

The Shark in the Vitrine: Experiencing our Practice From the Inside Out With Transdisciplinary Lenses

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Abstract

The Scholars of Studying Teaching Collaborative engaged a dozen faculty members from 12 specializations and 4 colleges at a large public university in a 2-year teaching and research project with the goal of learning about and enacting a self-study of professional practice. Participants were selected from various disciplines to provoke alternative perspectives in whole group and critical friend teams. While we each conducted a self-study, we also designed and enacted a meta-study to assess our professional development within the context of the collaborative. We analyze the potential of engaging in collective self-study and report how the methodological challenges initiated transformational learning that bridged theory and praxis. Learning the self-study methodology was complex, but such concentration

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multiplied the impact of both personal and professional transformation. The study benefits faculty from a broad range of disciplines, at diverse stages in their academic careers, and working at every level of the academic hierarchy.

Keywords

transformative learning, personal transformation, transformative pedagogy

If I wanted discussion in the arts and humanities classroom to be different, I would first have to know myself better as a teacher; and from there, transformation must take place from the inside out . . . A transformed teacher would not teach about but BE the shark in the vitrine—a medium through which experience could pass that had the potential to trigger self-transformation as it did for me when I experienced Damien Hirst's (1991) embalmed shark following me as I walked around each corner of the sculpture. (Constantine, 2012)

This reflective vignette is drawn from Lynne's narrative of her experiences in a university-wide transdisciplinary 2-year self-study research project. As a professor in the School of Art, Lynne believes that "art's job [and we argue self-study's job] is to transform the artist, who then must transform the world. The art form is a pathway and its physical form is a distraction from the real artwork, which is the artist herself." She was one of a dozen faculty competitively selected to engage in The Scholars of Studying Teaching Collaborative (SoSTC). Lynne articulated much of what we each encountered throughout the self-study process. We have threaded Lynne's comments throughout our analysis as an exemplar to demonstrate the individually transformative nature of our work within the collective context of SoSTC.

Participants' goals were to learn about the self-study methodology by enacting a self-study of their teaching and professional practice. Anastasia's goal in launching SoSTC was to extend self-study research outside of teacher education and to examine the impact of what happens when academics from diverse disciplinary backgrounds come together to study their teaching, professional identities, and the authenticity of their theories in practice. This goal became a reality with the support of our Center for Teaching and Faculty Excellence. Each of us, including the facilitator, developed a research question grounded in practice. For example, Lynne asked, "How can I improve my teaching practice to help students learn from classroom discussion of complex social issues in the arts and humanities? How well am I teaching and modeling the practice of democratic dialogue as a means to help students learn to value and use knowledge in community?"

Self-study research is a reflective investigative practice that springs from personally situated inquiry and generates new knowledge through critical collaborative inquiry (LaBoskey, 2004; Loughran, 2004; Samaras, 2011). In self-study, researchers critically examine their practice to develop more consciously driven modes of pedagogical activity, as opposed to relying on habit, tradition, or impulse (Samaras,

2002). Self-study entails critical and collaborative actions that focus “on the space between self and the practice engaged in . . . between self in relation to practice and the others who share the practice setting” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 15). As Ham and Kane (2004) emphasize, self-study is not research because it is “by me, for me”; it is research because it is self-consciously “by me, for us” (p. 117). Faculty members come to consider teaching beliefs objectively with “deeper understandings and relationship with others” (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p. 14). Moreover, self-study scholars embrace teaching “not just as a pedagogical task, but also a social-pedagogical task” (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 830), prompted with moral, ethical, and political aims.

Simultaneously, self-study confronts scholars with their fallibility and triggers a heightened awareness when they notice the gaps in their practice. Embracing the messiness, uncertainties, complexities, and elisions of their teaching, they realize, can lead to positive results, given how the discipline of self-study requires both self-confidence and vulnerability (Loughran, 2004; Smith & Samaras, 2011). Self-study research is embedded with both risks and opportunities “countering professional development ‘fixes’” through documenting teachers’ lived engagement with theory and practice considerations (Latta & Buck, 2007, p. 190).

The study reported here builds on earlier research of a meta-study documenting the progress and nature of our group (Samaras et al., 2012). One method of self-study is collective self-study in which researchers interactively examine an issue and their role within a project (Davey & Ham, 2009; LaBoskey, 2004; Samaras, 2011). In this collective self-study, we asked, “What were the methodological complexities of our engagement in self-study?” We chose to focus on the challenges we encountered in learning the self-study methodology and the transformative nature of experiencing it. This positive tension is at the center of self-study research and was powerfully unleashed for us as we stepped outside of our disciplines and the comfort zones of habit and accustomed practice, with only our smaller groups of critical friends, a concept unfamiliar to many in the collaborative, as a safety net.

Conceptual Framework

Transforming From the Inside Within a Learning Community

Reflecting on who we are and what influences us socially, politically, and culturally is important to us. Mezirow (1978) believes that personal perspectives obtained through critical self-analysis are vital in adult development. Further, generating feelings of discomfort or anxiety is a critical component to the learning process and a necessary element for transforming one’s own pedagogy (Bozalek & Biersteker, 2010). We came to understand transformative learning as a process that occurs as a result of a trigger, or disorienting dilemma, experienced by an individual and/or collaborative struggle and sustained with support from others (such as critical friends in this study) that allows the individual to recognize, identify, and accept a new way of thinking, perhaps even a major pedagogical shift. Cranton (2002) explains:

At its core, transformative learning theory is elegantly simple. Through some event, . . . an individual becomes aware of holding a limiting or distorted view. If the individual critically examines this view, opens herself to alternatives, and consequently changes the way she sees things, she has transformed some part of how she makes meaning out of the world. (p. 64)

Since discourse is invaluable in enabling learners to understand their ways of knowing, the discourse needs to be supportive and learners need to be willing to listen to one another without judgment (Mezirow, 1997). The most critical learning takes place in the communicative domain (Mezirow, 1995). Communicative competence develops when learners are able to articulate their own values, assumptions, and beliefs (Mezirow, 1996). This approach is not without its share of bumps in the road. Mezirow (1978) explains, “Making a critical appraisal of the assumptions underlying our roles, priorities and beliefs is usually tension-producing and can be acutely threatening” (p. 105). During transformative learning, individuals “become aware of their broadening perspective, and how that perspective is subjective, based on past and current context as well as future aims” (Snyder, 2008, p. 165). A safe environment is essential to enable individuals to share their beliefs and accept feedback and perspectives from others. Moreover, engagement and modeling of self-study practice by the facilitator is extremely important, so participants can witness the facilitator invested in the individual and collaborative nature of transformation (Samaras, 2009; Taylor, 1998). Furthermore, as transformative learning shifts the consciousness of the individual, it results in a reframed understanding of self-identity, interactions with others, and new possibilities (O’Sullivan, Morell, & O’Connor, 2002).

The community extends and transforms individuals’ understanding while the individual internalizes cognition, that is, from intersubjectivity to intrasubjectivity (Vygotsky, 1981). Furthermore, the very nature of dialogue in collective inquiry raises new thought, which, in turn, influences the community itself (Vygotsky, 1978). Self-study research entails such critical collaborative inquiries (Samaras, 2011) where personal insights and the research process are documented and presented for critique—a process that validates researchers’ interpretations (Bodone, Guðjónsdóttir, & Dalmau, 2004).

The work of Cranton and others over the last decade on holistic transformative learning further emphasizes the parallel between the dialogic and discourse-based collaborations of self-study and the integration of cognitive/rational, extrarational, and even social critique elements into holistic transformative learning. For example, Eisen (2001, quoted in Taylor, 2007) identified in his discussion of the criticality of relationships to holistic transformative learning, the essential characteristics if such relationships were to prompt transformation: “trust, non-evaluative feedback, non-hierarchical status, voluntary participation and partner selection, shared goals and authenticity.” As the core of critical friends’ work similarly resides in the urge to understand, rather than critique, others’ ideas in equitable community the wrestling with this component of self-study brought participants to what Cranton (2006, p. 98)

speculates might be, “the crux of the transformational experience—entering into another’s frame of mind with empathy rather than critically questioning of challenging points of view” Whereas faculty members historically work in an individualistic and isolated fashion, dialogue across specializations, grounded in notions of Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, was a requisite for this project. Gathering as a whole group and in critical friend teams, we supported and challenged each other’s understanding of self-study and the methodological soundness of our projects. These organic and diverse communities allowed us to mediate, negotiate, and socially construct an understanding of enacting self-study.

Faculty Learning Communities

Learning communities exist in various educational settings (Lassonde & Israel, 2010; Samaras, Freese, Kosnik, & Beck, 2008) and in university centers committed to supporting faculty teaching (Cox, 2003). However, many university cultures do not offer those supports, forcing faculty to rely on their own resources. Levin and Greenwood (2001) asserted that “universities are mainly devoted to their own, often autopoietic knowledge production processes, to insider academic career struggles, and, increasingly, to making a profit” (p. 103). Faculty members have generally been taught to research people but not research “*with people*” (Heron & Reason, 2001, p. 179) and certainly not to research themselves (Whitehead, 1989).

One forum for challenging that tradition has been faculty-learning communities, which “provide an excellent structure to help faculty members develop scholarly teaching” (Richlin & Cox, 2004, p. 128). The goal and value of a university collaborative is to solve practical problems while generating knowledge that is negotiated, tested, and peer assessed. A faculty self-study group is another forum for supporting faculty teaching. Teacher educators have typically been the participants in self-study groups (Grierson, Tessaro, Cantalini-Williams, Grant, & Denton, 2010; Hoban, 2007; Kitchen, Parker, & Gallagher, 2008; Lunenberg, Zwart, & Korthagen, 2010; Samaras, Kayler, Rigsby, Weller, & Wilcox, 2006). In our faculty self-study group, however, the majority of participants were not teacher educators. This study will add to the existing theories in the area of transformative learning based on the composition of the participants, the bridge between theory and praxis, and uniquely, the transformative learning that can ensue among transdisciplinary faculty engaging in a collective self-study.

Our Collective Self-Study

Participants and Context

Our group is diverse by culture, discipline, and experience and included nine females and three males. We came from departments of humanities, social sciences, recreation, education, languages, and the sciences and met monthly over a 16-month period in 90-min face-to-face meetings. At our first meeting, we shared research interests

through artifacts and then chose critical friend teams. Critical friends provided thoughtful and insightful feedback on the actions and engagement of practice (Costa & Kallick, 1993; Schuck & Russell, 2005). Three teams resulted, two teams with four participants and the other team with three. The facilitator also worked with two critical friends: an instructor who had facilitated a teacher educator self-study group and the director of the University's Center for Teaching and Faculty Excellence.

During our meetings, we shared our individual self-studies, discussed methodology, and analyzed data. For example, Laurie, from the Parks, Recreation and Leisure Studies, inquired: How do my hybrid learning techniques influence community building among students? Esperanza, from Modern and Classical Languages, inquired: How does my perception of the effectiveness of instructional technologies influence my students' engagement with technology?

And Jennifer, from Elementary Education and Mathematics Education Leadership inquired: What learning opportunities and practice-based skills can I afford preservice and in-service teachers so that they will relearn, embrace, and implement research-based practices in teaching mathematics?

Members volunteered to lead writing and perceptual activities to challenge our notions about research. During the smaller critical friend meetings, we engaged in more intimate exchanges. We wrote letters to each other about the design and progress of our individual studies and shared details of research instrument design, data collection, and analysis, including preconceptions, assumptions, and misinterpretations. Topics of self-study ranged from analysis of whether textbooks are obsolete in a first-year history survey course to challenges associated with implementation of inquiry-based instruction in a preservice secondary mathematics course.

Data Sources

Blackboard Scholar[®], a web-based community site, supported and extended our whole group and critical friend discussions. Each member could contribute readings, materials, and postings, such as draft research questions, conference presentations, institutional review board proposals, suggested publication and presentation outlets, resources, and pedagogical tools shared during our whole group gatherings. Data were posted on the Blackboard site as community artifacts and as a trail for transparent and systematic group documentation of data collected.

Data sources included (a) narrative mid-project exit slips or personal reflective formative assessments of the work of the collaborative (collected in November 2010); (b) narrative end-of-project exit slips (collected in April 2011); (c) individual exit interviews with questions designed with input of all 12 participants (conducted by a graduate research assistant with member checks, March through April 2011), and (d) individual narratives on the impact of the collaborative (written in August 2011). The prompts for writing the narratives included integrating thinking about our individual self-studies, our individual interview transcript, and activities

experienced in the group and critical friend exchanges. These narratives covered such events as sharing research artifacts and essays, quick sketches that reflected our collaborative experience, and letters about our research that we exchanged among our critical friends.

Data Analysis

From our group of 12, we created two faculty teams for data analysis based on our interest: (1) a seven-member team analyzed the narratives and (2) a five-member team analyzed the mid-project and end-of-project exit slips. In addition, a pair of doctoral students analyzed and check coded the individual interviews. The seven-member narrative analysis team designed what they coined “a nested waterfall approach,” whereby each of the 12 narratives was read and coded independently with an overlap of at least two readers for each narrative. We identified segments of participant narratives that addressed the research questions and then negotiated preliminary and overlapping categories using the constant comparison method (Creswell, 2012) through open, axial, and selective coding (Patton, 2002).

Using constant comparative analysis (Creswell, 2012), the five-member team analyzing the exit slips began by identifying segments of participant responses that addressed the research questions, resulting in the following themes: (a) improvement of teaching and attitudes toward students, (b) learning about self-study and research design, (c) group and critical friend meetings for structure, feedback, and motivation, (d) resources and examples provided, (e) new ways to assess our practice/study teaching, and (f) improvement in instruction.

For our second level of analysis, meaning was drawn from the text in a holistic fashion examining connections and relationships among the categories (Maxwell & Miller, 2008). Detailed analyses of narratives expanded our understandings from the analysis of exit slips, which resulted in the following themes: (a) individual professional growth, (b) transformative power of working with critical friends, and (c) impact on pedagogical approach and interactions with students.

For our third level of analysis, a doctoral graduate research assistant analyzed the interviews and conducted member checks with each participant. She also conducted check coding with a sampling of the interviews with another graduate research assistant for intercoder reliability. Using the constant comparative analysis (Creswell, 2012), the following themes were found in the interview analysis: (a) qualities of the environment/tone, (b) challenges/barriers, (c) support personally and professionally, (d) applicability in classroom, (e) characteristics of participants, (f) critical moment, (g) journaling and letter writing, and (h) suggestions for improvement.

Finally, eight of us agreed to work as a writing team to draw meaning across the full data set and identified the following themes: (a) researching in interdisciplinary partnership, (b) immediate connections and impact, (c) challenges faced, and (d) transformative synergy for personal and professional practice.

For this study, we returned to our data to focus on a deeper exploration of the impact of methodological challenges in collective self-study. We discovered in that individual and collaborative struggle, a process that first triggered transformational action and then sustained it; not simply for the duration of the collective self-study but beyond, into participants' quotidian practice as teachers and learners. We understood this from a first person stance from writing ourselves into our individual research self-studies that we were conducting concurrently with our meta-study. Our collective self-study further validated what we were experiencing on a personal level.

Findings

Transformative Synergy for Personal and Professional Practice

Participants reported the value and multitude of cognitive and emotional support (Day & Leitch, 2001) gained in working with colleagues from diverse disciplines, which facilitated personal to professional connections. Trying to understand and enact the methodology gave us a common language. Increased awareness of potential transformative synergy emerged as each of us reported transformative action—as a teacher, of our ideas of teaching—and transformative learning, about the very nature of pedagogy, and about our teaching purpose. We saw our teaching in new light with the support of the whole group. There were notations of connection, emotion, and revelations of self-assessment, such as Lynne's note, "Two central outcomes for me of the self-study I conducted in AY2010-2011 in conjunction with my participation in SoSTC: first, understanding my path to improvement as a teacher as a process of self-transformation, and second, understanding that the closely observed experience of the classroom would tell me how to achieve the end that I was seeking." This individual transformation through participation in SoSTC was also expressed by this participant who wrote:

I uncovered unexamined perceptions I was bringing to my own work, to my students' work, to my own teaching and to my students' learning. I broke down barriers, discovered energy to implement changes in learning activities and evaluation that I had been thinking about for a long time and never had the courage to commit to . . . as researching my teaching—myself as teacher—and my students' learning through the collaborative's unique structure and aims.

Transformative synergy transpired through transdisciplinary group perspectives. Another participant remarked:

You are spending time with people who are in other disciplines—way out of your area. And people who you wouldn't meet necessarily in any other circumstance. We are learning from people in Astronomy and Art. And I think that makes a big

difference . . . unexpected learning about classroom teaching and learning that is also just about things in life.

Exploring self-study through each other's domains invited an unanticipated and welcoming leadership. We began to trust each other and perhaps ourselves. Whole group activities facilitated by participants stretched our singular and disciplinary lens. Each participant brought his or her unique expertise to our whole group which changed us as a group and individually. Our initial interdisciplinary collaboration metamorphosed into a transdisciplinary community. Gary Poole (2013) recently redefined transdisciplinarity as a space in which the boundaries between the disciplines begin to blur, and an outsider sitting in on a research meeting would encounter problems in defining or locating each participant's disciplinary "turf." Through our immersion in self-study, we welcomed transdisciplinarity as an identity to which Poole argues scholars of teaching and learning might aspire, not as the identity crisis he suggests the loosening of the bonds of disciplinarity may so often become. Lynne encapsulated this shift thus: "I can still remember Kirk's presentation vividly—his skill as a storyteller, the generosity of his attitudes towards his students, his openness to learning from everyone who might be able to contribute. That demonstration of his presence outside the vulnerable space of SoSTC recontextualized his study for me, and made me feel connected to his work despite the differences in our disciplines."

Sharing an artifact that represented her research to the group, a participant discovered the meaning behind the object she brought:

And suddenly the artifact, that was this kind of object as research, became really a reflection of who I was as a teacher slash researcher. And suddenly I articulated with the group the reason I brought this artifact . . . the way that I shared with the group what the artifact meant to me was different than what I had intended when I walked in the door that day. But yet at the same time it was much, to me, much more accurate and richer.

Our appreciation that we were still figuring out the methodology and our embrace of public discussion of our mistakes and epiphanies moved us forward and offered us permission to change our thinking about our teaching. As a participant exclaimed, "We had to express with objects and drawings what we wanted to achieve with the project, how we saw ourselves in the project . . . Things that I had never done before." Another wrote about a creative writing exercise which Lesley led, "It was an open and trusting environment . . . Don't worry about what you say, don't worry about your spelling and grammar, just reflect for yourself about that . . . And at that point, I was like ok. I can deal with that." As Lynne expressed:

I think my contribution to the group—my involvement in the group has been to provide that different way of thinking. I cross boundaries because I also am in Cultural Studies as well as in the Art world. So, I am kind of bilingual, if you will, and operating on both

sides of the brain . . . But bringing in those perspectives from the realm of creativity meshes very well with what Anastasia is trying to do. Also, she has been very active in trying to get unusual methodologies into the mix like visual methods and so forth. And I think a part of my work with the group has been to help to move that forward.”

Teacher (and Pedagogy) in the Repair Shop

As neophytes in self-study, although not necessarily in the study of teaching and learning, the majority of participants entered the collaborative with expectations drawn from more traditional faculty learning communities where they would be working on improving their teaching. Lynne wrote, “I came into the study thinking that the goal was to improve the teaching mechanics of my classroom, to make me a better teaching machine.”

Poutiantine and Conners (2012) see this expectation as common even among faculty who intentionally seek to improve their practice. They call faculty’s initial focus on information, the expansion of what they know, a concern with formation, which changes *the how* but not *the who*. Formation, they argue, “is more about creating or developing a larger, deeper, and more effective connection with what one already has . . . rather than being about reforming the relationship with that objective or subjective knowledge base” (p. 72).

Increasingly, although, we discovered that the transdisciplinary nature of the collaboration provided a safe space where participants could articulate fundamental questions and admit to lack of mastery in ways, for example, that the competitive structures of academic departments and disciplinary communities often render too risky. The multiple audiences of the whole group meetings and of the critical friend teams served to decenter us through awareness of our individual fallibilities and the courage to reimagine our pedagogies. As a result, the collaborative gained confidence to redesign questions and instruments, rethink data analysis and interpretative frameworks, and forge linkages to relevant existing literatures and practices across disciplines. One participant noted gratefully: “I have no research experience with people who are alive. I am a historian so I came up with a list of survey questions and it was very helpful to get feedback on those questions.”

Particularly in the critical friend teams, our findings suggest that participants’ struggles to apply the methodology of self-study triggered a holistic transformation, which encompassed what Patricia Cranton (2006) calls both the rational and the extra-rational approaches to transformative learning. The process of critical self-reflection-in-community propelled participants, without conscious intention, into a renewed awareness of the “emotional, spiritual and imaginative” aspects of transformative (self) education. The recurring themes of vulnerability, unknowing, trust, fear, passion, and courage illuminate participants’ journeys toward “greater self-knowledge and personal integration” (Cranton, 2006, p. 50). But, as our analysis charts, such perceptions flourished not in opposition to, or separate

from, the cognitive ways of processing in which scholars are trained but in dynamic symbiosis. Vulnerability and trust displaced the facade of authoritative competence, whether the participant was sharing his or her insecurity or responding to another's uncertainty. For example, one participant reflected:

One of our members was opening up this morning, and she was like a fish out of water, not knowing what she was doing with her questions. She was very open about it and so the response from the group was being very grateful to her for sharing openly with us and trusting enough that she could share with us. And so, in the end, although she came with a little bit of fear for exposing herself . . . " I am the dummy in the group! You all get it, but I don't" . . . but it didn't feel that way. I was more like . . . it was really brave and trusting of you to say things we might be afraid, even, to say among people in our own department.

Others questioned, in critical friend teams, the whole nature of pedagogical inquiry, as defined in the fields of educational research or through the scholarship of teaching and learning.

And they forced me to think—why do you even care about this? So, why are you doing x, y, z in classes? Why are you passionate about this? So, to add in a new data source of . . . me . . . thinking of . . . why I care about the topic of the study I am studying, why am I interested in developing that type of teacher. So, much more personal reflective practice as opposed to working on others.

Another summarized the reflective turn thus:

[Critical friends] discussed how to focus our research questions on us rather than solely on our students . . . a great deal of professional growth came through my interactions with my critical friends. As I wrote to them, I was forced to crystallize my own thinking about my research.

Still others initiated small changes that multiplied into major pedagogical shifts. For example, one researcher reflected: "Perhaps the most promising development from my SoSTC study is that it caused me to make some changes in how I teach. I have decided that assigned papers need to be more personal in their scope." Another participant's experimentation revealed the following:

Based on students' responses, I really did come up with some creative ideas about creating a classroom atmosphere that encouraged students to go beyond the just taking-notes-on-lectures spoon-fed to them. Clearly articulating my own goals as to what I wanted them to come away with helped create a classroom atmosphere of information-exchange and learning that kept the room buzzing.

Indeed, increasing awareness of vulnerability as source of authority, in relation to teaching and learning, liberated us to discard old notions in order to recenter and

more authentically ground our practice. We honored each other's inquiries, probed for clarity and articulation, and assisted with demystifying the self-study methodology. As one participant related how she planned to videotape several teaching sessions and then analyze them, for instance, she was struck by the gulf between the practice of faculty peer observation and its learning potential beyond the purposes of annual review and portfolio:

We actually ask our students to do video analysis for self-teaching in the classroom. We don't do it ourselves. So I was thinking, "Wow, what a great idea!" Maybe I should do that for my own learning. It is very hard, but it is modeling for students that this is something that is valuable.

The process of transformative action rendered our inquiries more dynamic and complex by heightening awareness of blind spots and individuals' unknown strengths. It was as if the vertical threads of the natural uncertainties of research in progress, and the inherent vulnerabilities of having that research focus on one's own practice became interwoven with horizontal threads that strengthened the fabric overall. In a sense, we began to recontextualize our vulnerabilities in the context of our strengths. Lynne, for example, realized:

. . . 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 so that I can be a better vector for students' self-transformation.

There was an immediate applicability of our exchanges and deliberations which manifested in our teaching practices. An early childhood educator chose to share the role of culture in her practice with her students so they might be more open to share the implications of their cultural identities to their teaching:

Without the year-long experiences with SoSTC and the discussions, I would not have had the courage or credibility to include my students in my schooling story and my experiences as an immigrant to this country and the lessons I learned that can apply to their young students.

Another participant noted he no longer wanted to be a "sage on the stage:"

As part of the transformation that I was undertaking, I also transformed the way that I approached my lecturing, testing, and student engagement . . . I incorporated several changes in my teaching style . . . I was able to document honestly what worked, what didn't work, and what I will change in the future . . . in a reflective "self-study" manner . . . to reflect upon, document, and make data-driven (i.e., inquiry-based) decisions regarding my teaching. That is what I initially aimed to achieve within my students, and now I realize that I needed to do it first.

Nature of the Self

Cutts, Love, and Davis (2012) argue that scholars' working with critical friends can help them to resist the dominant narratives of scholarly practice and faculty roles and develop authentic counternarratives that include a reworked vision of the self and its potential within the academy. As the participants in SoSTC grappled with the self-study methodology, several developed an enhanced comfort with "not knowing"—of moving forward within chaos and a lack of certainty about future direction—a significant precondition for creative innovation (Joyce, 1995).

Anastasia wrote in her narrative, "I left that early gathering feeling like I had no control of what would come next for us and I confessed that I loved not knowing." A second participant, months later, reflected back:

I spent the first semester not really sure exactly where I was going or what I was doing—I'm pretty tolerant of my own intellectual chaos, as I was taught when young that unlearning is often the most critical part of learning, but in our case, the chaos phase lasted longer than usual.

While participants could adapt to the chaos of "not knowing" as scholars and researchers, "not knowing" in the classroom proved more threatening:

I felt like I was not in control of it all [student learning]. There was all this extra material I didn't get to. There is all this material I should have prepared for the class but I didn't do it. And so I felt a little out of control, and I was scared . . . positive I was going to get lousy student evaluations for that course last semester. I just felt completely frantic about it almost every week. But the scores were actually extremely positive in the outcome. I was asking, "How is that possible?" From where I was sitting, it looked like a mess.

And for another participant, fusing the identities of scholar and teacher provoked transformation:

And then it sort of clicked. Oh, of course! I am collecting. This is research. I am studying myself. Even though it seems kind of odd, it is research. I am studying what I am doing in the classroom and how it is impacting students' understanding and performance . . . The scientist in me said, "Well, here is data collection, here is the evaluation, the objective evidence that I am using to improve what I am doing." And then it was like, "aha!"

Others consciously invited "not knowing" into their classrooms as an ongoing process, their confidence sustained by their immersion in self-study methodology and the implication of the collaborative's impact.

Engagement in the process of transformative learning can be both enlightening and restorative in nature (Lange, 2004) and may even lead to social activism (Walter, 2011) as a result of individual value reprioritization. Transformative

learning can also reframe an individual's understanding of self-identity and identify new possibilities (O'Sullivan et al., 2002). An integrative studies scholar struggling to find an academic identity noted near the formal end of the project:

It's as if I had found a kind of methodology for becoming whole and finding personal coherence, as well as researching my teaching—myself as teacher—and my students' learning . . . through the collaborative's unique structure and aims. I'm still beginning but I am beginning differently.

The experiences of the SoSTC scholars suggest that the methodological richness of self-study, infused with its democratic dialogic and relational requirements, fosters transformative learning in ways highly accessible, if not always comfortable, to higher education faculty. In more conventional forms of the scholarship of teaching and learning, however progressive in intent, for example, faculty tend to see change in themselves, even transformative change, as a by-product of change in them, their students. Self-study of teaching, which requires focus first on the teacher, the "I," locates the struggle for efficacy within the self, rather than externalizing it as under the control of the actions of others. The struggle to understand self-study as a form of research itself became for our collaborative the disorientating dilemma that called into question the assumptions of, for some of the group, decades.

Ripple Effects

The findings described earlier, although, were not isolated within the group. Even as the group was immersed in the ongoing study, it became a "sphere of influence" where transformations precipitated sharing of work, which had, and continues to have, ripple effects beyond our classrooms. Anastasia, as facilitator, noted in the middle of the first year:

I really believe something magical is happening across our colleges and programs and for our university. Participants are taking and sharing self-study with their departments and colleagues. We are coming to know and care about each other's work. Also, something else is happening. Other faculty are asking me to help them launch their self-studies.

One multilingual member of the group, who blogs and tweets on teaching and learning, has received enthusiastic queries about self-study of teaching from her colleagues in Spain. Other participants have presented their research at conferences on Mediaeval History, at the National Art Education Association annual conference, and introduced the methodology of self-study of teaching at successive International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning annual conferences. They have published results of individual self-study projects in disciplinary pedagogical journals, introduced the methodology to masters' students with a focus on teaching,

and intentionally invited students to understand the methodology of self-study in action in the collaborative endeavor of teaching and learning at both graduate and undergraduate levels.

We entered SoSTC as individuals with preconceived notions about what the group would be, what it might do for us, and what we might bring to the table. We leave the group with newly constructed meanings, perceptions, and ideas mediated by this group experience, and shared, or ready to be shared, with our students. As Lynne concluded, “Unlike the blind men trying to understand the elephant by getting a deep knowledge of one of its parts, multimodal and collaborative efforts cross and cross and cross each other’s paths, getting the unknown to reveal itself in the intersections and interstices of our efforts.”

Scholarly Significance

This collective self-study allowed us to explore the nature, benefits, and methodological challenges of learning a complex methodology in a transdisciplinary faculty self-study collaborative. Enacting the self-study methodology reaffirmed our commitment to improving our teaching in a transparent and documented process with peer review. It restored our humanity and fallibility as teachers because we openly acknowledged the messiness, uncertainties, and complexities of research into teaching and learning (Bass, 1999). Our interactions highlighted teaching as an art as well as a craft (Silva, 1999). SoSTC promoted an integration and wholeness through collaboration and offered preconditions for productive action and change in our work with students. It heightened our awareness of limitations with the rigor of critical friends’ collaborations, extending research challenges to self, colleagues, and students as learning collaborators.

Creativity researchers suggest that learning to appreciate others’ domains, to transfer insights from other domains to one’s own, and to combine concepts drawn from a range of domains enhances the possibility of genuine creative insight through a creative synergy between divergent and convergent thinking (Sawyer, 2006). The transdisciplinary partnerships expanded these preconditions for us. Working in the first person and with critical friends, we deinstitutionalized our questions to find the core of our inquiries within the parameters and support of a learning community.

Finally, the process orientation of the SoSTC, as opposed to a subject-specific content-oriented approach, allowed faculty to examine institutional norms in relation to self-growth. Similar approaches indicate this type of approach increases the likelihood of genuine faculty development in the arenas of teaching, administrative collaboration, and curriculum development (Balmer & Richards, 2012). Thus, the SoSTC exhibits not only potential for faculty growth but also opportunities for institutional development. Building individual capacity in faculty development through self-study impacts institutional capacity and the director of the Center for Teaching and Faculty Excellence speaking about our work understands that:

I think one of the ways that we strengthen the institution is by having people across the institution work together around concrete things and in productive ways to build that kind of capacity so when hard things happen—which they do—then they can be solved by people from all sort of places at the institution.

Our work holds much potential for other universities willing to support transdisciplinary forums for faculty to think deeply about their professional practice. The affordances of information and communications technologies call into question the very nature of teaching and learning, and institutions of higher learning will have to prove, both to accreditors and to students, that they are able to foster relationships between faculty and students that surpass those possible anywhere else. As faculty efforts in collective self-study to improve teaching allow individuals to transcend the technical and transform their teaching from the inside out, they are particularly applicable to periods of potentially disruptive innovation and change within the academy. Thus, our work also highlights the importance of universities supporting and rewarding collective self-study initiatives as a nexus of grassroots change and institutional renewal.

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