

# A pedagogy changer: Transdisciplinary faculty self-study

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*In this article, I examine pedagogical understandings as captured through documented critical incidents of a transdisciplinary faculty self-study group which was designed and grounded in notions of sociocultural theory. I report from my lens as facilitator-participant-observer and from my work with eleven other participants in a three-semester research project in which we conducted individual self-studies of professional practice as well as a meta-study of the collective. A diverse data set, which included exit interviews, mid-project and end-of-project exit slips, and individual narratives, served to triangulate and support themes of our exchanging of pedagogical activities, learning with critical friends, and re-imagining our pedagogies. The study suggests that, as universities work to improve student learning, they might consider providing creative studio spaces for self-study of professional practice so that faculty can exchange their talents in order to more deeply understand and experience pedagogical innovations.*

**Keywords:** Self-study of professional practice, transdisciplinary, faculty study groups, pedagogy, critical incidents, transformative learning, perspective-taking, innovation

## Introduction

In 2006, Anne Freese and I wrote about the paradoxical nature of self-study research in our book, *Self-study of teaching practices* and framed that discussion within Vygotskian tenets of how we learn with, and through our interaction with others (Samaras & Freese, 2006). Our goal in writing the book was to demystify self-study research and make it practical and impactful for teacher and student learning. Towards

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that end, we decided to invite teachers to explore self-study research through a series of informal self-study methods but not until we first addressed the nature of self-study research as purposely paradoxical. We described self-study as both *individual and collective* and, as Loughran and Northfield (1998: 7) characterised, a “significant paradox” of the self-study terminology. Although self-study is a personal inquiry situated in one’s professional practice, it is the audience and dialogue of critical friends that enables perspective-taking. We also noted that self-study research is both *personal and interpersonal*, as learning and thinking arise through collaboration and are socially mediated (Vygotsky, 1978). In these ways, we recognised the *private and public* paradox of self-study research and the essentialness of sharing the personal to improve education inside and outside of ourselves as teachers. What I did not realise then was that the paradoxical nature was uniquely transformative when participants worked in a holistic manner not bound by discipline, but by exploring and exchanging pedagogical inquiries which transcended their discipline boundaries. I learned that first-hand when I facilitated and participated in a transdisciplinary faculty self-study group that changed the way I thought about pedagogy, which is the focus of his article.

University cultures do not typically promote or support self-study groups so that faculty can collectively explore their pedagogy. Consequently, faculty often rely on their own resources and efforts to connect with colleagues inside and outside their discipline and college. Moreover, faculty members have generally been trained to research people, but not research *with* people (Heron & Reason, 2001: 179), and certainly not to research themselves, as they do in self-study research (Whitehead, 1989). Self-study research is a reflective investigative practice that springs from personally situated inquiry and generates new knowledge with the critical support of colleagues (Louie, Drevdahl, Purdy & Stachman, 2003; Samaras, 2011). Essentially, in self-study, faculty choose to critically examine their teaching in order to develop more consciously driven modes of pedagogical activity, as opposed to relying on habit, tradition, or impulse (Samaras, 2002). The goal of self-study is for faculty to be active agents in reframing their beliefs and practices at both the personal and professional level and for improvement-aimed purposes beyond themselves (Loughran & Northfield, 1998). In self-study research, scholars embrace teaching “not just as a pedagogical task, but also a social-pedagogical task” prompted with moral, ethical, and political aims (LaBoskey, 2004: 830).

Self-study teacher-educators have designed faculty self-study groups composed of other teacher-educators (Grierson, Tessaro, Cantalini-Williams, Grant & Denton, 2010; Hoban, 2007; Kitchen, Ciuffetelli Parker & Gallagher, 2008; Lunenberg, Zwart & Korthagen, 2010; Samaras, Kayler, Rigsby, Weller & Wilcox, 2006). These groups work with the goal of solving practical problems about teacher education, while generating knowledge that is negotiated and tested. My initiative to launch a transdisciplinary self-study group was inspired by my goal of introducing self-study research across my university and of extending it to faculty who were not all teacher-educators – thus

moving self-study for teacher-educators into transdisciplinary self-study (Samaras, 2002). Although I had taught self-study research for classroom teachers and for doctoral students, who came from various specialisations for years, this was my first experience facilitating a transdisciplinary faculty self-study group (Samaras, Adams-Legge, Breslin, Mittapalli, Magaha O’Looney & Wilcox, 2007). I imagined it would be different and embraced my uncertainties. I was curious to see what would happen when academics from diverse disciplinary backgrounds came together to study their teaching and the authenticity of their assumptions of practice based on their ways of knowing. My goal became a reality when I received the support of The Centre for Teaching and Faculty Excellence (CTFE) in 2010 to launch a faculty self-study group known as the Scholars of Studying Teaching Collaborative (SoSTC). Participation across disciplines and colleges was a requisite for this project. A dozen of us gathered to study our teaching practice.

In this article, I share the highlights and shifts in thinking about our pedagogies, as captured through our documented critical incidents from my lens as facilitator-participant-observer. According to Tripp (1993: 24), a critical event is “a situation which marked a significant turning-point or change in the life of a person or an institution ... or in some social phenomenon”. Using critical incidents is common in research about teaching as well as in other disciplines (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Kosnik, 2013; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011). Angelides (2001) found that critical incidents are an efficient method to gather rich data that unveil participants’ deep interpretations of seemingly everyday events as well as the meanings they attribute to their significance. In addition, Measor (1985) noted that when recalled, critical incidents may have negative or positive consequences as teachers reflect about their personal and professional identities.

Our experiences in SoSTC changed us on both a personal and professional level as we changed it. Despite the diversity of our expertise, and possibly because of it, there seemed to be an underlying order that transpired and transformed the ways in which we thought about, re-imagined, and enacted our pedagogies. I liken this dynamical nature to chaos theory where our unique smaller systems of knowing pedagogy changed as we experienced each other’s unique ways of knowing. I frame my discussion in the very paradoxical nature and sociocultural frame, which Anne and I presented, and extend that discussion, in this instance, to the paradox of *exchange and change* in coming to know pedagogy – a pedagogy changer. A participant captured a related notion in a sketch she made when asked to diagram how she understood her work in the context of our work in SoSTC. She would later find that the hub was not me, but the larger collective sphere propelling our smaller critical friends’ circles and vice versa.

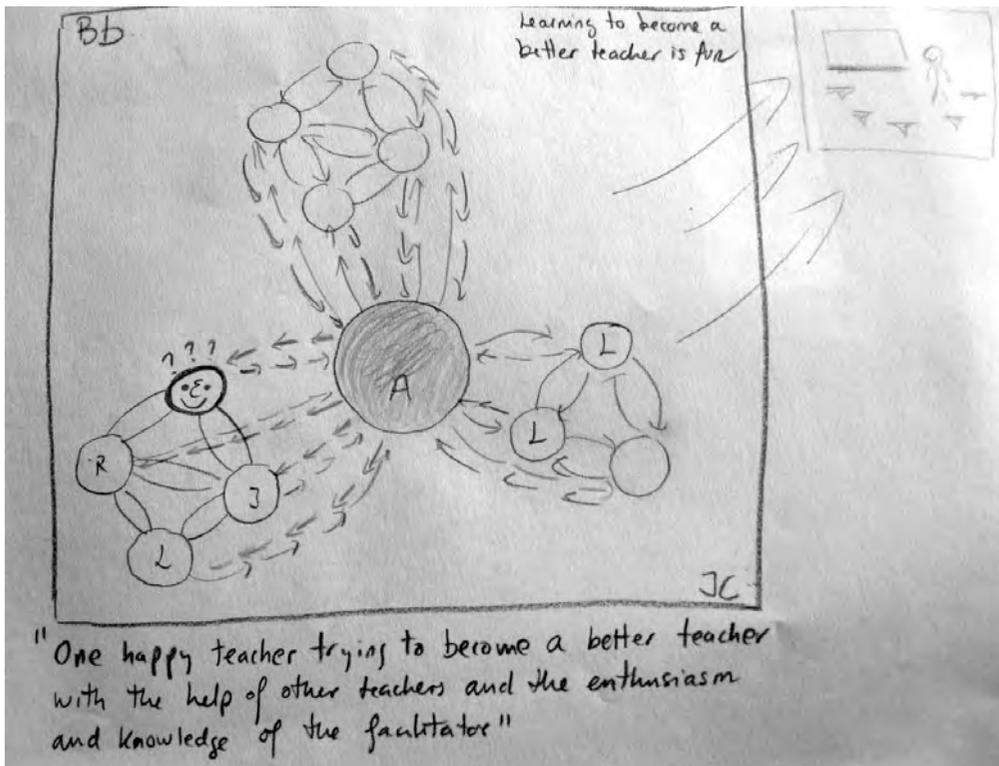


Figure 1: Design of SoSTC

The design for our faculty self-study group was grounded in notions of Vygotsky's (1981) sociocultural theory. Accordingly, learning is situated in practice through joint activity and is socially and culturally mediated, and especially through the psychological tool of language (Vygotsky, 1978; 1986). Learning through dialogue is active, social, and affective and shapes individuals' mental processes (Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978; Rieber & Carton, 1987; Wertsch, 1991). Actions and thoughts are culturally mediated, "indirectly shaped by forces that originate in the dynamics of communication" (Wertsch, 1985: 81). Vygotsky asserted that learning, thinking, and knowing arise through collaboration and re-appropriating feedback from others and a willingness to learn with and from each other (Wells, 2000). The community extends and transforms individuals' understanding, while the individual internalises cognition when working outside his/her own perspective (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Latta and Buck (2007: 191-192) address the interplay of the personal within a collaborative in their self-study:

*Self-study demands that all of us attend to the experiences and understandings of others, bringing this thinking back to ourselves, inciting an individual-collective movement that is always in the making, forming and reforming, transforming self and others. In this way, turning back on self is a process experienced as interdependent with others.*

As is the paradoxical nature of self-study research, our participation entailed both personal and collaborative inquiry (LaBoskey, 2004; Loughran & Northfield, 1998; Samaras, 2011). Personal insights were continuously documented and presented for critique with critical friends, or trusted colleagues who provided thoughtful and insightful feedback on the actions and engagement of practice (Costa & Kallick, 1993). The role of a critical friend is to provoke new ideas and interpretations, question the researcher's assumptions, and provide open, honest, and constructive feedback (Breslin, Mittapalli, Samaras, Adams-Legge, Infranco, Johri, McIlwain, Magaha O'Looney, Pearson, Pratt & Wilcox, 2008). They serve to validate researchers' interpretations (Bodone, Guðjónsdóttir & Dalmau, 2004). Dialogue with critical friends is invaluable in enabling faculty to understand their teaching from an ontological stance as lifelong learners (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009).

Nonetheless, self-study may trigger a self-study scholar's heightened awareness about the assumptions and gaps in his/her practice (Berry, 2007; Brandenburg, 2008). Teachers realise that embracing the messiness, complexities, and omissions of their teaching can lead to positive results, given how the discipline of self-study requires both self-confidence and vulnerability (Loughran, 2004; Smith & Samaras, 2011). As Mezirow (1995) asserts, the most critical learning in transformative experience takes place in the communicative domain, but that communication needs to be supportive, with learners willing to listen to one another without judgement (Mezirow, 1997).

## **Context and participants**

In August 2010, eleven faculty members were competitively selected to participate in a three-semester research project to conduct a self-study of their professional practice facilitated by myself, a teacher-educator and self-study methodologist scholar. The selected faculty members came from eleven specialisations and four different colleges within George Mason University (GMU), a large public university with a diverse student and faculty population. Our faculty group was 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. Each of us, including myself, developed a research question grounded in practice. With the support of our group, we designed and enacted an individual self-study project. Topics of individual self-studies included, for example, exploring challenges and supports incorporating inquiry-based activities in a large lecture astronomy course; probing how classroom discussion in critical arts courses can be re-imagined as a more powerful tool for learning, and analysing the use of hybrid learning techniques to influence community-building in a recreation and parks course. In addition to our individual self-studies, we also engaged in a meta-study to explore our collective experience which grounded us in a shared task (Samaras, Smith, Harmon, Nasser, Smith, Borne, Parsons, Woodville, Constantine, Roman-Mendoza, Suh, Swanson & Karczmarczyk, 2012a; under review).

We met monthly over a 16-month period as a whole group in 90-minute face-to-face meetings. At our first meeting, we shared research interests through artefacts and then chose critical friends' groups. Three groups resulted, two with four participants and the other with three. I also worked with two critical friends, Mieke Lunenberg from Vrije University, who had facilitated a teacher-educator faculty self-study group in Amsterdam, and Kim Eby, Director of CTFE. During our whole-group meetings, we talked about the progress of our self-studies, shared our confusions and insights about the self-study methodology, and collected and analysed data for our meta-study. Throughout our time together, participants volunteered to lead pedagogy-based activities during our whole-group meetings. These activities included sharing an artefact that represented our research topic; free writing about our teaching; participating in perceptual activities to provoke our ways of knowing, including observing galaxies, and a drawing activity where we sketched how we understood our self-study research within the context of the collaborative. As critical friends, we met inside and outside of the whole-group meetings both face-to-face and virtually. We also engaged in letter-writing, email and file exchanges with critical friends.

## **A multiplier effect for presenting, writing, and publishing**

From the beginning of our work, we discussed how we had a wonderful opportunity to individually and collectively present and publish our research – a motivating factor for academics. Nonetheless, having a choice about the level of personal involvement, which our work and schedules afforded us, gave us flexibility and variance in our contributions. That personal choice also determined our author order for various collaborative projects over time. Since we all collected and analysed the data, there was a collective “we” of authorship; yet participants chose their level of involvement. Regardless of level of involvement, a multiplier effect resulted. We became co-authors of collective pieces as we continued to present and publish our work over a two- to three-year period, capturing different data points in our longitudinal research. Since Diana, a graduate student-assistant, had contributed significantly in conducting, transcribing, and analysing interviews, conducting a partial literature review, and contributing to writing, she became a second author in the later writing.

All participants were invited to take the lead on presenting, analysing, and writing which some did as analysis team leaders. A large research team and our prolonged engagement increased the validity of the study and allowed for triangulation of different sources, methods, investigators, and analysis (Creswell, 2013). For example, we created three teams with leaders for data analysis based on our interests: a seven-member team analysed the narratives; a five-member team analysed the mid-project and end-of-project exit slips, and Diana co-analysed individual interviews with myself, conducted member-checks with participants, and check-coding with another graduate student. The seven-member narrative analysis team designed what they coined “a nested waterfall approach”, whereby each of the twelve narratives was read and coded independently with an overlap of at least two readers for each narrative.

Finally, eight of us agreed to work as a writing team to draw meaning across the full data set.

For our beginning presentations, we found it manageable for each of us to prepare a PowerPoint slide, discussing our individual projects within the context of our whole group at a college research colloquium (Samaras, Borne, Harmon, Constantine, Suh, Roman Mendoza, Nasser, Parsons, Smith, Smith, Swanson, Woodville & Eby, 2011) and at the annual CTFE conference (Smith, Borne, Harmon, Constantine, Suh, Roman Mendoza, Nasser, Parsons, Samaras, Smith, Swanson & Woodville, 2011). We continued to build upon those slides and used them as a base to develop and write papers which we presented at national and international conferences (Parsons, Nasser, Samaras, Smith & Suh, 2012; Samaras, Smith, Harmon, Nasser, Smith, Borne, Parsons, Woodville, Constantine, Roman-Mendoza, Suh, Swanson & Karczmarczyk, 2012b). Each lead author adapted and extended the work of previous ones. Parallel to our group research, some of us chose to also individually and collectively present at conferences related to our specialisations (for example, see Constantine, 2011a; 2011b; Smith & Samaras, 2011; Suh, 2012; Woodville, 2011) as well as publish in journals of our discipline (Swanson, 2014). This writing is my individual effort to step back again with some distance and consider, as facilitator, the pedagogical impact of our collective work. And yet, this writing is only possible because of the data we collected as a group. Therefore, I proudly place my co-authorship “with” my SoSTC colleagues and graduate research-assistant, as I re-examine our critical incidents in more detail.

## **Examining critical incidents**

As part of our meta-study reported elsewhere (Samaras *et al.*, 2012a), our group collected data that included data about critical incidents. We asked: “What key nodal or critical incidents had an impact on how our community and individual projects evolved?”. I revisit that question, in this instance, by returning to our data with a focus on our thinking and shifts about pedagogies, as documented in critical incidents using three primary data sources, namely individual exit interviews conducted; mid-project and end-of-project exit slips, and individual narratives. As a group participant, I was a part of contributing to, and analysing each data source. For the individual exit interviews, participants, including myself, responded to: “What was a critical incident that occurred during your experience with the SoSTC group?”. The prompt for writing the narrative was for participants to reflect on the impact of SoSTC on his/her individual project and personal and professional development. The narratives addressed our thinking about our individual self-studies, individual interviews, and pedagogical activities experienced in the group, such as sharing research artefacts, sketching drawings that reflected our collaborative experience, and writing letters exchanged with critical friends. Data were posted on *Blackboard Scholar*®, a web-based community site, which served as a platform to document and make transparent

all our data. We posted our emerging designs, details, instruments, data, and analyses including our preconceptions, assumptions, and re-thinking about practice.

First, I read through each exit interview, identifying segments of participant exit interviews that addressed critical incidents related to pedagogy. As I read each interview, I made analytical memorandums (Saldana, 2009) of preliminary codes. Then, reading across the interviews, I developed categories using the constant comparison method with open, axial, and selective coding (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). In this data set, participants expressed that one of their major 'eureka' moments was when they understood the self-study methodology. This occurred, to a large extent, through discussing their projects with critical friends and receiving peer feedback. Critical incidents also included enacting pedagogical activities presented by participants during our whole-group meetings and articulating their thinking about pedagogy with critical friends. Participants' willingness and interest in sharing their expertise to our whole-group meetings were also particularly powerful for me. In my interview, I stated: "I have been giving mine ... you know, talents. Now others are jumping in. So I'd say that is what made it work. It was relevant and people seemed to enjoy it."

Next, I read through the mid-project and end-of-project exit slips, again using the constant comparative method. Participants reported improvement in their teaching and attitudes towards their students; the value of the group and critical friends' meetings to provide structure and motivation, and new ways to assess and research their teaching.

Last, I read through each narrative to identify segments of participants' statements that addressed critical incidents related to pedagogy. In this data set, critical incidents included enacting pedagogical activities presented by participants during our whole-group meetings; revising preconceived notions about teaching and who they are as a teacher, as well as collaborating and communicating with a diverse and supportive group of scholars – especially critical friends who helped them articulate and rethink practice. These overlapping outcomes in the large and diverse data set served to triangulate and support repeated themes by participants related to critical incidents experienced. These included exchanging pedagogical activities; learning with critical friends, and re-imagining pedagogy. I address each of these themes next.

## **Exchanging pedagogies**

In planning our project launch, I considered pedagogies to engage us and, like a teacher, I began my lesson planning! Nonetheless, after our very first meeting, I reminded myself that this faculty self-study group was not my classroom. I observed that the group had an inertia which moved each of us individually and collectively. In an early log to Mieke, I wrote:

*I realized that I don't have to be the only expert – indeed, I am not. Each participant brought their unique talents to our whole group and collectively we changed. We worked in overlapping circles of ZPD, using our expertise and talents to support each other's efforts including mine as facilitator ... We found that we were a resource for each other because of our unique disciplinary lenses.*

We found a common language through the self-study methodology which necessitates a public discussion of confusions and assumptions about learning. A participant remarked: “Initially, I was a little intimidated by the theoretical aspect of the teaching discipline because it is not one with which I am familiar ... (but) imaginative explorations helped all of us view our questions under new lights.” Participant presentations invited viewing pedagogies in ways wholly alien prior to participants’ involvement in the group, as this participant shared:

*Lesley's creative writing activity, Lynne's presentation about the way you see things, and Kirk's presentation about citizen scientists were all useful in helping me to continue looking for new ways to see things and allow myself to come out of my “comfort zone” and learn new things, too.*

Moreover, the exchanging of our pedagogies also changed us: “I was especially helped by everyone’s reception of my demo on the perceptual information. I now see that it is central to what I teach.”

Participants brought an artefact that represented his/her self-study of teaching research interest and talked about it. Presenting our research artefacts was noted as a key critical incident in participants’ understanding of self-study and the development of individual projects. A participant discovered the meaning behind the object she brought:

*And suddenly I articulated with the group the reason I brought this art[e]fact ... the way that I shared with the group what the art[e]fact 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.*

I brought a shell that reminded me of my journey in academia; “a porous and rather beat up shell with its original shape now only a guess; tattered by the currents but still quite strong and very interesting”. I am continuously amazed in how incorporating the arts makes visible our concerns about our teaching (Samaras, 2010). Using the arts in research helps create an understanding of a situation, while simultaneously encouraging outside interpretation (Eisner, 1991; Weber & Mitchell, 2004). I have found that the research artefact activity gets at the underbelly of our research interests and invites critical collaborative inquiry (see Samaras, 2011: 104-106; Pithouse-Morgan & Van Laren, 2012). A participant posted her photograph and wrote about it on our community Blackboard site:



*"The underwater remotely operated vehicle (ROV) represents the research I do, the collaborative nature of that research, my interest in engaging people in the outdoors, and my desire to remain technologically savvy. This "tool" offers another lens from which to view a traditionally understood part of our natural environment. This can lead to a more holistic understanding of our impacts on and connection to natural places. Like the ROV, I am interested in viewing my teaching from multiple lenses and the effects of using technologically enhanced tools in the classroom to facilitate learning".*

At one of our whole-group meetings, we drew and shared a sketch that represented our experience as participants in SoSTC. We later wrote a narrative about it and posted it to each other. Another pedagogy we explored included letter-writing where critical friends wrote and read each other's letters about their research ideas (see Samaras, 2011: 82-83). A participant relayed, "Because I had to articulate my thinking in letters, I was better able to organize my thinking with regard to self-study. As I responded to their questions, I was able to think further about my own work". Pithouse-Morgan *et al.* (2011) also found letter-writing useful for gaining insight into each other's lived experiences, particularly on an emotional level. According to Reiman (1999: 599), "written speech is a self-reviewing structure of thought". When we write, we speak to ourselves and when we share that writing with others and make it public, it allows us to hear our thoughts again and understand them in a way when others ask us for clarification, elaboration, and conceptualisation.

## **Learning with critical friends**

Gathering as a whole group and in critical friends' groups, we supported and challenged each other's understandings of self-study and the methodological

soundness of our projects. These organic and diverse communities allowed us to co-mediate, negotiate, and socially construct an understanding of enacting self-study.

*When I talk with my critical friends, I am forced to articulate my current thinking and I get feedback from them. ... I find myself with more questions about my study, about my students, and about my teaching. Then I talk to my critical friends and, again, I must articulate my thinking and get feedback from them.*

Participants enacted their individual study in two public audiences for both support and peer review within their critical friends' group and with the whole group:

*The critical friends' groups ha[ve] proven enormously supportive, and really quite transforming for me, especially as I approached the analysis of my pilot results. The larger group has proven inspiring in the exchange of ideas about research methods from different disciplines which might apply to one's own research, and the sheer pleasure of exchanging ideas with others whose priority is teaching and the radical enhancement of student learning.*

Moving from the large group to small groups and back to the large group provided opportunities for us to re-articulate, document, and re-assess our understandings. We particularly appreciated being able to learn from each other and discovering unexpected zones of connectivity and relationships across fields. The multiple audiences served to de-centre us through an awareness of our individual fallibilities. We made linkages to relevant existing literatures and practices across disciplines.

The process of exchanging with critical friends also made us more aware of blind spots and our sources of our authority. It liberated us to discard old notions in order to re-centre and more authentically ground our practice.

*I cannot stress enough how important my critical friends, and indeed the entire SoSTC community, were in this process. They shared their musings, insecurities, discoveries, course changes, and small victories; I learned more from them about teaching and about self-transformation than I have ever learned.*

Data analysis revealed that we found the different levels of groups beneficial. Nonetheless, critical friends' groups worked with varying degrees of consistency, accountability, and vulnerability. One participant indicated the challenges of meeting obligations with her critical friends' group by sharing, "I really adhere when I have this once a month meeting ... But with the critical friends' piece, we are kind of doing it on our own and everybody's got their own thing to do, myself included."

## Re-imagining pedagogy

Ultimately our work as teachers is to impact our students' learning, as this participant's remark reminded us: "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."

There was an immediate applicability of our exchanges and deliberations to our students' learning.

*This artefact helped me point out the personal biography in my teaching and sharing the educational journey I went through to reach my present level of awareness to impact students' current level of awareness to self as learners and teachers.*

That process began with the courage and openness to study our practice out loud with people who provided safe havens for deconstructing our ways of knowing and encouraged us to confront our preconceived notions about teaching and student learning.

*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.*

In a narrative about her sketch, a participant expressed the complexity of her learning:

*My drawing represented my concept of our process as a vibrant network in which connections are virtual and ever evolving, humming with powerful energies that leap across spatial divides. (It) represents creative processes needed to answer research questions, which in some sense are like Meno's "paradox of inquiry" in the Socratic dialogue: "How can you find that thing, the nature of which is unknown to you?" To me, the only possible answer lies in the sheer number of potential connections and the possibilities of novel paths.*

Participants assisted each other with understanding that self-study includes 'I' and 'we':

*I learned A LOT about my own pedagogy! Because I was focused on my role in instruction, I really learned more about how to make instruction better for students. I am used to doing research on student learning but had not previously spent time thinking about how to study myself in the study.*

We gleaned pedagogical ideas from fellow participants' presentations, which we, in turn, shared with colleagues in our departments. Pedagogical connections were forged with heightened reflection from activities enacted with a diverse group of critical friends. A participant shared, "The diversity of disciplines represented by individuals of the large group was part of what created such an interesting and engaging dynamic for me". There were notations of connection, emotion, and revelations of self-assessment:

*Through mind-shifts such as the one Anastasia encourages, I have found SoSTC helps me break through the limitations that a discipline's standards, in this case art history, can impose. It also helps me with my own personal goal: to learn as much from my students as they do from me.*

Another participant surmised:

*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.*

## **Living the paradox of exchange and change**

We entered SoSTC as individuals with preconceived notions about who we are as teachers, what self-study might do for us, and what we might bring to the table. We left the group with newly constructed meanings, perceptions, and ideas about our pedagogies mediated by the group experience. As a participant described:

*Self-study is a process that involves me ... that is the piece. I know that I am changing, but through the collaborative, I can see how that happens and I can make that the very part of the fabric that I teach*

My work as a facilitator guided faculty to improve the quality of their teaching, the programmes they work in, and the students they teach. And in that process of facilitating, I also changed and learned. I experienced first-hand the transformative nature of leading by working within a culture of collaboration where participants also teach each other and the leader (Samaras, 2013).

Our interactions highlighted teaching as an art as well as a craft, as we worked towards productive action and change in our work with students. We openly shared our mistakes and epiphanies and gave each other permission to change our thinking about our teaching. Our exchanges heightened an awareness of our limitations. The rigour of critical friends' collaboration challenged us to lay bare our precious claims. Working in the first person and with critical friends, we de-institutionalised our questions to find the core of our inquiries within the parameters and support of a learning community.

Creativity researchers suggest that learning to appreciate and transfer insights from others' domains to one's own enhances the possibility of genuine creative insight (Sawyer, 2006). The transdisciplinary exchanges expanded these preconditions for us. Auld *et al.* (2013: 34) argue that "academics should have a greater presence in the research literature on teaching in higher education, and self-study is one way in which such lived realities can be explored in a personal and public space".

Our work suggests that, as universities work to improve student learning, they might consider providing creative studio spaces like SoSTC, so that faculty can exchange their talents to improve their students' and their own learning. Engaging in transdisciplinary faculty self-study groups holds a great deal of potential for faculty professional development and especially for faculty review with self- and peer assessment in a culture of/for learning about pedagogy.

## Endnote

Although this research was conducted by the author, the participation of Diana Karczmarczyk, Lesley Smith, Louisa Woodville, Laurie Harmon, Ilham Nasser, Seth Parsons, Toni Smith, Kirk Borne, Lynne Constantine, Ezperanza Roman Mendoza, Jennifer Suh, and Ryan Swanson in the SoSTC learning community made the writing possible.

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