

Chapter 1

The Complications of Collaboration in Self-Study



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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 Grimmert 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 Grimmert 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 Grimmert 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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