experiences within the CoP" as a means to provide support for each other. Cronin and Armour (2019) describe how one coach's excessive commitment to his sport caused damage to his personal relationships, and they conclude that an absence of self-care lead to coach burnout. For us, our internal layer of critical friendship facilitated the development of personal and professional relationships as we built trust and understanding through coaching together.

As Richard noted in Year 3, "I really enjoy the collaborative nature of what we're doing. It is very motivating, challenging (in a good way) and prompts me to reflect deeply on my own coaching." Likewise, Anne suggested during Year 3 that, "the CoP created a shared space for both coaches to share disappointments or reflection after a defeat". Both of us valued this, and the rapport we developed enabled us to "have ownership and input...the mutual respect to 'step in' on each other without

offence is evidence of trust in the relationship” (Anne, Year 3). Accordingly, we learned more about ourselves as coaches and teachers through collaboration, reflecting the experiences of Hostetler et al. (2018, p. 161), where they describe how “trust in one another, willingness to be vulnerable, and bonds intensified over time”. In an overall sense, the words of Harkness et al. (2018, p. 382) resonate: “positive critical incidents have the potential to facilitate learning through the emotions of celebration, joy, connection, and affiliation” (p. 382). Accordingly, our experiences helped sustain our coaching efforts, as we sought to support each other while navigating challenges. Our learning was an inherently social process (Farnsworth et al., 2016).

As our coaching relationship developed, we had opportunities for informal conversations and reflection on our own teacher education practices, for example, while on bus journeys to games. These discussions helped build trust, as we became more comfortable to reveal “personal strengths and weaknesses” (Goodnough et al., 2020, p. 10). This sharing of experiences enabled us to establish and sustain a caring climate (Purdy et al., 2016). As we spanned these boundaries between teaching and coaching, our support and care for each other was authentic and empathetic.

20.4.2 Uncomfortable Experiences on the Boundaries of Coaching and Teaching

Self-study communities of practice provide a secure space within which to discuss experiences and foster professional development opportunities (Gallagher et al., 2011). In a similar way, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020, p. 14) highlight how this social learning space is “about people finding partners with whom they get better at making a difference” (p. 14). Our learning space was both formal (during our weekly meetings to reflect on, and discuss, our practice) and informal (where we had frequent conversations immediately before, after or even during training sessions and games). Crucially, it was a secure and comfortable environment where we could talk openly about uncomfortable aspects of our practice, and is characteristic of the “safety, trust and care” inherent in a self-study CoP (Kitchen & Ciuffetelli Parker, 2009, p. 120).

20.4.2.1 Being Uncomfortable with New Pedagogies

In our SSCoP we wished to be student-centred teacher educators, and athlete-centred coaches, but struggled to reconcile these aspirations with athlete expectations grounded in a more traditional coaching style (Light & Harvey, 2017). We noticed how our athletes, shaped by their previous experiences, found it challenging to embrace fully our use of learner-centred approaches.

Our attempts to incorporate effective questioning strategies, for example, was problematic for us as coaches and for the athletes. Athletes’ feedback indicated

frustration because they wanted us to be more directive in our style: “We’d rather be driven...more of a ‘do this’ rather than ‘what do you think?’” (Student-athlete, Year 2). This highlighted the importance of understanding how prior experiences impacted athletes’ receptiveness to new approaches. Jarrett and Harvey (2014, p. 90) report similar issues, suggesting “a change in pedagogy may often be difficult to facilitate due to students’ preconceived notions” (p. 90). Likewise, we found it difficult to adopt these strategies. As Anne (Year 4) noted:

Balancing the “telling” and “asking” continues to challenge me. I want to get players discussing and finding solutions themselves, but it sometimes seems to be just easier to tell them what to do. And sometimes I think that’s what players want us to do too!

As we became more competent, we noticed subtle improvements. While Anne (Year 4) still highlighted difficulties, she also detected a change in athletes’ levels of engagement:

I still feel that some of the “problem solving” questions we are asking players result in “surface level” responses...In comparison, overhearing the small group player discussions on Monday – players were more specific and focused.

As coaches and teacher educators, we value good planning. Richard wrote: “because of our clear session focus, we knew what we wanted to achieve...we outlined our objectives clearly, and allowed time for some interaction with the players” (Richard, Year 3). We hoped to encourage similar approaches among our student teachers. This emphasis on planning sensitised us to the need for reflection-in-action too (Schön, 1992), and we noticed that being able to deviate from the plan could be important as we gained expertise. In the same reflection, Richard noted: “because our session was so well planned...sometimes it felt that following the plan was more important than personal interactions.” Later, we discussed how our student teachers can struggle to respond to individual children’s needs in a classroom context. The following season, Anne suggests we had improved this aspect of our practice: “our collaborative approach was responding to players’ needs as opposed to fitting our coaching plans” (Anne, Year 4).

As brokers in the LoP, we reflected on how our student teachers may struggle with pedagogical innovations as they learned how to teach. Consequently, we developed “an appreciation of and a responsiveness to the learning that students are engaged in” (Garbett, 2011, p. 73). Our learning as coaches adopting a novel pedagogy deepened our empathy for students who encountered similar challenges. By reflecting on the needs of our students, we hope we are better placed to reflect Martin’s (2018, p. 267) contention that “being a teacher educator...means supporting teachers to identify and act upon the connections between their work in a multiplicity of contexts” (p. 267). Our learning about pedagogical strategies within our SSCoP informed our support of student learning in our TEP, thus spanning the boundaries on our LoP.

20.4.2.2 Being Uncomfortable About Our Coaching and Teaching Identities

While dealing with the discomfort of pedagogical challenges might be an expected part of learning a new approach, becoming uncomfortable with our teaching and coaching identities was not something we had envisaged originally. Although brokering between both domains of practice (teaching and coaching) was advantageous to us, our dual identities were often a cause of uncomfortable boundary crossings, as we spanned both domains. This was significant for Richard, due to the interconnectedness of PE teaching and sports coaching. Because some of the athletes we coached were also students in our lectures, they had experience of us as teacher educators in a class setting, and as coaches in a competitive sports setting. One student-athlete's comment in Year 4 illustrated the complexity of this boundary spanning situation, when she noted the discomfort that would be apparent "...if he roared at me in a match, and then I have to go and sit in his 9 o'clock lecture."

Another suggested our approach contrasted sharply with her prior experiences where coaches were frequently "giving out and being aggressive" (Student-Athlete, Year 3). Some student-athletes believed the reflective style they associated with a teacher educator was incompatible with the more vocal, aggressive manner they expected from a sports coach:

But then Richard's also probably going to lecture half of us so, like, there's a line where, like, it's different than a club coach because there's different lines that he might be able to cross and not cross (Student-Athlete, Year 4)

Our reflections on this feedback highlighted the importance of acknowledging our student-athletes' prior experiences, and challenged us to examine if, and how, our coaching and teaching identities were different. Fenton-O'Creedy et al. (2015, p. 33) argue "identity is not just an individual attribute but is negotiated anew in each community we participate in". Given the overlaps that occurred in our landscape, this process of renegotiation, as boundary spanners with a focus on learning, informed our experiences and those of our student-athletes.

The coaching roles we adopted underwent significant change over the five seasons. In the beginning, Anne observed and assisted Richard as head coach. She reflected on how she was transitioning from a familiar role as a player, to a less comfortable role as a coach. Later, she described feeling "inadequate for not knowing the 'right answer' to players' queries" (Year 4). Later in the season, Anne noted how our coaching roles evolved. She wrote:

Our coaching roles do not need to be equal...the coaching CoP is not about developing a parity in our coaching roles, but rather learning from, and complimenting, what each coach can bring to the team's development.

This suggests both of us were learning, albeit in different ways, "through the process of becoming a member of a community" (Cushion & Townsend, 2016, p. 191). In terms of resolving the discomforts associated with our teaching and coaching, the collaborative nature of our self-study, and the support provided by being "co-conspirators and critical friends" (Hostetler et al., 2016, p. 61), helped us

to navigate our way through complex journeys across our LoP. We learned more about ourselves in the context of what Ives et al. (2020) describe as “the intersectional and fluid nature of identities and their associated management” (p. 100).

20.5 Conclusion

Over the course of five seasons, our collaborative self-study has provided us with opportunities to identify authentic, meaningful instances of learning from practice (Callary et al., 2012), while crossing boundaries on our LoP. Fletcher and Ovens (2015, p. 217) note the potential for self-study to provide “glimpses into the black boxes of the professional contexts and situations in which practitioners work” (p. 217). In our situation, the characteristics of our specific SSCoP enabled us to interrogate aspects of our practices that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. Our exploration of our coaching and teaching practices facilitated a deeper understanding of how we coach and how we teach, and we acknowledge that the time commitment required to engage fully in an SSCoP is significant, but rewarding. We have gained a better perspective on the interconnectedness across the contexts within our overall LoP, while adding to the few existing studies that examine this novel concept (e.g. Duarte et al., 2020). By building on existing research (e.g. Patton & Parker, 2017), our learning journey evidences the potential for broadening the self-study CoP approach to incorporate learning between, and across, landscapes of practice. In line with self-study research generally, this is accompanied by a commitment to disseminate “our findings beyond our immediate contexts” (Kitchen & Ciuffetelli Parker, 2009, p. 109).

Hadar and Brody (2010, p. 1650) use the “metaphor of symphonic harmony” to describe the collegial atmosphere that developed among teacher educators within a CoP. While not claiming to have achieved symphonic harmony over the past five years, our experiences suggest high levels of collaboration and shared learning helped us to build a caring coaching environment. Moreover, a process of “reframing” informed our discussions (Bullock et al., 2014, p. 39), particularly as we began to explore how our coaching learning was applicable in other contexts within our broader LoP. Consequently, the assertion that “knowledgeability is not just information, but an experience of living in a landscape of practice and negotiating one’s position in it” resonates with us (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 142).

Existing research in CoPs emphasises the need for “strong leadership and stable settings” to support coach learning (Bertram et al., 2016, p. 60). In our situation, we noted that, over time, the nature of leadership became more democratic as we learned with, and from, each other. Acknowledging that our learning as teachers and coaches is a social endeavour (Cushion & Townsend, 2016), we suggest that adopting a self-study approach supported our ongoing learning. Niesz (2010, p. 44) contends the “meanings made and identities constructed in communities are the creators of possibility” (p. 44). In our situation, developing a greater understanding of our coaching and teaching practices within our small SSCoP has been very rewarding

for us, personally and professionally. Consequently, we hope our experiences may prompt others to explore their learning as boundary spanners in a variety of contexts using a similar framework.

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Chapter 21

Forming a Self-Study Community of Practice in Turbulent Times: The Role of Critical Friendship



Michael Ling and Shawn M. Bullock 

Abstract This chapter considers the ways in which the authors used their critical friendship to form a self-study community of practice (SSCoP) within a larger community of practice in a graduate program devoted explicitly to teacher inquiry. This program has produced hundreds of alumni in a local teaching area, all with rich experience of carefully analysing their own practices and making the results public in ways suggested by LaBoskey (The methodology of self-study and its theoretical underpinnings. In: Loughran JJ, Hamilton ML, Russell TL (eds) *International handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices*. Kluwer Academic Publishers, pp. 817–870, 2004). The first author (Michael) has been involved with the program since its inception and was program leader for a number of years; Shawn taught for a number of years in the program before moving to a new academic appointment. We offer this chapter, a personal history how our critical friendship led to a SSSCoP within a large graduate program, in part as a way of dealing with the ebbs and flows of neoliberal pressures on academics and teachers. We offer two metaphors to articulate what we have learned about the importance of establishing authentic self-study communities of practice to support the professional development of experienced teachers. Finally, we comment on the ways in which SSSCoPs might begin and end in response to the pressures and requirements of new forms of collaboration in the work of teacher educators.

Our chapter is about the ways in which we, as critical friends, developed metaphors for thinking about the neoliberal pressures on academia in particular and on those of us who co-taught in an in-service teacher education unit that developed

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graduate-level programming alongside teachers in local schools. One of the challenges of writing a chapter like this is to find the boundaries that exist between frequently used terms in self-study literature such as *critical friendship* and *community of practice*. In writing this chapter, we hope to shed light on the ways in which a critical friendship might lead to a self-study community of practice—and indeed, the ways in which such a transition might be a necessity for teacher educators under neoliberal pressures. The former, we believe, served as a foundation whereas the later was, for us, bounded to a particular time in which we shared particular challenges to our practices as teacher educators. To clarify, we argue from the outset that a critical friendship might exist without a self-study community of practice. In the same way, we feel it important to underline there are traditions that use the concepts of critical friendship and community of practice outside the self-study literature. For purposes of this chapter, we take Schuck and Russell’s (2005) argument that a critical friend is a companion on a professional journey, and that a key component of the friendship is the willingness to share ideas and to ask questions of each other. We also found resonance with Allison and Ramirez’s (2016) self-study, in which they served as “co-mentors” for each other while navigating tensions as they learned new roles in their respective institutions.

The issue of a community of practice is more complicated. Wenger et al.’s (2002) seminal work was, of course, not written with self-study in mind and thus there are many communities of practice that do not engage in self-study—at least as conceived in our methodological tradition. In fact, a central tenant of the scholarship on communities of practice is that we are all participants in multiple communities of practice within different elements of our professional lives. The overarching environment in which we developed our self-study of community of practice was *within* a well-established community of practice in a graduate program unit called Field Programs (FP). We thus begin our chapter with a prologue—a description of the origins and practice of diplomas and degrees offered within the FP unit. Our purpose in this chapter, though, is *not* to articulate or analyse features of the FP CoP. Instead, we write about how we formed a self-study community of practice (SSCoP) of two, based on our critical friendship and shared sense of trust, as a bulwark against the pressures of neoliberalism on how we thought about teacher education.

The rest of our chapter features two beginnings and two endings. First, we introduce two metaphors to help us interpret and challenge the ebbs and flows of a program, our reliance on a critical friendship to bolster our self-study community of practice within a larger graduate program, and the lessons learned for our pedagogies of teacher education. Our metaphors—that of the *zombification* of the academy and the jazz musician technique of *comping*—will likely seem odd to most readers initially. In introducing these metaphors early, we hope to invite the reader both to understand how we built these metaphors conceptually (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and to empathise with why we feel that *comping* in a self-study community of practice (SSCoP) plays well, acting as a vanguard against the *zombification* of the academy. Second, we analyse the ways in which we observed—and felt within our

teaching—the ways in which these pressures had an impact on the teaching of reflexive practice to practising teachers within that context, over a period of years.

Our chapter concludes with two endings. First, we discuss some of the ways in which the metaphor of *zombification* helps to explain some of the pressures on our work in FP. Our self-study community of practice (SSCoP) has ended because we no longer have the opportunity to teach together in the same program. Processing this reality is a part of our second ending, in which we realise that our SSCO was born of fears about the ways in which our lives as teacher educators were affected by larger neoliberal forces on education.

21.1 Prologue: Field Programs—Teaching About Teacher Inquiry

The academic program unit, “Field Programs,” in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University (hereafter, SFU), began in the 1980s as “Field Relations,” a unit that had as its initial aim the mandate to provide graduate level professional development opportunities to practicing (“in-service”) teachers, in geographical areas of our large province (British Columbia), where such opportunities were limited or indeed non-existent. This developed over time to involve the cultivation of connections with ‘the field,’ that is, the school districts, schools, teachers, and administrators that form the broader community that we as a Faculty both serve in our capacity of offering courses and programs that meet the needs of those constituents, and that we draw from in terms of personnel who are seconded to work in the unit as members of the Instructional and Administrative Team.

Along with hiring teachers to be part of the team, for terms of two to four years, there were two other aspects of the organization of the unit that were original, and to some, radical, from the inception of this unit: the various programs (two-year Graduate Diplomas in Education, or GDEs) were developed *with* school districts, and so were not solely offerings that were created by the unit and its Faculty members. Instead, the GDEs were collaboratively developed to address certain educational needs or desires in those school districts, for interested teachers to pursue, thus building capacity in these various topical or thematic areas in those districts. So, for example, when new digital technologies were emerging in educational settings, Graduate Diploma programs on this central theme were developed to enable teachers to explore ideas and applications of this theme to their own settings. Other programs included: Exploring the Arts in Education, Today’s Classrooms, Tomorrow’s Futures (exploring everything from shifting demographics in schools, to diversity and inclusion), and ones devoted to helping teachers interpret a recent, government-mandated, curriculum reform initiative in British Columbia

We believe this is a significant point to note, as Field Programs used the language of practitioner research and/or teacher inquiry to largely describe what we were doing, eschewing terms likely to be more familiar to the teachers in our programs

such as *action research*. In a sense, we were doing self-study without using the language developed within self-study scholarship, and without connection to more formal S-STTEP outlets such as the SIG, the Castle Conference, the journal, and so forth. We were focused on engaging teachers in understanding their multiple selves in practice, though, and the focus of each Graduate Diploma program was often a jumping off point rather than a “subject or professional area” in which one developed “expertise.” The two-year program was structured in such a way that practising teachers would take courses that addressed various aspects of that theme, and in the next term, would develop an inquiry project (a “field study”) wherein they could apply these new learnings to their own practice in their classrooms. The entire two-year program would consist of these recursive rounds of ‘content’ and then ‘application,’ punctuated by end of term portfolio presentations where the students would document and represent their learning to a sub-group of their classmates, and a mentor.

In 2005, new regulations were developed so that students who completed a GDE could apply to continue for an additional three semesters of study that involved pursuing an inquiry into oneself and practice for a year. The program and the degree that was conferred was a Master of Education in Educational Practice (hereafter MEd (EP)). Two or three Faculty Members would constitute the instructional team for this additional year, who would teach the three courses, and supervise the students’ inquiry projects and final presentations. Michael has taught in this program since its inception and has supervised approximately 500 students from that time up to the present. Shawn also both supervised and taught students in these cohorts between 2014 and 2017, before departing SFU and taking a position at Cambridge.

21.2 Beginnings Part I: Critical Friendship as Catalyst for Self-Study Community of Practice

We, Shawn and Michael, had the good fortune to meet each other and to become collegial colleagues and friends, almost immediately in 2012 when the former (Shawn) took a position at SFU, and was fortuitously placed in an office next to the latter (Michael). We quickly formed a critical friendship based on trust and a set of mutual interest: Michael sharing his knowledge of the anthropology of education and the history of ideas, and Shawn introducing Michael to the literature, research, and the community of ‘self-study’ (in particular, literature written by the S-STTEP community and the biennial ‘Castle Conference’). Our initial critical and personal friendship often focused on explorations of educational questions considered writ large, often over a meal together. Michael provided historical background into and the contemporary cultural context and practices of Field Programs, which formed the basis of the MEd (EP), as his teaching was largely within the FP unit. Inevitably, we shared stories of our histories in teacher education—Shawn having come from

another university and trying to find his way in a new place; Michael finding it useful to reflect on his experiences with someone new to the Faculty.

For a while, though, we lacked a shared practice of teacher education in our Faculty. When Shawn was, unexpectedly, asked to teach in the MEd (EP) program our critical friendship shifted to what we would argue was a self-study community of practice (SSCoP) within a larger CoP in the graduate program. Still new to the Faculty, Shawn found it important to have a trusted senior colleague with whom he could share questions and vulnerabilities. Shawn was excited to teach in a program ostensibly devoted to helping practising teachers re-position their selves in relation to practice, but he felt daunted by the prospect of entering into such a well-established community of practice composed of colleagues who had taught in a tightly-knit program for many years. He was unsure of the extent to which his background in self-study would be thought of as useful, or indeed welcomed. Our critical friendship remained, but the requirement of teaching together shifted us from one type of collaboration to another. We theorise that our critical friendship was foundational to one form of collaboration, but our move to a self-study community of practice (SSCoP) reflected a new practical, action-oriented approach to the problems posed by teaching within the same program.

Fortuitously, we hit upon a specific mechanism to help us built trust and extend our critical friendship to a SSCO: a book club. As likely nearly anyone in a university teaching/research position these days may well attest, the opportunities in our current social and cultural climate to deeply, and in a sustained manner, discuss and pursue matters of mutual professional interest are more and more difficult to come by. As many authors have argued, the socio-politics and organizational pressures of our moment in post-secondary institutions, has created challenging circumstances for such sustained and probing conversations. Everything from the “24/7” lives we are compelled to live (Crary, 2014) to the specific impact of “the new managerialism” and “audit culture,” forces that are arguably emphatically defining, influencing, and shaping our institutions (Ball, 2012; Shore, 2008), have been cited as ongoing challenges to the very notion of being colleagues.

In 2013, we decided to “culture jam” these pressures by agreeing to create our own “book club of two,” wherein we would read and discuss books that we had wanted to read but had not been able to find the time. To give it some structure and focus, we decided on books that would address issues of contemporary university life, with the aim that it would help us contextualize what we were experiencing anecdotally and to a certain extent, intuitively, as teacher educators within the same graduate unit who shared responsibilities for groups of students. Thus was born a platform for deepening a critical friendship around our own self-study of practice, within a program that was focused on reflexive inquiry. The book club held us accountable to meet regularly and provided a lens through which we could process the pressures we were feeling teaching within the same program. Our examples could, for the first time, be drawn from shared experiences and a shared commitment to improving our teaching for the same groups of students. In effect, we were attempting to cultivate an informal version of what we asked our students to do. In

hindsight, we realise that the book club provided us with a mechanism to shift our mode of collaboration from critical friendship to an SSCoP.

Two key metaphors for making sense of both our lives as academics and our roles as teacher educators in the same institution developed from our reading: *zombification* and *comping*. Despite developing from the seemingly disparate fields of horror fiction and jazz music, we found these metaphors both helpful in negotiating border crossings (Jasman, 2010) in our critical friendship and in our initially different statuses within the community of practice in the FP unit: Michael as insider and Shawn as outsider.

21.2.1 *Zombification*

We are aware of the strangeness of including a metaphor developed from a trope common to horror and fantasy fiction: the zombie. Although the nature and character of zombies vary somewhat, they tend to be represented as somewhat mindless, void of their former humanity, slow-moving, and deadly. Crucially, though, they represent a place between being alive and dead—undead, as genre fiction would have it. The application of the metaphor of “living death” to the academy is the motivation for Whelan et al.’s (2013) work *Zombies in the Academy*, an edited volume that was the first shared reading for our book club. In part, they seemed motivated by Ulrich Beck’s idea of *zombie categories*: those categories that continue to be used despite being meaningless in current sociopolitical contexts. Whelan et al. argue, in part that “the ivory tower model of the university, along with most of the other traditional archetypes of the institution, is just such a category: an undead, lingering ghoul” before (more optimistically) stating that their aim is not to provide “simply pessimistic or cynical accounts of the strained circumstances under which those who populate universities carry out their peculiar work [but also] to reflect the creativity, wit, imagination, and commitment with which this work is conducted” (p. 5). The zombie, for authors who contributed to Whelan et al., is “a sign of our sense of what it means to occupy the field of contemporary higher education” (p. 5). Contributors used the metaphor to analyse and interpret four main themes: the rise of corporate culture in university, the “infectious” digital technologies that increasingly occupy real and virtual spaces in the lives of academics and students, pedagogies and literacies that are becoming zombified thanks to problematic new normalities and, cheerily, the post-apocalyptic terrain of higher education and where the “academic underworld” might head in the future.

We found this work both amusing and helpful in equal measure and, with hindsight, we realise it could not have come at a better time in our critical friendship and collaboration. We wish to note, for clarity, that we do not believe our current or former institutions are any more or less “zombified” than any other university in the English-speaking world. To borrow from Bullough and Pinnegar’s (2001) work, we found many of the essays in Whelan et al.’s (2013) both “rung true” and “enabled connection” via the metaphor of zombification.

It is also worth clarifying, at the outset, some of the work that the *zombification* metaphor does for our thinking: It helps us interrogate commodification, massification, solidarity, and pedagogical reflection. We share Pearce and Tan's (2013) concern the commodification of universities through technologies, although unlike them we argue that non-digital technologies (i.e. program structures) are as equally culpable as digital ones. Deslandes and Adamson (2013) proposed the interesting notion of *zombie solidarity*, which requires a "radical disinterest in participating in this [academic] deadening culture as well as a palpable—indeed deeply threatening—lack of desire for the good this culture produces and the differentiated class status it compels us to pursue" (p. 69). An academic zombification, then, for Deslandes and Adamson, becomes positive because it involves a "conscious refusal of the very terms in which one can be 'interested'" (p. 69). Kimber (2013) used several zombie film tropes to reflect on the nature of pedagogy within media education in the U.K. Particularly resonant for us was his use of a small subset of zombie films that feature sympathetic renderings of zombies against terrifying representations of the humans who survive the "zombie apocalypse." The argument here is "the illusory nature of many of the perceived differences between academics and their students," as "we are all involved in the same joint project of learning about, participating within, and trying to promote and develop a discipline in which we have shared interests and investments" (p. 239).

21.2.2 *Comping*

One of our many shared interests is music history and analysis, and there was scarcely a book club meeting that went by without some extended discussion of a piece of music, a musician, or a book or film about a musician. Although the initial focus of our book club was, as outlined above, on the perils and pitfalls of the rise of neoliberalism in the university and the concurrent *zombification* of academics and the academy, we eventually turned to extended discussion of the arts, particularly music. To this day, our sadly less frequent "book club" meetings are more frequently grounded in the arts. Shawn recalls that one of our first discussions about jazz prompted him to recall his experiences in a jazz history course in university, in which the professor stated bluntly at the end of the course that he was unable to define jazz beyond the fact that "It should probably have some element of improvisation...and it should probably swing." Michael, who has spent a significant amount of his career using ideas from the performing arts in his work with teachers, immediately helped Shawn to think more carefully about what it meant to improvise, in a musical sense, and how the musical metaphor might feed in to the work of the teacher educator. Shawn made links to Schön's (1983) ideas about reflection-in-action, and understanding the problematic, the unclear, in the moment of a situation.

We find the work of musician and sociologist Howard Becker (2000), who writes extensively about jazz music, creativity, and improvisation, to be particularly

helpful, particularly a piece written at the turn of the century that discusses the *etiquette* of improvisation:

The etiquette here is more subtle than I have so far suggested, because everyone understands that at every moment everyone (or almost everyone) involved in the improvisation is offering suggestions as to what might be done next, in the form of tentative moves, slight variations that go one way rather than some of the other possible ways. As people listen closely to one another, some of those suggestions begin to converge and others, less congruent with the developing direction, fall by the wayside. The players thus develop a collective direction which characteristically—as though the participants had all read Emile Durkheim—feels larger than any of them, as though it had a life of its own. It feels as though, instead of them playing the music, the music, Zen-like, is playing them. If, however, the participants are not courteous to each other that way, do not listen carefully and defer to the developing collective direction, the music just clunks along, each one playing their own tired clichés. (pp. 172–173)

Our second metaphor has thus developed into what jazz musicians often call *comping*, which is usually thought of as the features of a piece (contra-melodies, tempos, chord progressions, rhythms) that either *accompany* or *complement* a soloist. It is a part of the improvisation described above, a way of developing the collective direction of a piece. Crucially, Becker reminds us that collective improvisation does not automatically result in this collective direction—we are at risk of adhering to our “tired clichés.” At the outset of our thinking, we felt that our role was to find ways to *comp* both the teachers enrolled in Field Programs and the larger community of practice that formed the unit. As time went on, however, we found that it was at least equally important to find ways to *comp* for each other, as the *zombification* of contemporary university life, including but not limited to Field Programs, provided all the more a need and reason to be nimble and responsive—to engage in *comping*—as a response to the uncertainties and the shifts of our times.

21.2.3 *Mobilising metaphors*

Having articulated our metaphors of *zombification* and *comping*, both of which were developed in the crucible of a book club that helped transform our critical friendship into a collaboration, we turn to an account of the ways in which these metaphors help us to understand both our situatedness in the community of practice within the programs we taught, and the ways in which these metaphors helped us to negotiate our own critical friendship and collaboration as we sought to align our teacher education practices and our values. We thus share a collection of beginnings and endings, the latter based on our present-day use of two metaphors to understand recent goings-on and the former largely based on a text first shared as a Castle Conference proceeding (Ling & Bullock, 2014) that provides an account of our early work together.

21.3 Beginnings Part II: Articulating Values for Teaching About Teacher Inquiry

In order to return to the beginning of our work together, it is important to re-emphasise that our critical friendship, born initially but not limited to a personal friendship, developed into an SSCoP as Shawn found himself thrust into a role in teaching in Field Programs in his second year at SFU and thus began experiencing problems of practice familiar to Michael. Shawn recognised immediately that Field Programs, and those who taught within it, exhibited the hallmarks of a well-established community of practice and that Michael was an experienced and respected member of the community. Kitchen et al. (2008) called attention to “both the teaching and inquiry dimensions of such communities” and, particularly relevant to our chapter, noted that SSCoPs need to adapt to the changing demands of academic culture in order to “sustain its members and overcome barriers to teacher education as a form of scholarship” (p. 108). We believe that the word *sustain* is particularly germane to the reason why the book club mediated our transition from critical friendship to SSCoP—our collaborative needs changed.

Our book club conversations became a jumping off point for helping Shawn to understand the nature of the community of practice that he was about to join, whilst simultaneously allowing Michael to take a new look at his practice with a view to articulating his values for teaching in the program and then to retrieve and/or reconstruct the very values that brought him to the eminently human, and ideally humane, studies of both anthropology and education in the first place. Our conversations, fortuitously, also coincided with Michael’s sabbatical year, during which he was spending much time reading and thinking about the history of qualitative research, the changing conditions of universities, and the very nature of inquiry.

Our early work together was thus about allowing ourselves to be challenged by shared concerns in what we considered to be the zombification of the academy more generally, the shifting sands of a graduate-level in-service teacher education program that Michael had devoted a considerable amount of his professional career to, and the immediacy of Shawn’s transition into said program and its community of practice. To be clear: We did not decide *a priori* what the metaphors would be and then engage in our discussions. Our book club, in which we have engaged with about a dozen texts up until the present day, helped us to develop ways about speaking about what was happening to our involvement in Field Programs and the Academy more generally alongside events as they were unfolding. In other words, we formed our own SSCoP of two by developing a shared language grounded in shared experiences of reading and discussion. Our beginnings centred on Michael’s interest in the nature of knowledge, the work of the academy, qualitative research, and teacher inquiry. The ever-shifting sands of the neoliberal university, coupled with our perception that the Field Programs unit might have begun to succumb to a kind of marketization and massification, prompted us to consider the possible roots out of which teacher inquiry and self-study might be said to emerge, when seen in cultural and historical perspective. In a word, the nature of our self-study

conversations compelled Michael to, first, reflect on not only his practice as a teacher educator, nor even solely his practice in relation to Shawn's, but the very nature and character of the institutional frames within which we seek to practice self-study. Early on, Shawn took the role of articulating his understanding of the place and nature of self-study with respect to other reflexive approaches, and Michael used his background as an anthropologist to motivate conversations about the very nature of knowledge, how it is "gained" or "obtained," and how it can be spoken of.

Michael introduced Shawn to something he refers to as "the lineages of inquiry" that have possibly existed historically and cross-culturally. He proposed that four distinct forms of inquiry have always existed in some form or other: the philosophical, the contemplative, the aesthetic, and the scientific (see Collins, 2000; though Collins does not explicitly use this nomenclature). Philosophical inquiry considers the nature of knowing and seeks to provide reasons for holding a certain view or position; contemplative inquiry uses means and methods for reflecting on the nature of self and the world; aesthetic inquiry involves practices which aim to both investigate and represent our knowing in various expressive ways; and scientific inquiry might be summarized as the manner in which we might know the world in trustworthy, predictable, and yet interpretive ways.

Teacher inquiry, and self-study, if they are practices that go beyond the instrumental notions of improving one's practice might be said to indeed involve all four forms of inquiry. We inquire philosophically into the nature of our knowing, of our existence, and we seek to provide good reasons for what we hold to be true; we use self-reflection as a means to understand ourselves in our worlds, with others; we seek to explore and represent our knowing in expressive ways, whether in the subtle ways of narrating our experiences or more fully expressive means such as painting or poetizing, or even singing our understandings; and, we are, arguably, eminently scientific (in both the natural science, and the human sciences senses) of seeking explanation *and* understanding in our contexts.

Michael's links between self-study methodology and the lineages of inquiry that he had identified in his earlier work was a significant turning point (Bullock & Ritter, 2011) that caused Michael to articulate new values for teaching about teacher inquiry in the following way (in his words):

1. The act of getting together with my colleague to consistently, and yet organically, engage with each other, around readings, around conceptual and theoretical matters, around our tensions, and to teach together has brought me to a recognition that the practice must always involve this collegial and dialogical element. Much as a contemplative community or an aesthetic collective both supports and holds to account its members in relation to their practices, so I too need to find (and have found) a companion to both hold me to account, and to support me. Our interactions, our mutual support, might be seen as a micro embodiment of a macro phenomenon in the history of forms of inquiry, that is, the need for a genuinely dialogical, critical, and sympathetic community.

2. The attempt to understand, and to advocate for, self-study and teacher inquiry in our fraught and fractious times, might likewise be assisted by such an exploration of how this form of inquiry is connected to historically longer and substantially grounded lineages, and, we might presume, honourably and rightly so.
3. To engage in self-study and teacher inquiry is to be ever mindful of the importance of maintaining a constant state of vigilance toward oneself, one's practice, and importantly, one's narratives about practice. That is, to be ever careful of how one's experiences may become 'mythologized', how previous practice, while seemingly 'successful,' can become sedimented, reified, again, mythologized, and indeed, may become ideological or a form of dogmatism. It was the experience of being able to participate with Shawn in teaching, with our differing and yet complementary kinds of experiences, in this program, and in the realm of self-study, in enacting our practice in front of students together, that have pushed me to examine my own mythologies of teaching in the program itself.

Here we see seeds of the development of our metaphors for thinking about how we might work with student-teachers within Field Programs, even though these values were articulated just before Shawn started teaching in the program in his own right. The zombification metaphor, in hindsight, allows one to see the ways in which Michael was concerned that the massification of both program structure and the demands on his time risked a deleterious effect of his engagement with his community of practice: A combination of a sabbatical year and book club meetings enabled a contemplative space for Michael; the critical friendship between us created a sense of productive, rather than bureaucratic, accountability. We also see the seeds of *zombie solidarity*, as Michael advocates for a kind of radical disinterest in university reward structures in favour of advocating for the low-valued work of teacher education, particularly teacher education via self-study. His third value is an excellent example of what we came to refer to as *comping*: Michael articulated the tensions between accompanying/complementing the community of practice in the program and going his own way in improvising a pedagogy of teacher education. Michael explicitly confronted the challenge of avoiding playing "clichés" by acknowledging the potential of ideologies, mythologies, and dogmatism to arise in any long-running university program.

21.4 Endings Part I: Zombification, Comping, and Teacher Education

We turn now to speak of endings: The endings of our self-study community of practice in the program in which we taught, the ending of our former collaboration, and indeed the ending of our prior understandings of teacher education. We hasten to point out that each of these endings generated a new beginning. As Galison (1987)

pointed out in his trenchant analysis of the end of big scientific experiments: nothing really ends, it just changes form.

The well-defined structure of the GDE and MEd (EP) programs within the Field Programs unit, constructed in the crucible of a partnership between tower and field form a kind of technology that enabled both massification and commodification and, as a result, allowed a kind of zombification to occur. To be clear: *we are not suggesting that either colleagues or students in these programs were literal or figurative zombies*. But we do argue that the relative ease with which a GDE program could be developed on a “current topic” in education with a local district partner did massify and commodify Field Programs to a certain extent—literally in the sense that diplomas obtained from GDEs can be used as warrant to augment teachers’ salaries and figuratively in the sense that, at times, it was unclear if competition between different programs, both internally in our university and externally with other local universities, was further “massifying” the FP unit. Commodification, massification and thus zombification can make it more difficult to maintain and engage with a community of practice.

Kimber’s (2013) comments about “the illusory nature of perceived differences between academics and their students,” a part of our conceptualisation of zombification, provide an important check against the authors othering ourselves from our former students and colleagues. The neoliberal forces that create the zombified academy, and indeed the K-12 school system, are not felt uniquely by us. Our student-teachers struggle with the zombification of their practices as educators just as we struggle with our practices as teacher educators.

We can now turn to the most significant finding: Our critical friendship fostered and mediated our new self-study community of practice (SSCoP) as we fought against the pressures of the zombified academy. The term *zombie solidarity* was well-chosen by Deslandes and Adamson (2013), as it implicated our own zombification in the need to develop a radical disinterest in things that might count for more in increasingly neoliberal academic contexts. Shawn, for example, was pre-tenure when he began teaching in the Field Programs unit and thus was taking some risk in engaging with the collective supervision of large numbers of students each MED (EP) cohort, if for no other reason that the time involved supervising students is rarely as valued as the time spent publishing peer-reviewed research: something that the academy has a radical interest in. As Kitchen (2008) noted, the tenure-track can be a “tender trap” indeed, in that education professors can feel torn between the more traditional academic reward scheme and a focus on teaching and teacher education scholarship.

Michael observed recently that our *comping* metaphor encapsulates that which most animates our critical friendship and sustains us as we seek new venues for collaboration. It is in the act of conversing together, as critical friends, that something spontaneous, improvised, and ‘new’ emerges, which could only come about by the very act of comping together. We also release that comping can act as somewhat of an antidote to the negative elements of zombification: If zombification means massification and commodification, comping encourages improvisations and experimentations that undermine reification. Similarly, if comping encourages the positive

elements of zombification by creating a space for solidarity and—to push the metaphor further—a realization that teacher educators and teachers are equally implicated in the same way as the members of a jazz band. We share a collective project—and the SSCoP we formed guided our focus and actions.

21.5 Endings Part II: So What? The End

We recognize that our chapter might be a bit different than many self-studies, particularly since we are not explicitly focussed on improving a particular element of our pedagogies of teacher education. We would argue, though, that we are improvement-aimed (LaBoskey, 2004) in that we seek to understand what Loughran and Northfield (1998) referred to as *dilemmas*, *tensions*, and *disappointments* in our lives as teacher educators in the academy. Further, we argue that our self-study community of practice, formed in the crucible of critical friendship, provided a space in which to explore these lived realities of our teacher educator identities.

We also take Samaras and Freese's (2006) point that self-study can be understood through a socio-cultural lens, and that it is thus considered a situated inquiry. Understanding the nature of the contexts in which we live as academics is crucial to this or any other self-study work. We imagine that many of our self-study colleagues have had experiences where others express interest in doing self-study work but lament the lack of time to do so. We hope to add to the constantly developing theoretical foundation of self-study methodology by offering some more explicit reasoning about both why self-study is so difficult to do in the age of the neoliberal university, and why this work can be so important to the lives of academics.

Another explicit connection to self-study methodology is what we believe will be an explicit response to a challenge posed by Lighthall (2004). He identified three shapes to self-study: practices, self, and relationship, and further argued:

[There] is the assumption that one or some combination of these three shaping forces remains important and powerful in the face of the student teacher's environment when he or she moves into full-time teaching. That full-time teaching environment includes such powerful [additional] shaping forces as the students being taught, student and school culture, curricular resources, school administration policies and demeanor, parental attitudes, the economy, and state and national policies and priorities. (p. 239)

We find Lighthall's ideas to be just as relevant to the lives of teacher educators as they are to future teachers. After all, teacher educators are subject to additional shaping forces as well, and so perhaps we owe it to the teachers in our classrooms to conduct our own self-study on the ways in which shaping forces affect *our* work, so that we may better help our teachers understand how these issues might play out in *their* work. By invoking metaphors to help us understand the ways in which our critical friendship had to sustain the shift in our community of practice, we hope to preserve a sense of what self-study might still be, against those similar forces in this neoliberal moment, and how critical friendship is all the more important, in the face

of the challenges to embody it on a broader social or cultural level in our various institutions.

Like the zombie mythos in fiction, our use of the metaphor is born of fears: fear of not being able to enact our pedagogies of teacher education in the ways that fit with our ontological commitments to self-study (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009), fear of a changing direction of a large community of practice due to broadening set of neoliberal pressures, and fear of the increased number of border crossings that we must enact, and fear of something valued and familiar coming to an end—or at least changing form. Although many have written about how communities of practice might begin, and should be sustained, it seems that relatively few have written about the ends of their communities, even if they are “only” changing form. We have, perhaps, found a way to unpack and interpret one way that critical friends manage the inevitable turbulence of changing times: forming a self-study community of practice.

21.6 Coda: SSCoP as Emergent Collaboration

In our coda, we wish to offer the idea of a self-study community of practice as an emergent collaboration. We acknowledge that Kitchen et al. (2008) originally defined a self-study community of practice as being composed of at least four individuals. In part, they suggested that groups of more than four members “increases the complexity of the web of relationships and increases the likelihood that not all members will have their personal and professional needs addressed” (p. 110). Although we are in complete agreement with the reasoning behind their definition, we wish to add our work as an additional consideration to thinking about the scale of self-study communities of practice. Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker’s (2008) work helps us to understand the unique challenges of collaboration at a particular scale (a group of nine, in their case). We wish to highlight that our SSCoP emerged as a way of dealing both with the scale of the existing CoP in the graduate program and our perception of the impacts of neoliberal pressures on the university more generally and our in-service teacher education graduate program in particular.

Thus, for us, it was a combination of functioning as critical friends within a larger CoP and feeling external pressures that prompted us to function as a SSCoP. We feel that there is additional work to be done around beginnings and endings of SSCoPs, and the ways in which critical friendships might develop and endure through different sorts of collaborative approaches to self-study. What we want to document here is how our mutual interests and critical friendship helped support us both as colleagues working together in a program that was focused on self-study and inquiry into practice, but most significantly, how this critical friendship became all the more important as organizational and logistical shifts came about that markedly changed the structure and character of the program. To put it another way: We want to demonstrate the ways in which critical friendship can respond to external pressures by developing the focus on a self-study community of

practice, and how this new community can provide a rudder for the turbulent waters of change.

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Chapter 22

Reframing Collaboration in Self-Study



Shawn M. Bullock  and Brandon M. Butler 

Abstract In this concluding chapter, the editors return to the questions they posed at the outset of the book, and offer some considerations in how self-study researchers might rethink the nature of collaboration in self-study. They revisit the chapters found in the book, and ask readers to reflect upon the themes and assumptions that emerged from the chapters individually and the book as a whole. They also encourage readers to explore the contradictions and possibilities that surround collaboration in self-study research, offering some suggestions for how self-study researchers might define – and make appropriate use of – the three forms of collaboration found in this book.

Many self-study researchers would agree that it is crucial to ask: “How have I come to understand things differently?” after engaging in self-study research. As editors, we feel that our understandings of collaboration in self-study have been reframed because of working with the authors in this collection, each of whom offered new insights and important links to both the self-study literature and the more general educational research literature. We have learned quite a bit about how different researchers conceptualize collaborative work in self-study and how they use various, often multiple, forms of collaboration to analyze their practices as teacher educators and self-study researchers. As we noted in our introductory chapter, it seems to us that the boundaries between the three types of collaboration explored within this volume – critical friendship, collaborative self-study, and self-study communities of practice – are intuitively fluid to many experienced self-study researchers.

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This fluidity allows for methodological innovation, as can be seen throughout this volume, whilst raising some relevant questions and avenues for future research.

Before summarizing some of the key findings in each section of this book, we wish to articulate two main themes that have developed for us from the book as a whole:

1. *Self-study researchers need to clarify what they are doing when they engage in collaborative work.* Put another way: It is helpful for self-study researchers to be methodologically grounded when they claim to use critical friendship, collaborative self-study, or self-study communities of practice. This is not to suggest that there is a recipe or a correct way to adopt any of these three approaches; we only mean to emphasize the importance of building on existing lines of thought within particular literatures and highlighting methodological innovation.
2. *The links between collaboration and collaborative self-study may not be defined as clearly as the links between either critical friendship and self-study or communities of practice and self-study.* As we noted in our introductory chapter, it was clear to us at the outset that the term *collaboration* is probably the most fluid of all the terms used for this book. In many ways, this might be because many self-study researchers presume a level of collaboration integral to self-study – be it through critical friendship, co-authorship, interactive presentations at conferences, or any number of other methods. We also hasten back to the idea, articulated by LaBoskey, that a feature of self-study is its *interactivity*. We suggest that there are several productive lines of enquiry for future self-study research that center around the nature of collaborative self-study.

We wish to be clear that these two findings are not critiques of the chapters contained within this volume, to which we have also contributed as authors. Rather, we feel that the purpose of gathering chapters together as an edited book is to offer an opportunity for readers to consider some of the high-level themes that feature across all the chapters. The two themes described above are what emerged for us and we invite the reader to consider how the chapters and themes might encourage an examination of their prior assumptions about collaboration in self-study. We now examine some of the other themes raised in each of the three sections.

22.1 Critical Friendship: Push Past the Superficial

Critical friendship has a long history going back over 20 years. However, that history is often considered in a surface-level manner. When one considers the scope of publications found in *Studying Teacher Education*, it is no surprise to find approximately 250 articles that mention the use of critical friendship. Yet its use is often employed “superficially” (Stolle et al., 2019). Many of these articles mention the use of critical friendship, perhaps to achieve methodological trustworthiness.

However, a description of how the critical friendship was enacted, let alone the voice of the critical friend, can be lacking.

This is a realization brought into focus in this section of the book. The chapters in this section provide readers with deep insights into the origin of the authors' critical friendships, methodological and conceptual considerations and implications, the implications of critical friendships on personal and professional relationships and professional practice. Each of these areas are worth further consideration and exploration by self-study researchers, and our hope is that readers of this book take up this call.

Often missing from critical friendship self-studies is a deep consideration of the literature on critical friendship. As we noted in the introduction to this book, more often than not, critical friendship is mentioned in passing, perhaps with a brief reference to Schuck and Russell (2005). Their research may be considered seminal for those conducting research on critical friendship in self-study. But it should not be the sole reading for those interested in critical friendship as there is an extensive literature base on critical friendship in, and outside of, self-study. Collectively, the chapters found in this section provide readers with an array of critical friendship scholarship to draw upon as they conduct self-study. In this volume, Tom Russell revisited his original self-study research, providing readers with a more complex understanding of the history of critical friendship and insights into Schuck and his conceptualization of critical friendship. These two facets of critical friendship – the historical and conceptual – must be considered carefully by self-study researchers before they enact critical friendship.

The remaining chapters provide readers with additional nuance. Elizabeth Stolle and Charlotte Frambaugh-Kritzer revisited their critical friend definition continuum, providing readers with further insights into the complex nature of critical friendship and the varied ways in which critical friends engage with one another. Megan Stump and Colleen Gannon added additional evidence that corroborates conceptual understandings of how critical friends provide support for one another (e.g., Logan & Butler, 2013), through the lens of supporting one another through their doctoral program. In their chapter, Elsie Olan and Christi Edge shared further insights into their recent work on critical friendship and narrative meaning-making. Critical friendship is often written about as something enacted “in the moment” to investigate current practice. Through their research, Olan and Edge have argued that critical friendship also serves as a way for self-study researchers to engage in autobiographical and narrative research related to prior experience.

Adam Jordan, Michael Levicky, Andrew Hostetler, Todd Hawley, and Geoff Mills exposed readers to a different take on the nature of self-study. Critical friendship research has focused exclusively on critical friendship in professional settings. Yet, as Jordan and colleagues suggest, the term “critical friendship” infers some level of *personal* friendship. Self-study research is deeply personal, even if the scholarship largely focuses on the professional implications of our research together. The personal aspect of creating and sustaining critical friendship is one that should not be overlooked, and further scholarship is needed that investigates this facet of critical friendship.

The final chapters in this section – authored by Rodrigo Fuentealba and Tom Russell, and Cécile Bullock and Shawn Bullock – provided readers with insights into the complexities of cross-cultural critical friendships. Each notes the implications of distance and language on the successful enactment of critical friendships. Many of the chapters in this section report cross-institutional critical friendships, but Fuentealba and Russell highlight the additional challenges found among critical friends from different countries, cultures, and languages. But rather than see these challenges as impediments, they identified the opportunities these differences afforded. The plurilingual challenges Bullock and Bullock highlight bring to mind Schuck and Russell's (2005) final consideration of critical friendship, the challenges of "talking about perceptual differences" (p. 120). As Bullock and Bullock note, changing between, and understanding, languages requires mediation and meaning-making akin to working across the disciplinary differences found in professional settings. These two chapters speak to more than just those working in cross-cultural critical friendships, they raise important questions worth consideration by any group of critical friends.

Taken individually, these chapters provide exemplars of the complexity inherent in creating, enacting, and sustaining critical friendships. Together, they add to the methodological and theoretical understanding of critical friendship not often found in self-study research. Self-study researchers should remain mindful of the contributions made by these chapters to critical friend research. Future scholarship should refrain from mentioning critical friendship in a superficial manner. Instead authors should highlight critical friendship's historical, methodological and theoretical origins and constructs pertinent to their research. Critical friendship should not be mentioned in passing, as if its mere inclusion denotes trustworthiness or a quality characteristic of self-study. If a researcher includes critical friends in their self-study, so too should the critical friends' voices be incorporated. As Schuck and Russell (2005) stated, "A critical friendship works in two directions. It is not solely for the person whose teaching is being studied; the critical friend also expects benefits" (p. 119).

22.2 Collaborative Self-Study: The Power and Peril of Prior Assumptions

Self-study is inherently collaborative. For this reason, that nature of this collaboration risks remaining tacit and unexamined. The authors in this volume have provided several insights into the nature of collaborative self-study and how this methodological approach might be different from the collaborative work that underpins self-study. It is this difference that underpins much methodological and conceptual complexity, in our view – and thus merits future attention.

The first four chapters in the collaborative self-study section help us understand some of the methodological work that might be done with an explicit focus on

collaboration in self-study. Two of the themes that emerge across these chapters are the ways in which collaborative self-study provides agency, often in challenging environments, and encourages an engagement with identity as a teacher educator. Hafdis Guðjónsdóttir and Svanborg Rannveig Jónsdóttir, for example, wrote about the ways in which collaborative self-study encouraged a collective approach to understanding both the nature of practice and their prior assumptions and beliefs about teacher education. One has the sense that the collaborative agency developed by the authors and their colleagues motivated a sort of chain reaction in how they approached their practice and their identity as teacher educators. As their collaborative agency grew, it seems that they were more willing to challenge each other, to take risks, and to seek out new perspective. Collaborative self-study seems to beget a more explicit recognition of the value of collaboration.

The catalytic nature of collaborative self-study is also viewed in the chapter by Nicola Carse, Mike Jess, Paul McMillan, and Tim Fletcher. One of the refreshing things about their work is its explicit focus on a collective identity, shaped and re-shaped over a significant amount of time. By focusing early on collaborative self-study, the group was able to eventually come to question the relative places of the individual and collective identities. As they state, there is both a “we” and a “me-within-we.” Their dedication was such that they invited Fletcher, an “outsider,” to function as a meta-critical friend to comment on their practices as a collaborative self-study group. In understanding their shifting identities within a collaborative and collective endeavor, Carse and colleagues argued that they are better able to consider the implications of their practices with local physical education teachers.

Laurie Ramirez and Valerie Allison also invite us to consider the importance of longitudinal approaches to understanding agency and identity in collaborative self-study work. The authors considered the ways in which a collaborative self-study might grow and change over the years, particularly as personal friendship develops within the context of critical friendships and co-mentoring. One of the lessons of their chapter is that collaborative self-study as methodology is dynamic and temporal; that is, certain kinds of collaboration might make more sense in different points of an academic career. Christopher Meidl, Jason Ritter, and Carla Meyer take up a similar theme, re-affirming the fact that early-career teacher educators might have concerns about the perceived legitimacy of self-study research, particularly if they are probationary and/or pre-tenure. A significant methodological insight from Meidl and colleagues is the value of “haziness” within collaborative self-study work. It seems that the haziness of collaborative self-study might, somewhat surprisingly, provide something of a boost for a focus on individual agency within a collective. The authors note the value of being able to identify with collaborative self-study methodology as a collective group whilst attending to the other responsibilities of academic life. This conclusion is reminiscent of the “me-within-we” sentiment articulated by Carse and colleagues, earlier.

Finally, we turn to creative challenges found in collaborative self-study, posed by the final two chapters of this section. Rachel Forgasz and Helen Grimmer encourage us to consider the ways in which academics might feel compelled to perform in the neoliberal university – and how collaborative self-study might provide a

methodological tonic. The chapter provides clarity about how improvisational theatre games might provide methods for engaging in collaborative self-study. One result is that the reader can clearly see the effectiveness of collaboration on “sense-making” in self-study. Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan and Anastasia Samaras provide a different, yet related challenge to considering the nature of collaborative self-study. Building on their lengthy collaboration around polyvocal approaches to self-study research, Pithouse-Morgan and Samaras provide a way of thinking about collaborative self-study that fosters creativity as a result of plurality, interaction, and interdependence. Like Forgasz and Grimmer, they provide clear examples of methods that support collaborative self-study. One important finding of their work is that creative collaborative self-study offers encouragement to those who might initially lack confidence for trying new methods in their research.

The chapters in this section go a long way to highlighting three key findings. First, self-study is inherently collaborative, but there is a difference between the collaborative nature of self-study and *collaborative self-study*. Second, a group of people doing self-study research does not automatically mean they are explicitly focused on the collaborative nature of their work. Third, the boundaries around collaborative self-study are inherently fuzzy, as seen through the various approaches in this section. Some authors focused on the knowledge gained through and supportive structures of collaborative self-study, whereas some focus more on how one might arrive at collaborative self-study. Like self-study itself, there is no clear form to collaborative self-study. Researchers are encouraged to clarify the nature and purposes of collaboration and the ways in which collaborations are either supported by other traditions, such as critical friendships, or are dedicated to developing methodological innovations. The potential value of collaborative self-study for helping teacher educators to reframe their identities and to develop agency within their practice and academia must also be considered.

In the first edition of the *International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices*, Bodone et al. (2004) argued that although there was no definition of collaborative self-study, there was a certain coherence of characteristics. They divided their examples of collaborative self-study into three types of action: establishing the conditions for research, creating educational knowledge, and recreating teacher education. Although it might be tempting to divide the examples of collaborative self-study in this volume along the same lines, we prefer to think of collaboration through Bodone et al.’s concept of *types of action*. In this volume, we would argue that the overarching types of action are reframing identity, establishing agency, and developing methodological creativity. Just as Berry’s (2007) concept of using *tensions* to think about teacher education practices provides a jumping off point for thinking about tensions in our own practice – without obligating us to use the tensions she identified in her own practice – we believe that Bodone et al.’s (2004) concept of *types of action* provides one possible way for self-study researchers to consider the nature of collaborative self-study. The types of action found in this volume may or may not resonate with the reader – we urge them to examine their own practices to see what might be revealed.

22.3 Self-Study Communities of Practice: A Nascent But Necessary Move in Self-Study

The concept of “community of practice” has a 30-year history, beginning with the work of Lave and Wenger (1991). It has been used in a range of academic and professional settings and has been extensively studied and used as a conceptual frame in educational research and practice. Surprisingly, in a field that has adapted many aspects of research and practice from other disciplines and research methods, self-study researchers have sparingly linked self-study research *and* community of practice as a theoretical and methodological lens. Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker (2009) first brought these two concepts together, defining self-study communities of practice as “groups of at least four members committed to working together to study their teacher education practices” (p. 108). Yet, few have taken up the challenge to make use of this approach to self-study.

It seems that one challenge experienced by self-study researchers relates to clarity. In other words, how does a self-study community of practice, a group of at least four, differ from collaborative self-study, a group of two or more? It is not as if these differences have not been noted elsewhere. Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker (2009) highlighted the contrasts between collaborative self-study and their nascent concept of self-study community of practice. They saw self-study community of practice as a way to move self-study “from small-scale initiatives to a movement involving large numbers of teacher educators within institutions, nationally and internationally,” and that “there needs to be more attention given to developing communities of practice and critically inquiring into the work of these communities” (p. 110). So, when Julian Kitchen revisited the eight characteristics of self-study community of practice in this section’s introductory chapter, it is not as a new expression of a unique approach to self-study, rather it a reconsideration of a decade-old concept that deserves further consideration by self-study scholars when they note the importance of negotiating group dynamics. As editors, two of Kitchen’s characteristics stood out as clearly separating self-study community of practice and collaborative self-study.

First, self-study community of practice critically examines the group processes and dynamics of the community of practice. There is no requirement in self-study research that consists of two or more people to study the process and dynamics of their collaboration. But self-study community of practice research prioritizes this exploration. How are group members supporting, challenging, questioning, and reflecting with one another? And, how does this investigation help improve the enactment of the community space? Second, Kitchen argued for the importance of exploring teacher education reform through self-study communities of practice. Although self-study research critically challenges professional practice and perceptions of self, there is no guarantee that self-study will result in concrete reform of teacher education beyond the localized problem under investigation. According to Kitchen, self-study community of practice will improve more than just a course, it

will improve teacher education programs. It can challenge and positively change institutional and professional cultures.

The chapters in the remainder of the section provided concrete examples of self-study community of practice's potential as a vital approach to self-study research. Carin Appleget, Courtney Shimek, Joy Myers, and Breanya Hogue took readers on their journey of developing a self-study community of practice. They applied Bodone et al.'s (2004) conditions for quality self-study collaborations, likewise used by Kitchen and Ciuffetelli Parker, to frame their journey. This contribution, by a group new to self-study, elucidates the characteristics of self-study community of practice in an accessible manner for those also new to self-study research, and for those experienced as self-study scholars but looking to research as part of larger collaboratives. The next chapter, by Angela Branyon, Mark Diacopoulos, Kristen Gregory, and Brandon Butler also explored the creation of a self-study community of practice. In their chapter, they focused explicitly on the importance of autobiography, of understanding one's self and the biographies of the group, in establishing conditions for research and the four characteristics of self-study community of practice associated that self-study standard of quality.

The remaining chapters considered the specific responsibilities and experiences of several members of larger self-study communities of practice or members of small communities of practice. In the first chapter, Karen Goodnough and Saiqa Azam addressed how they worked within the larger collective but also developed their own separate critical friendship embedded within the community of practice. Of interest in this chapter was Karen's role as leader of the self-study community of practice and emerging leader of her university, a leadership role that complicated the relational dynamic with group members. Next, Richard Bowles and Anne O'Dwyer investigated their experience in a self-study community of practice centered on their identities as educators and sport coaches, and the intersection between those two roles. In contrast with other chapters in this section, their self-study community of practice consisted of the two of them. But when lining up their experiences and outcomes against the characteristics of a self-study community of practice, there is clear alignment – which begs the question, must a self-study community of practice have four or more members? Or, is it the characteristics themselves and their realization that define a self-study community of practice?

The final chapter in this section exemplified one of the challenges of this book – what separates critical friendship, collaborative self-study, and self-study community of practice? As the reader may have noticed, a number of chapters in this book mentioned the use of two (or all three) of these approaches to self-study, simultaneously. Collaborative groups, like Goodnough and Azam, and Michael Ling and Shawn Bullock in the final chapter, navigated between stories of their experiences within a self-study community of practice and as members of a critical friendship. For Goodnough and Azam, critical friendship was an outcome of their self-study community of practice. In Ling and Bullock's case, critical friendship was the catalyst for self-study community of practice. What these experiences suggest is that the forms of collaboration found in this book should not be viewed in a bifurcated fashion. Rather, self-study researchers may move in and out of one of more forms.

Critical friendship may exist as a component of a collaborative self-study or self-study community of practice. Collaborative self-study may evolve into a self-study community of practice, and vice versa, depending on the evolving intent of the self-study collaborative research group.

22.4 Final Thoughts: Finding Clarity in Collaboration in Self-Study

We started this book with what may sound like a simple question: How does one conduct self-study? We attempted one possible response to that question: Consider the role of collaboration in your self-study work. But even that seemingly innocuous recommendation has its limitations. If self-study research is inherently collaborative (LaBoskey, 2004; Loughran, 2005), then what does collaboration look like in self-study? This may be a better question to ask ourselves as self-study researchers. We fully agree with Julian Kitchen who noted in his chapter: “there is a need to distinguish among critical friendship, collaborative self-study, and larger communities of practice.” Finding the borders between, and the coherence within, each of these concepts can often prove quite challenging, however.

We see this book grounded in Bodone et al. (2004)’s view toward collaboration in self-study, in that,

The nature and form of collaboration within self-study has an effect on the nature of the “self” in self-study, the ways in which knowledge is created and disseminated, the relationship between learning and action, and the ways in which changes in knowledge of teaching teachers overlap with changes in teacher education practices. (p. 771)

In other words, the ways in which you collaborate with others will determine the orientation, enactment, and dissemination of your self-study. Too often, self-study scholars are guilty of mentioning the use of critical friendship, collaborative self-study or some other form of collaboration in passing, with little to no attention to collaboration itself. To simply say you collaborated with one or more people and that ensured validity and trustworthiness is no longer sufficient (Mena & Russell, 2017; Stolle et al., 2019). To paraphrase Olan and Edge in this volume, “[collaboration] is a not just a noun, but also a verb – a state of being, action, ever present.” It is incumbent for self-study researchers to be explicit in their identification of which collaborative form they use in their self-studies, ensure the research methods used appropriately reflect the intent of collaborative form, and that the scholarship made public fully surfaces how the collaborative form helped improve the practice of the individual and/or collaborative.

There may be disagreement with this view. As Bullock (2020) noted, disagreements regarding the very nature of self-study are ever-present. Healthy dialogue surrounding what collaboration in self-study means, for instance, will only strengthen our collective understanding of self-study research. Our hope is that the

readers of this book see this view at work in how we decided to organize the book and in the contributions of chapter authors.

We submit that the destination of each chapter in one of three sections in this book matters far less than the extent to which authors have analyzed and interpreted their collaborative processes. Again, we draw from Loughran's (2005) assertion that there is no one right way to do a self-study. A clear, warranted argument submitted to colleagues in self-study and education researchers more generally, as can be found in each chapter, helps facilitate exactly the sorts of dialogue we look forward to in self-study research. To take one example, consider the relationship between the concepts of *collaborative self-study* and *self-study community of practice*. Perhaps the difference between the two is what Kitchen defines as the critical examination of group processes and dynamics found in self-study communities of practice. A collaborative self-study, he argues, does not require the group to investigate the internal dynamics and their influence on growth and learning. The purpose of our volume was to bring these kinds of questions to the forefront and to encourage more transparency around the nature of collaboration in self-study research.

Finally, we wish to point to some work that might be taken up by those interested in pursuing ideas introduced in these pages. Many chapters provided an insight into longstanding collaborative relationships, framed in one or more of the concepts we asked authors to consider. We believe that analysis of the long arc of one's work in self-study is a worthy endeavor, particularly when one is engaged with a number of different kinds of collaboration in a career. We would particularly encourage future work that examines the ways in which collaborations change and reasons for these changes. Self-study of teaching and teacher education practices is, after all, fundamentally a set of interactive processes, including but not limited to collaborations. We all share a commitment to making these processes clearer, so that we may better understand our selves in how we teach.

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