Self-study Collaborations: A Deakin University Faculty Research Group

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Self-study methodology has been employed by a scholar group to engage in research around teaching practices and student learning in teacher education. The scholarship of teacher education is explored through several focussed research projects that then become the data for meta-analysis within the group through meeting conversations and Cloud based (asynchronous) conversations. This session will offer four presentations from researchers within Deakin University's Collaborative Reflective Experience and Practice in Education (CREPE) Faculty Research Group.

Brief descriptions for focussed research projects:
Presentation 1: The Collaborative Reflective Experience and Practice in Education (CREPE) Faculty Research Group
All eight researchers participated in regular meetings (online and face-to-face) to progress the meta-analysis through and about collaborations around each focussed research project. Researchers: John Cripps Clark and Peta White
Presentation 2: Designing Visible Pedagogies
Esther and Peta undertook self-directed reflective practice and critical friend discussions focussing on the practice of making their teaching pedagogy choices and decisions visible (and therefore instructive) to students. Researchers: Esther Loong and Peta White
Presentation 3: Teaching Sustainability
Jo and Peta explored sustainability through an arts based pedagogical practice in two different contexts (Drama education and Senior Biology education). Researchers: Jo Raphael and Peta White
Presentation 4: Engaging Curriculum and Assessment Design
Leicha and Josephine will shadow each other as they design curriculum and assessment tasks for pre-service teachers and critically reflect on and reframe their practice and learning experiences to improve student learning and engagement. Researchers: Josephine Lang and Leicha Bragg

Scholarly Collaborations

As teacher educators we are expected to be at the 'cutting edge', infusing the latest technology and pedagogical research while facilitating "delight and success" in our students (Deakin University, 2014). Reflective practice is crucial to continue developing our teaching practices. To ensure our success we have identified a need to establish supports that will facilitate our continued professional learning. The Collaborative Reflective Experience and Practice in Education (CREPE) Faculty Research Group consists of eight academics within the School of Education at Deakin University who are engaging in scholarly collaborations in initial teacher education and reflective practice research with self-study methodology.

The group collaborates to perform meta-analysis via discussions regarding their research in both face-to-face and online (asynchronous) media. This research builds the capacity of these researchers both individually and collectively (personally and professionally) as well as augmenting their reflective practices through multiple, focussed research projects where the collaborative connections provide opportunities for clarity and perspective. Our beginning research question asks: (How) Can we continue to develop our teaching practice to ensure we are high quality, contemporary teacher educators, and practice informed researchers?

Self-study Methodology

The birth of self-study methodology (in 1990s) has probably been the single most significant development ever in the field of teacher education research (Zeichner, 1999, p. 8). The goal of self-study teacher research is to enable teachers to gain tacit knowledge about their teaching as they seek to improve and assess their teaching, its impact on student learning, and its contribution to the knowledge base of teaching (Samaras, 2011, p. xiv). Through open, reflective, collaborative, and systematic investigation self-study can generate deeper understandings and learnings of our teaching practices.

Self-study methodology allows for a focus on self, as in self-action, specifically within an educational setting asking "How can I improve what I am doing?" (Samaras & Freese, 2006, p. 55). The methodology implies

> the study of one's self, one's actions, one's ideas, as well as the 'not self'. It is autobiographical, historical, cultural, and political and it draws on one's life, but it is more extensive than that. Self-study also involves a thoughtful look at texts read, experiences had, people known, and ideas considered. These are investigated for their connections with and the relationships to practice as a teacher educator. (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998, p. 236)

Self-study is not the same as reflective practice due to the critical awareness of the following two distinctive purposes: 1) how considerations of power undergird, frame, and distort educational process and interactions; and 2) how to question assumptions and practices that seem to make our teaching lives easier but actually work against our own best long-term interests (and those of the students) (La Boskey, 2004).

Grounded in "personal situated inquiry" (Samaras, 2011, p. 10) teacher educators initiate their own research questions based on teaching observations and experiences where close examination leads to personal and professional growth and learning (Berry, 2007). Self-study facilitates an exploration of the 'living contradictions'

(Whitehead, 1995) between what we believe and what we practice, where new understandings of personal theory making prevail.

Sounding somewhat contradictory, self-study necessitates "critical collaborative inquiry" (Samaras, 2011, p. 10) and practice (LaBoskey, 2004). Critical feedback from colleagues within the teaching community extends and encourages the researcher's understandings. The provision of different lenses through respectful questioning from collaborators can lead to divergent positioning and alternative perspectives which help to validate the quality and legitimacy of the research.

The key research goal of self-study is to "improve learning" (Samaras, 2011, p. 11) with a focus on the 'so what' of teaching practice through inquiry into our own teaching. Improvement in teaching impacts our "students' learning, inform[s] education and school programs, influence[s] policy decisions, and reform[s] education" (Samaras, 2011, p. 11). Self-study inquiry reveals what works, what doesn't, and what the consequences of change might be as we learn about our teaching and continue to work towards improving student learning.

Self-study research requires "transparent and systematic research process[es]" (Samaras, 2011, p. 11) achieved through openness to others' views, opinions, questions, and critique. Self-study inquiry relies on teacher/researchers who make their practice explicit to themselves and others through a transparent process where collaborators support probing and interpretation.

"Self-study is knowledge generation and presentation" (Samaras, 2011, p. 11) as research contributes to the personal and professional knowledge base of education. As researchers we strive to publicise our findings opening them to critique and contributing to the "accumulation of pedagogical, content, and issue-based knowledge" (Samaras, 2011, p. 11) and its validation.

As teacher educators we are attempting to "prepare new teachers and facilitate ongoing teacher development" (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 818); similarly our research in teacher education aims to ensure we are conducting our learning and teaching in a way that is meaningful and produces results.

Presentation 1: The Collaborative Reflective Experience and Practice in Education (CREPE) Faculty Research Group
Researchers: *John Cripps Clark and Peta White*

Collaboration can enhance the development of individuals, groups, and organisations through greater creativity, more effective problem solving, and adaptive strategies to change. It is, thus, important to understand how collaboration can transform individuals, groups, and organisations (Brew, Boud, Lucas, & Crawford, 2013; Franz, 2005).

This focused research project aims to examine transformative development within the Collaborative Reflective Experience and Practice in Education (CREPE) Faculty Research Group.

The project aims to address the questions:

1. What are the values we bring to our participation in the CREPE Faculty Research Group and how do these develop during and through our collaboration?

2. How do the social and communicative structures of the group mediate the construction of our research narratives?
3. How does collaboration mediate the development of identity?
4. What is the relationship between personal reflection and how this impacts on organisations more broadly?

By working with all members of the group across all group interactions as well as the small group activities of the focused research projects this research aims to both:

a) Understand collaboration and how it is mediated by the:
 i. values and identities of the participants;
 ii. processes of reflection (including critical friend and focused research projects), and
 iii. structures of communication and organisation.
b) Develop the group through the mediation of:
 i. communication;
 ii. social structures; and
 iii. organisational protocols and processes.

The research will use self-study methodology to facilitate the unpacking of self-reflective practice in the context of the interactions within the group. All members of the group will participate as critical friends to "help to prevent self-deception" (Lomax, 1991, p. 14); "lighten individual reflective journeys; apply critical lenses of power and discourse; celebrate our successes; and to trouble the complexities of our tasks" (White, 2014, p. 3).

While this study is exploratory, it will build theory from themes and patterns that emerge through careful exploration of the development of collaboration within the group. Data will be drawn from:

1. Recordings of our monthly video-conference meetings;
2. Discussion threads and documents lodged on the CREPE Research Group website;
3. Interviews with all members of the CREPE group (Craig, 2009; Kosnik, Cleovoulou, & Fletcher, 2009); and
4. Reflections on these interview transcripts by individual annotation and group discussions.

The analysis will be undertaken using relational agency (Edwards, 2005, 2007, 2010) to focus on the language-in-use (Mäkitalo & Säljö 2002) narratives and self-projection (Francis, 2010; Kozulin, 1998) of participants.

Presentation 2: Designing Visible Pedagogies

Esther and Peta undertook self-directed reflective practice and critical friend discussions focusing on the practice of making our teaching pedagogy choices and decisions visible (and therefore instructive) to students. In trying to understand and improve our practices, we attempted to find what Whitehead (1995) calls 'living educational theories'. Many of the decisions made as teacher educators, in terms of teaching pedagogies, may not be obvious (and visible) to our students. We often made pedagogical choices around modelling diverse examples and alternative strategies, yet these choices were often not made explicit and, therefore, opportunities for student learning were lost.

We agreed to document our planning through the writing and sharing narratives of our lessons by posting them up on the CREPE website designated for our project. We also represented the pedagogical strategies implemented in each lesson through flow charts or concept maps that would further capture the conceptual knowledge or understanding we hoped our students would accomplish. The third strategy was the commitment to weekly critical friend discussions, held one day after we had both taught our respective classes. "Whilst I have just begun to be acquainted with Peta, I found in her a quiet and gentle spirit that I could relate to as I shared some of my teaching experiences with her" (from Esther). Thus we began to navigate the critical friend (Handal, 1999) relationship. Handal (1999, p. 64) defined a critical friendship as having the following characteristics:

- A personal relationship of confidence;
- Belief in the professional competence of the critical friend;
- Expectation of personal integrity; and
- Basic trust in the good intentions of the critical friend.

For example: Esther expressed concern over the lack of student engagement with the readings. As we brainstormed possible strategies, we decided that Esther would ask her pre-service teachers directly why they did not do the readings through small group discussions, documenting the results of that discussion on paper. Esther would then carry out a whole class discussion about how she could be of further assistance in supporting the students to get to the reading prior to the lesson and how the students could assist themselves, either individually or collectively as a group. When Esther implemented this strategy she found that enabling students to share their thoughts and reflecting on their actions brought about the intended outcomes as the following lesson saw all those who were present at the discussion completing their readings prior to the class.

With the critical friend approach, Esther was concerned about unequal reciprocity of providing feedback from one to the other in the conversations they shared. Handal (1999) observed that while one party gained from the fresh eyes and new ideas, the consultant party is also made aware of aspects of his or her own practice that have not necessarily been considered before. Careful selection of the critical friend is thus essential to ensure that both parties are comfortable in developing a relationship that is firmly based in professional trust and care.

Presentation 3: Teaching Sustainability

Self-study collaborations between two teacher educators from different discipline areas: one a science and environmental educator and the other a drama educator with an interest in applied drama for learning was centred on an interest and passion in education for sustainability. In the first instance, Jo, the drama educator invited Peta, the science educator into her two classes with pre-service teachers who are undertaking a primary arts education unit with a focus on drama. The classes involved drama as pedagogy for teaching and learning in the area of education for sustainability. The invitation and acceptance were formally written and presented on the CREPE website.

For Jo, this self-study project was an opportunity to cross discipline boundaries and share practice. She began her invitation with a quote from Palmer (2007).

'When we walk into our workplace, the classroom, we close the door on our colleagues. When we emerge, we rarely talk about what happened or what needs to happen next, for we have no shared experience to talk about. (p. 170)

There was not any foreshadowing into potential issues and expectations for the critical friend sharing, just an open invitation to come and enjoy. Jo offered each drama workshop twice with two different classes enabling Peta to participate in the first and then to take a more observational role in the second.

In a second phase of this project Peta invited Jo to collaborate in a tutorial to demonstrate the ways drama strategies can be applied as pedagogy to engage students in controversial issues in senior biology education. Jo presented the workshop for pre-service teachers in Peta's class of biology method studies and Peta then applied these drama strategies in her teaching of the same topic to a second class of biology method studies students.

Reflections on each stage of the project were written and posted in the research group's shared CREPE website, which allowed us to articulate our aims, engage with the self-study literature and draw connections with some of the conceptual frameworks that we worked with to help inform our reflective practice. Posting these notes in the shared on-line research space meant that colleagues in the research group were also able to read and contribute to the conversation.

Self-study as a methodology is at its most powerful, according to Russell (2010), 'when a teacher educator is willing to explore the complexities of learning by those who wish to become teachers in the context of exploring simultaneously the complexities of one's own learning to teach' (p. 691). We discovered that this self-study project had positive impacts on our own teaching practice as well as important influences on our students. We also recognised a respect and interest amongst the pre-service teachers for the way we modelled collaboration and reflective practice as educators. Furthermore, our presence in each other's teaching spaces helped to generate rich and authentic discussions about teaching and learning that positioned us all (teacher educators and pre-service teachers) as teachers and learners together.

Our project continues with particular attention to the broader influences of self-study methodology that are possible when conducted by teacher educators who collaborate across discipline areas in ways that are visible to their students and colleagues.

Presentation 4: Engaging Curriculum and Assessment Design: Collaborative Shadowing

We will create a self-study community of inquiry to examine both individually and as critical friends our curriculum, assessment, and pedagogical practices. Through the use of 'collaborative shadowing' of each other's curriculum and assessment design and development for, and teaching in, our units Primary Mathematics Education (Leicha) and Assessment: Ways of Knowing (Josephine), we come to better know our pedagogical practices.

The research questions reflect our interest in exploring our processes as we design, develop, and enact our curriculum and assessment intentions for our respective units – and how these critical reflections impact on improving our own teaching practices to enhance our students' learning. The collaborative self-study

process has lead us to develop these five research questions that are framing our thinking in the *Collaborative Shadowing* focussed research project:

1. How does collaborative shadowing develop my understanding of curriculum design and pedagogical practices?

2. How can we continue to develop our teaching practice to ensure we are high quality, contemporary teacher educators, and practice informed researchers?

3. How are we adapting to support our students to engage meaningfully in Cloud based [online] learning?

4. How are we adapting to support our students to engage meaningfully in concepts of assessment and assessment tasks?

5. What is the impact of self-study in reframing our thinking of teaching?

Employing Samaras and Freese (2009) as a guide on how to explore ways of generating data to support developing community of inquiry approaches, we broadly identify the seven categories of data generation to examine critically our work as Unit Chairs.

1. Recordings and note taking of meetings;

2. Journaling of the self-study experience;

3. Email correspondence between the two researchers;

4. Course materials for units in which the two researchers teach;

5. Recordings of our monthly meetings;

6. Discussion threads and documents lodged on the CREPE Research Group website, and

7. Units' eVALUate (student evaluation) data.

We will analyse the data through an interrogation of our written word, seeking themes and important statements that arise.

Context plays a significant factor in shaping our project relationship. We find that our video linked based meetings and its affordances of sharing our work helps to bring focus as we work together. We also set ourselves reflective reading tasks, e.g. Samaras (2011) to broaden and deepen our understandings of self-study.

The next phase of our *Collaborative Shadowing* project will be undertaken in the first trimester of 2015 where we anticipate enacting and evaluate changes to our assessment and curriculum design, and come to a better understanding of ourselves as teacher practitioners through self-study.

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