

## **Journaling and Self-Study in an International Research Collective**

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I was wanting a space where I could reflect on the research process in a community of inquiry, and I am so thankful that I have you two to reflect with. ...My big question is what are YOU two most interested in studying? (Amber, American Author)

Your big question for me is also the biggest question for me. I am thinking my research questions during shower, waiting for bus, and sleeping time. Sometimes I feel I am a fly, I don't know where I am flying, I want to touch everything. (Lulu, Chinese Author)

I am also thinking my research question every time...I feel I am in river. I don't know where I am floating. I try to don't to be caught in a tree, a bank or... I don't want to swim to stay same place. Above all I can not swim. I want to float a stream, although there is obstacle. I am floating stream already. (Suguru, Japanese Author)

### **Introduction**

The quotes above are from an interactive on-line journal (Lee, 2010) that was kept by the authors of this paper. We are three educational researchers in Hawai'i who are each from a different country, and at different stages in our professional careers. Initially, we were drawn together because of our common interest in philosophy for children Hawai'i (p4cH). p4cH is an approach to education that aims to transform traditional classrooms into intellectually safe communities of inquiry (Jackson, 2001), and in each of our home countries p4cH is being explored as a viable means for school betterment (Oakes, Quartz, Ryan & Lipton, 2000). Caught between the tension of representing the interests of our unique backgrounds and wanting to find a common ground to discuss our p4cH research we started the reflective practice (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1987; Zeichner & Liston, 1987; Loughran, 1996) of journaling with one another. Through journaling we hoped to create a "systematic and critical examination of [our] actions and [our] context as a path to develop a more consciously driven mode of professional activity" (Samaras & Freese, 2006, p. 11). In this paper we discuss the collaborative self-study that we conducted as we systematically wrote in, and analyzed our journal. We will explain how journaling and self-study helped to promote our international collaboration (DeZure, Chism, Sorcinelli, Cheong, Ellozy, Holley, Kazem, & Atrushi, 2012) by creating an international commons where we could deepen our inquiry in the research process in a culturally responsive way. We will conclude with our personal reflections on the importance of journaling and self-study among educational researchers who share common interests, and yet who wish to tailor their research to the contexts of their home countries.

### **Background and Theoretical Framework**

In this paper we draw upon the literature of reflective teaching, culturally responsive pedagogies, social constructivism and self-study to help us frame the role of journaling in our international research collective. The research literature abounds with studies that discuss the value of reflection and reflective practice (Dewey, 1929; 1933; Schon, 1987; Zeichner & Liston, 1987; Erickson & Gumperz, 1988; Henderson, 1989; Van Manen, 1991; Loughran, 1996). Reflection is an integral part of conscious being, and "professional growth is found in the ability to always create the conditions for self-reflection, to use narrative and reflective writing to

unpack our own thoughts and gain that intellectual distance important to analyze our daily experience” (Cuarsarano, 2011, p. 553). In this study, we envisioned learning journals (Moon, 2006) as an important tool for creating the conditions necessary for a reflective practice (Loughran, 1996) that would help us improve upon our newly established international research collaboration in education (DeZure et al., 2012, p. 27).

Like Spalding and Wilson (2002), we believed:

(1) journals serve as a permanent record of thoughts and experiences; (2) journals provide a means of establishing and maintaining relationships with [others reading the journals]; (3) journals serve as a safe outlet for personal concerns and frustrations; and (4) journals are an aid to internal dialogue. (p. 1394)

We wanted to use this type of “reflective thinking via journal writing” (Spalding & Wilson, 2002, p. 1393) to study our international research collective and to personally examine each of our roles in it (Lunenberg & Samaras, 2011).

We envisioned the journal as a place where we could begin with a question, doubt, hesitation, wondering or perplexity, and move “through the act of searching to find material that [would] resolve, clarify, or otherwise address the doubt” (Spalding & Wilson, 2002). We saw the journal as a “a mutually self-disclosing context” where we were “free to ask and answer questions, to discuss [research] with others, and to probe for deeper understanding of complex issues.” We wanted to use our journal as a place for cultivating “further inquiry with others that were like-minded in their commitment to critical dialogue, transformational inquiry,” (Elliott-Johns, Peterson, Allison-Roan, & Ramirez, 2010, p. 81) and the p4cH approach to education.

We also wanted to use our journal “a ‘community of practice’ without geographic boundaries” (Elliott-Johns et. al., 2010, p. 81). Through dialogue and caring we wanted to transcend the borders of our nation states, “understand each others’ lives and concerns and build [our] relationships” (Lunenberg & Samaras, 2011, p. 844). We imagined, that through journaling international researchers like us could “avoid making assumptions about what is essential, what will work and what is desirable. Instead [we could] work collaboratively with [our] partners to identify what is relevant, useful and appropriate to context” (p. 27). In line with the practices of culturally-responsive approaches to education (Gay, 2000; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008) we wanted to use our journal, and this study to build upon the literature by suggesting that reflection and journaling are essential to relationship building, the co-construction of knowledge, self-knowledge, and validation of diverse cultures, languages and experiences in international research partnerships.

To conduct our self-study research we used a social constructivist lens. This included the belief that knowledge is constructed by learners, is experienced based, and is developed within a social context (Schon, 1987; Vygotsky, 1978). We further characterized our self-study as “personal, constructivist, and collaborative” (Beck, Freese, & Kosnick, 2004, p. 1256). It was personal because we started with ourselves, and reflected on own research processes and interests. It was constructivist because we were “*constantly* inquiring” about our p4cH research and ourselves, “never content with present ideas, aware that knowledge is always partial and can always be improved upon” (Beck, Freese & Kosnick, 2004, p. 1263). And finally, it was collaborative. We developed a philosophical community of inquiry (Lipman, 1991, 1993; Jackson, 2013, 2001) where “the views of individuals” were “constantly brought into dialogue with the views of others” (Beck, Freese, & Kosnick, 2004, p. 1265).

## **Objectives and Purpose of the Study**

Drawing upon the research on self-study and reflection, this paper aims to capture the complexities of conducting educational research with international partners. It also aims explore the possibilities of using a collaborative and interactive online journal in an international research collective.

## **Research Questions**

What is the role of journaling in an international research collective?

- How did the journaling support our collaboration?
- How did the journaling advance our individual and collective research interests/goals?
- How does the journaling process support the growth of the project we are researching (p4cH and the philosophical inquiry course)?
- How does the journaling process support our development as educators, researchers, and people?

## **Methods**

This study applies a self- study research methodology that is self-initiated, improvement aimed, and interactive (Laboskey, 2004). It was also characterized by a “collective self-study method” that involved the “interactive exploration of an issue by a team of researchers” (Lunenbergs & Samaras, 2011, p. 844) who were engaged in collaborative inquiry (Samaras & Freese, 2008).

### *Context and Participants*

The participants in this study are the three authors of this paper. We are educational researchers from three different countries: the United States, China, and Japan. We became connected with one another at a large university in Hawai‘i, and because of our common research interests formed an international research collective.

Amber is the Director of Curriculum and Research at the University of Hawai‘i Uehiro Academy for Philosophy and Ethics in Education. The Uehiro Academy is the home of p4cH. As a part of Amber’s position she is responsible for designing innovative approaches to p4cH and researching the impact of p4cH. During the course of this study she was researching the impact of a newly developed public high school social studies elective titled, Philosophical Inquiry. Amber has been practicing and researching p4cH since 2001. She was born and raised in the United States.

Lulu is a doctoral student from Educational Psychology Department in College of Education at University of Hawai‘i at Manoa. She originally came from China and moved to Hawai‘i to pursue her doctoral degree in August 2011. She was fascinated by the power of p4cH in positively impacting students’ thinking and behaviors, thus she became interested in doing p4cH research and planned to spread p4cH teaching philosophy to China in the future. In 2012, Lulu was introduced by the founder of p4cH, Thomas Jackson to the principal investigator Amber, and began to work together to investigate the Philosophical Inquiry course’ impact on students’ academic engagement and psychological well-being. Amber introduced Lulu to Suguru in June 2013.

Suguru is a doctoral student from the College of Education at Hiroshima University. He was born and raised in Kyoto, Japan. Suguru was drawn to Hawai‘i because of his interest in p4cH. He is particularly fascinated in the relationship between the collaborative questioning

process in the community of inquiry and the construction of democratic (minnshyushyugiteki) social relationships. Suguru came to Hawai'i in the spring of 2013 to visit the Uehiro Academy, and then applied to be a visiting scholar at the University of Hawai'i during the 2013-14 school year. Suguru met Amber at the Uehiro Academy and Amber introduced Suguru to Lulu. In the future, Suguru wants to apply what he learns from his research to reshape citizenship education in Japan.

### *Data*

The primary data source was our interactive on-line journal. Initially, during the summer of 2013, we wrote in the journal five times per week. Then, when the 2013 fall semester started, and life became much more busy, we wrote in the journal once a week. We continued this practice for eight months (6/17/2013 – 1/22/2014).

We used google docs as our online journaling tool to share our journal entries with one another. Like Elliott-Johns, Peterson, Allison-Roan, and Ramirez (2010) “the content of our journals included personal reflections, perceptions and questions” (p. 81). The journals were a place for open ended-inquiry and reflection as we read and responded to one another’s writing. Through this practice we created an ongoing and continuous dialogue (Freire, 1990) with one another despite the gaps in our personal contact. In our dialogue we respectfully recognized each other’s voice through careful listening, asking for further clarification, and acknowledging our openness to different viewpoints to improve our collective work (Lunenberg & Samaras, 2011, p. 844). At the end of our data collection period, we ended up with a total of seventy single spaced pages of journal entries.

The secondary data sources in this study include emails between the three of us, transcripts of audio recorded conversations and discussions, and analytic memos (Creswell, 2005, p. 67; Charmaz, 2006, p. 72–95) that we each kept throughout the study.

### *Data Analysis*

Using the method of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) we did an extensive analysis of our journals. This occurred in three phases. In phase one, we analyzed the journals “early to help us focus further data collection” (Glaser & Straus, 1967, p. 508). We started with the 51 (single-spaced) pages of our journal, which we kept from June 17, 2013 to August 9, 2013. We analyzed these entries separately and developed initial open codes. Then we came together and served as critical friends (Miles & Huberman, 1994). We shared our open codes and worked together to develop an initial set of theoretical codes and analytic themes (Charmaz, 2006). In phase two, after journaling again for three more months, we read through 35 more pages of (single-spaced) journal entries that were kept from October 2, 2013 to January 22, 2014. Again, on our own we further developed our initial set of theoretical codes and analytic themes. Then we came back together, and through dialogue methodology (Lunenberg & Samaras, 2011, p. 844) we created our final list of analytic themes. In phase three we wrote up our findings and collaborated further to revise our thinking and refine the themes we had developed.

### **Findings**

The discussion of our findings includes an overview of the themes that emerged from analyzing our interactive on-line journal. Our collaborative analysis resulted in the following themes: an international commons, deepened inquiry in the research process, and a culturally responsive practice.

**An international commons.** Through the analysis of the data we came to see our interactive on-line journal as an international commons. The “commons, encompasses everything that is jointly owned by all of us” (Walljasper, 2010, p. 1), and in this study, the data revealed how journaling created a common space for the three authors. The data showed how our common interests in p4cH, along with regular journal writing, helped us overcome our language barriers and build a safe place for dialoguing about our intellectual confusion, emotional difficulties and social relationships with one another. The data also showed how our journal kept us connected with one another, and helped us overcome the loneliness and isolation that we had experience prior to forming our international research collective.

Throughout the journal the three of us wrote extensively about our passionate interest in a p4cH approach to education. Amber was focused on the new Philosophical Inquiry p4cH course that she was developing and researching for the Hawai‘i State Department of Education. On June 17, 2013 she wrote excitedly, “this is the first social studies class that I have been able to design curriculum for and teach that focuses on thinking!” On the same day, both Lulu and Suguru replied to her post.

I was just passionate in changing the Chinese education system...I wonder how to get Chinese children more critical? Innovative? How to make them more sympathetic? Compassionate? How to make them value themselves and have confidence? How to make them enjoy their learning and engage in school? How to get them to know that their ideas and thinking are cared for and respected by others? Then I found the Philosophy for Children Program. THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT I WANT! (Chinese 6/17/2013)

I am interested so much in the p4c in Hawai‘i (p4cH) because p4cH is curriculum reform that teaches to children think for themselves. In Japan, we have many problems in school (e.g., school violence, bullying)...But how to change? I think p4cH is a strategy for motivating and promoting children’s learning...philosophical inquiry is...designed so that children practice thinking for themselves. (Japanese 6/17/2013)

As this data demonstrates, our shared excitement and enthusiasm for p4cH brought us together, but additional quotes from the journal make obvious our struggles to overcome the fact that we spoke different languages.

English was the language that we all had in common, but each of our relationships to the English language was different. Amber was a native speaker, Lulu was quite proficient after living in Hawai‘i for over two years, and for Suguru, this was the first experiencing communicating solely in English. Throughout the journal we wrote about our differing abilities, and how language impacted our communication and relationships with one another in the international research collective.

Suguru wrote extensively about struggling with his English. Finally, on November 18, 2013 Amber wrote,

Hi Suguru- why can’t our journal be a place for you to practice your English? We are very friendly and forgiving! I loved reading your abstract tonight, and I can’t wait to meet with you tomorrow and talk about it. I feel like you writing about your research in English gives me a window into what you are thinking about, and then we can discuss the parts that don’t make sense. I think it is a really cool process. I get to learn more about what you are thinking in your research, and you get to work on your English - this is good for everyone. (American 11/18/2013)

In addition to her words of encouragement, the data also showed that Amber was wrestling with issues of guilt related to her inability to speak Japanese. She wrote, “this language barrier makes it so frustrating. It makes me feel guilty” (American, 10/29/2013).

Suguru followed up on Amber’s comments and concerns,

Yes. I want to improve through this journal. Thank you for your reading to my English, you two! If you find that there are wrong English, which I repeat, Please tell me. And, Amber, I don’t think you must feel guilty! I think it is good to study Japanese a just little such few word, though because it could be great means to make Japanese relax....I always appreciate your patience so please don’t feel guilty! (Japanese 11/21/2013)

Lulu approached the language differences more pragmatically. To Suguru, she wrote, “don’t worry, if you practice writing everyday, you’ll see your English becomes fluent. Your English is now better than before” (Chinese 12/17/2013). This dialogue, about our language differences was important. It helped us work out our communication breakdowns so that we could construct a safe place to talk through the intellectual confusion, emotional struggles and social relationships that were a part of each of our p4cH research initiatives.

*A safe place.* A hallmark of the p4cH approach to education is the importance of creating intellectually safe communities of inquiry. Jackson (2001) wrote, “for dialogue and inquiry to occur,” participants “must be emotionally and intellectually safe” (p. 460). The analysis of the data demonstrates how we incorporated these beliefs about teaching into our online journaling.

Some examples of intellectual safety are seen in quotes where we honestly share our confusion with one another. At one point Amber wrote, “Suguru - I am interested in your question about the philosophical inquiry course, but I’m not sure that I understand your thinking around why you want to know” (American, 6/27/2013). This allowed Suguru to dig deeper into the reasons behind his questions, which provided Amber with an explanation about why he was asking the questions he was asking. Another example intellectual safety was when Suguru interrupted an intense back and forth that Lulu and Amber were having and wrote, “by the way I can’t quite follow what you two are talking about, sorry. What was research for Philosophical Inquiry course under DOE?” (Japanese 10/20/2013). In response to Suguru’s inquiry, Amber and Lulu helped to clarify his understanding of the issue, which enabled Suguru to become an active member of the discussion. This process of maintaining an intellectually safe community of inquiry was ongoing and required vigilance. But the payoff was well worth it. As Suguru concluded, “of course, I know I can put my thinking freely....I think it is very tough work to write own thinking, even so we are adults. This journal is very tough work and very good challenge” (Japanese 1/22/2013).

The data also showed how we worked hard in our journal to create an emotionally safe place where we could share our feelings and support one another. Some of emotional sharing related to our research:

There were some other small changes. I was really overwhelmed and irritated at first because these changes were not mentioned on the comments I got from the review board over a month ago. I felt like changing my research design at first because I didn’t want to make all of the changes they suggested, but then I remembered why I chose the research design that I did and I just got started working. That is always helpful for me. When I get stressed out about something I found that when I just get down to work - things tend to work themselves out. (American 6/24/2013)

I feel I am a chicken with head cutting off. I keep running around, but forget where to head for. Before I am fascinated by doing survey instrument design and field test, but because of the sample size issue, I have to give up. So, I cannot do item response theory and structural equation modeling at the first semester. (Chinese 6/25/2013)

Tonight, I struggle to write a proposal for my dissertation that I read for Committee Members at July 23th in Hiroshima. But I couldn't proceed with the work. I get depressed. Although I felt and thought my project is advancing, now I feel I don't know what I do and think. (Japanese 7/1/2013)

As the quotes above illustrate, the very process of journaling helped us work through our emotions, but in other cases, like Suguru's final quote, we needed words of encouragement from someone else. On the same day that Suguru wrote his entry about being depressed, Lulu replied, "I have the same feeling with Suguru. I don't always know exactly where I am heading for..."(Chinese 7/1/2013). After reading her response Suguru came back with a more settled attitude. He wrote, "do what you can, with what you have, where you are" (Japanese 7/6/2013).

In addition to our emotional expressions about the research, we also felt safe enough to write about our personal emotions with one another. Amber wrote about her struggles balancing motherhood and her career.

I worry that my children will be ok while I am gone. This is one thing I am constantly struggling with - can I still be a good mom, and be a successful professional. I hope that I will have Internet access so that I can continue to write in this journal. It will be so cool if I do because that will mean that each of us will be separated by the big Pacific Ocean but we will still be able to support one another, and gain strength from one another. (American 7/12/2013)

As the quote illustrates, while Amber was away from her family on travel, she used the journal as a source of emotional support.

For Suguru, the journal was an emotionally safe place to talk through the difficulty of adjusting to living in a new country. He wrote, "I'm very confusing. I feel frustration. I'm in Hawai'i but I still writing in Japanese article" (Japanese 10/10/2013). Amber wrote back, "Suguru...I think it is ok that you are working on the article in Hawai'i" (American 10/15/2014), and through their continued dialogue he became more settled in his new home.

Lulu also used the journal as a place to express her emotions. On November 16, 2014 she wrote,

Because of me, my boyfriend came back from mainland, but cannot find a very good fit or better job here in Hawai'i. If I can finish my study earlier, he and I may have more opportunities and we'll feel our life finally settling down. I don't want him to sacrifice his time and dream for me for so long time....When I think about the future direction, I feel very confused. Going back to China, everything is supposed to be much easier for me, and I'll quickly build up my relationships and reputation in the place where I work. Besides, I can always meet with my parents and brother, so I don't have to bear the guiltiness and heartaching feeling. In the U.S., it will be much harder for me to find a good job comparing with the Chinese job opportunities because of my language and the U.S. policy toward the international students. However, I do believe if I work hard and I demonstrate competent qualities, I can find a good job in the U.S. But how about my fiance? Can he find a better job in the U.S. than in China? Will his parents allow him to stay in the U.S.?  
(Chinese 11/16/2013)

This entry in particular opened up Amber's ideas to the unique struggles that Lulu was facing in the group's international research collective. Amber wrote back,

Wow Lulu, this is a lot of heavy stuff. I have had to do a lot of thinking about how to create a life that will make both my husband and I happy, but I have not had to think about what country will be the best for both of us to live in. I wish I could make the dissertation process go a lot faster for you, but it is this thing, which is not always in your control...I can remember going to see a movie with my husband where the girl had a baby and all I did was cry because I wanted to be done with my dissertation and have a baby. I think I still had one or two more years before I finished. Lots to think about. Let me know how I can support you. (American 11/18/2013)

These quotes begin to demonstrate how the dialogue, open sharing, and words of support that were facilitated through our interactive online journal helped us to construct a international research collective that was much more than a straightforward academic collaboration. We were critical friends who not only cared about one another's research, but about each other.

The final component of the safe environment to emerge from the data was the way in which the journal allowed us to debrief our social relationships with one another. At one point during the study Amber and Suguru got into a heated discussion with one another. They did not debrief their social interaction in person, and instead waited to talk to one another through the journal. Suguru wrote,

In this week, I had some discussion about my research with Amber. I didn't tell about my interest well. I irritated myself. But I can grow only step-by-step. I can do only what I can do. Thank you for your patience. (Japanese 10/28 – 10/29/2013)

Amber wrote back,

Ahh Suguru...I'm sorry I got a bit frustrated too. I was having a bad day...I also can't imagine trying to communicate my complex thinking in another language. Both you and Lulu are so courageous to be doing your studies in another country and another language. As I reflect I realize that I need to be a bit more patient. I really want to understand what you are thinking, and I want to be able to dialogue with you about the relationship between p4c and social studies...I should be learning Japanese so that I can communicate with you better...(American 10/29/2013)

As the quotes illustrate the journal provided a safe place to discuss misinterpretations and misunderstandings that would have taken much more courage to bring up in person. In this ways, and others, our interactive online journal kept us connected.

***Kept Us Connected.*** On January 17, 2014 Amber wrote, "this is a busy life, and through journaling we remain connected to each other's thoughts, feelings, struggles, and celebrations." What she recognized what the important role that the journal was playing in keeping the international research collective in tact.

Quite often there were large gaps in time when Amber, Lulu, and Suguru wouldn't see one another. We would write things like, "I am wondering how is Suguru now? Did he still feel discouraged? Is he in England right now? I look forward to hearing about his new P4C experiences there" (Chinese 7/13/2013). Separated by the business of our own life, and in this case physical distance, we would use the journal to communicate with one another.

In our communications with one another we would share what we were working on, and give each other important updates about the areas of our research that we were collaborating on. There is evidence of us corresponding about theoretical arguments that we were making (Chinese 6/18/2013), reports we were writing (Japanese 7/23/2013), and our communications with research participants (American 10/16/2013). This data shows how the journal was an essential tool for our open and ongoing communication with one another.

In one outstanding entry, the data showed how our journal helped us stay connected despite the miscommunications that we were having with one another about the research process. Suguru had found out that he could not do research that involved student participants. He wrote, “I can not easily accept that I can not be researcher in school. What am I? I thought I'm researcher for schooling education” (Japanese 7/11/2013). On the same day, Amber replied,

You are a researcher of schooling education!!!!!!!!!!!!!! You are researching p4cH in schools - you will just have a different data source than you originally thought. It is OK - your data source does not determine whether you are a school researcher or not. I wish I could help you see that the research you are doing with p4cH is SO important. (American 7/11/2013)

And Lulu added,

Suguru, you just have to change another lens to look at your research. Maybe this is a better opportunity. Although you felt you were going the other way, you will end at the same point one day. You are studying P4C and p4cH, everything you do is connected to this. One day you will see everything is connected. (Chinese 7/11/2013)

Through many explanations about the University and Department of Education research policies, and mostly through words of encouragement, Amber and Lulu helped Suguru through a potentially debilitating part of his research process. As the data shows, Suguru was ready to quit his p4cH research project in Hawai‘i, but because of his ongoing dialogue with Amber and Lulu via the journal, he cleared up his misconceptions about the U.S. research policies and moved his research forward.

The deep connection with one another that was cultivated by our communication in the journal also helped us overcome the loneliness and isolation that we had felt while doing our research prior to meeting one another. Lulu wrote about what it felt like before our international collective. “I even questioned what is the meaning for me to do the research... Sometimes I feel I deserted my mom and dad to come to the U.S. to suffer” (Chinese 6/20/2013). Amber had also felt very alone in her role as the sole p4cH researcher in Hawai‘i, and as she explained in her journal entry, “now I feel like I am working with a team of people who can collaborate with one another as we each pursue our own interests” (American 6/17/2013). She went on to explain, “When I forget to read our journal I think that I’m the only one thinking about p4c Hawai‘i research, and then I read the journal and I’m reminded that you two are thinking about this research all the time too” (American 1/3/2014).

Through our constant connection and encouragement to one another the journal became a place of inspiration and a source of motivation. Our journal makes me “feel more power and momentum to do p4cH research,” (Chinese 10/19/2013). Lulu continued,

I cannot imagine what my situation if Amber or Suguru were gone. Many times, I feel I cannot find my way, many times, I feel frustrated. I read this journal, I know I am not alone. I get courage to do this research again. (Chinese 7/16/2013)

As this quote exemplifies, the journal created an international commons, a safe place for dialogue that ultimately kept us together.

**Deepened inquiry in the research process.** The second major theme that emerged from the analysis of the data demonstrates how the journal helped to deepen our inquiry throughout the research process. We used the journal to ask questions, reflect on our field experiences, and

think through the difficult phases of our research projects. Through journaling we became “critical friends or trusted colleagues who seek support and validation of their research to gain new perspectives in understanding and reframing their interpretations” (Luneberg & Samaras, 2011, p. 843). In Suguru’s words we formed a “research community [which] is very helpful for me” (Japanese 1/2/2014).

Many of the questions that we asked in the journal pushed us to think more deeply about the theoretical dimensions of our research projects. For example, Lulu wanted to explore “the connections between multicultural education (M.E.) and p4cH. What M.E. can do to improve students’ learning experiences in philosophical inquiry (PI) class? Does PI class need M.E. anyway” (Chinese 1/15/2014)? Amber responded, “Wow Lulu, so many questions! I’m not sure that I have all of the answers to them, and I think they would good for our group to discuss in person” (American 1/17/2014). As Amber suggested in this particular journal entry, we would often meet in person and use the questions that we posed in our journal as starting points for dialogue and philosophical inquiry. As it happens with classroom inquiries that use a p4cH approach, our inquiries revealed what we were confused about, helped us uncover the complexity of the topics that we were exploring, and supported us in developing possible answers to our questions.

In addition to asking philosophical questions about the topics we were investigating in our research, the journal also helped us deepen our inquiry by providing us with a place to reflect on our field experiences. In this journal entry Lulu reflected on her first day at an American school.

Today, it’s like a dream come true experience. I finally went to one of the p4cH flagship schools -- Kailua High School, the school where Amber and Chad worked. Amber showed me the classroom where she worked before. I visited the classroom, there are warm and colorful paintings on the wall, and two old computers and one old TV. Don’t know why, I then thought about the Chinese high schools. In China, it seems that all the high school structures are the same. It is all about tall buildings and artificial playground. The Chinese class structure is also very different from the US’s. This makes me wonder how I can apply p4cH in Chinese classroom? (Chinese 7/23/2013)

The journal provided her with a place to record her experience and think about how the experience connected to her own life. In the case of this journal entry, Lulu began to think about how her work with p4cH in Hawai‘i could apply to her future work with p4cH in China.

**Research is “up and down”** The data also shows how the journal helped us become more comfortable with our confusion and uncertainty about the research process. At one point Suguru wrote, “When I read journal which Lulu wrote, I think, research is up and down...our inquiry have many directions...and I think I’m off track” (Japanese 6/25/2013). This prompted Amber to respond,

All of your comments remind me about that research is not a linear path. We think that we know the direction that we are going, and that we are designing the path that our research will take, but so many variables outside of our control impact the work that we do that we have to remain flexible as researchers...it is a lot like life. We can be very intentional about the life that we want to lead, but we also need to be flexible to account for all of the things that happen that are out of our control. (American 12/15/2013)

This realization deepened our inquiry because it helped all of us become more open to seeing our research as a continual work in progress.

We also recognized that our critical friendship was an essential tool for improving upon our works in progress. One example was how we used each other's eyes to look at our research questions in new ways. This is seen in the following exchange:

Lulu's questions made me realize that I will need to go back to my research questions that I developed a couple of months ago and revise them in light of the progress we have made with the curriculum and with our own thinking. Lulu - any ideas for Suguru? Maybe you can share your research questions with Suguru. (American 10/22/2013)

Suguru - If you feel you still are going to different directions, you don't know which way to go, you need to settle down your mind at first. Ask yourself again WHAT IS YOUR BURNING QUESTION? WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST INTEREST? WHAT IS YOUR PASSION? Then try to write down everything, fly with your mind, WHAT ARE YOUR WONDERINGS? WHAT QUESTIONS YOU WANT TO SOLVE AND INQUIRY DEEPLY INTO? Write all the questions down. Then probably we can give you more feedback. When you think about a research question, you should also imagine how you gonna answer the question. How to define it? How to measure it? And can you measure the thing you really want to measure?...Here are my research purpose and questions, I hope this may help you narrow your research questions... (Chinese 10/22/2014)

Thank you, I appreciate your advice (Japanese 10/28/2013)!

As the data shows, we were constantly learning with and learning from one another. We used questions, reflection and dialogue to cultivate a critical friendship that not only helped to support the research we were producing, but the knowledge that we were constructing about other people, places, cultures, and ourselves.

**A culturally responsive practice.** The final theme to emerge from the analysis of the data revealed how journaling was an essential tool for creating culturally responsive practices (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Gay, 2000) in both our research and our relationships with one another. The use of an online interactive journal in our international research collective helped us reflect on our home countries and cultures, and become more aware of others' countries and cultures. The journal also provided a place for us to engage in cross-cultural sharing, which helped us situate and tailor our research to the uniqueness of our home countries. All of this helped us gain multiple perspectives on the role of research in our own lives.

It became apparent during the analysis of the data that for Lulu and Suguru the journal played an important role in helping them reflect on their own schooling experience. In an extensive journal entry, Lulu reflected,

These kids remind me of my high school time, I am jealous again about their curriculum and class environment. I never had this kind of classroom before, I only remember I lived in the boarding school, I got up between 5 to 5:30am, and then recited English words or text, historical facts, and Chinese texts with our classmates in a very organized classroom. At 6:30am, we began running in the playground, I had deep impression of the dark sky and "scary" trees, especially in the winter time. I feel I am like a warrior, running a long way and fighting against all the hardships, and sacrificing everything to win a battle. Oh, the figure of our chief teacher emerges. I now feel very respectful for her commitment and engagement in motivating and "controlling" us in the early morning, she even came to school earlier than us at 5 o'clock. After the running, we will head to the dining room for a simple breakfast, I remember, I don't have much time for eating and playing sports, what I only can do is study study study, the boring and challenging study whole day until the late night 11pm. We had night class until 9:30pm, then we went back to the dorm for cleaning and washing. But after that, some classmates still worked hard on their homework or reading, so influenced by them, I began to pick up the book again... The funny thing is that although we feel our high school life is the most miserable life at that time, I feel more cherished and touched by that experience. At

that time, we don't question the meaning of the life, don't think about the ethical and respectful relationships with other, don't inquiry with other peers in an intellectually safe community... but we still enjoy the life. Now I know it is because the culture and the belief in our country affecting our thinking philosophy and motivation to learn. If we had opportunity to know or learn other things, we were not bounded in a in a limited time and space, I or even we would certainly chose p4c style. (Chinese 10/07/2014)

This caused Suguru to think of his schooling experience as well. He replied,

I remember my school experience. It was so different from Lulu's experience. I was in private school that allows students to advance from one stage to the next, without taking entrance exams. We call a school like that "escalator school". In "escalator school" I didn't study at all. I strongly remember, when I was elementary school student, I thought "I hate study, so I should go to school where I may be not studying!" Even there is the problem for the money (private school is expensive), I was be able to go that school. Because, fortunately I'm only child in my family. I was playing every day through 10 years. And then I noticed I like to think about something, so I started to study and thought how to go graduate school. After all I went to Hiroshima University. (Japanese 10/07/2014)

For Lulu and Suguru, the journal was a place where they could compare their experiences in the U.S. to prior experiences in their home countries. They also used the journal to think about the future, when they planned on returning home.

For example, in another journal entry Lulu thought deeply about how she would apply what she learned in the U.S to her work in China. She wrote

This morning, I am wondering why I always want to change the Chinese education system? Each country has their own culture and educational context. I cannot just transplant the whole U.S. model to the Chinese educational system. To transfer the whole p4c model to Chinese schools will not be easy, that means I need to consider seriously what aspects of p4c I want to use in Chinese classroom, which can also be a dissertation topic. I need to study all the literature about Chinese educational system and teaching method, Chinese culture, and Chinese educational innovation; then find out what Chinese education really needs, finally I can choose what elements in p4c fit the Chinese education the most. In this way, my research can benefit the Chinese education, instead just transplanting a good organ, but it doesn't fit the body condition. (Chinese 7/2/2013)

Journal entries like these illustrate how Lulu and Suguru were highly aware of the cultural context of their research. They also show the important role of journaling in helping them integrate their home culture into their new research context.

Initially, Amber did not have reflections like these. As she conducted research in her home country she was more focused on her research topic, and less focused on the cultural context of her study. That was until she started journaling with Lulu and Suguru.

The first evidence of Amber's transformation was a journal entry she wrote in response to Suguru. Amber stated,

Suguru talked about how in Japan people have a vision about how they want schools to be and then the reform efforts are very linear. The people at the top articulate the vision, then they make the curriculum, and then teachers teach the curriculum, and the thought process is that students will learn better. I think the same type of linear reform efforts happen in the United States. Vision, common core standards, state standards, teacher PD, and the hope is that students will learn. I think that the problem is that by the time that vision trickles down to students no one really knows why they are doing what they are doing, and in this sense schooling is meaningless. (American 6/9/2013)

This data shows how Amber started to think more deeply about her cultural context as a result of

her participation in the interactive online journal with her international partners.

Further evidence of the way in which this international journal encouraged us to think about the cultural context of our research is seen in an entry written by Amber on June 23. She wrote,

I wonder, is it different when you are doing your research in a context that is not your home country? Do you have to think about the context you are doing your research in, and your home country? (American 6/23/2013)

Lulu and Suguru answered her questions.

I carry the dream – impacting Chinese education and saving Chinese children’s wonderings. In China...on examinations there are almost no open-ended questions...a standardized answer is designated to each question...the students have less opportunity to express their true thoughts and innovative ideas...most of children do not enjoy their schooling and the memory of their childhood times is always related to study and examinations That is why I am here in Hawai‘i, I try my best to do my research....We need to tailor the research to the public needs and reality. (Chinese 6/20/2013)

In Japan, we have many problems in school (ex: school violence, bullying). Many people know these problem is caused by simple reason that is children’s poor motivation for learning...school curriculum has to change...But, how to change? ...I want to explain curriculum, which make learning to asking question as goal...[I want to use] textbook analysis...to make theory? (Japanese 6/17/2013)

This exchange of ideas demonstrates how the journal not only helped us have a heightened awareness of the important role of cultural context in research, but it also facilitated cross-cultural sharing and understanding between the three of us.

The data also revealed how the journal gave us cross-cultural perspectives on our personal lives. For example, in response to Amber writing about her struggles balancing her family and professional life Lulu wrote the following journal entry.

Most of the Chinese young parents will feel easier to balance the work and their family responsibilities, because the grandparents would consider taking care of the grandchildren, cooking and doing house chores are their responsibilities after the baby/babies are born. I agree with your thinking that the family is your center of gravity. According to Confucius: cultivate a good personality and be a good person, raise and regulate a decent family, then the states will be well governed, and the whole world will be a better place. I feel it makes sense. If the family has problem, you will be very distracted and uneasy doing the other things, no matter whether it’s your work. (Chinese 11/11/2013)

Amber replied to Lulu “I love the Confucius quote Lulu - it is very meaningful for me, and I’m so thankful for your understanding” (American 11/13/2013).

The data revealed that as we engaged in the back and forth of cross-cultural sharing, listening, and reflecting on our own research we had the opportunity to gain multiple perspectives on the role of research in our own lives. As younger scholars, Suguru and Lulu thought about their dissertation. Suguru wrote,

Scholars in U.S frequently say a dissertation is like driver license. Scholars in Japan also say so, and sometimes they say a PhD dissertation is like “sending smoke signal (lighting signal fire).” In Japan we used to use smoke for signal in war. I guess it is tradition imported from China...meaning that we are starting an act for a big movement...it is declaration of position in knowledge world. I want to have license to drive research in this world, to do movement of changing schooling, and to let everybody know my position. (Japanese 11/13/2013)

Deeply entrenched in the dissertation process, this quote shows how Suguru came to a deeper understanding of why he was invested his research.

Lulu, on the other hand, had more practical reflections about her research. She wrote,

Our dissertation is an important predictor for what kind of job we will find, in this case, we also need to take our career goal into consideration while writing a dissertation. We need to fulfill our passion, but most importantly we need to survive. If I want to survive well either in the U.S. or in Asia, I need to do p4c research through quantitative lens. I need to do psychometrics and statistical analysis. This is the market need. (Chinese 6/20/2013)

She listened to Suguru's thinking, but in light of the context of her own life she was thinking about how her research aspirations could support her economic survival.

In response to their writing, Amber, who is at a different stage of her career wrote,

That is such an interesting inquiry...it seems like we all need to ask right now - who is our research for?...Can we stay true to ourselves and find a form of research that resonates with who we are? Will this pay off in the long run? I have no idea. People may continue to say - where is your data? I too feel mounting pressure a bit because my position in the Uehiro Academy is to research p4c and have DATA to show people it's impact...but how do you research something so complex? I think we need to constantly ask ourselves -why are we doing what we are doing? Is this meaningful? And the intention is that we will continue to ask these questions as we move forward...(American 6/23/2013)

The power of the journal is that we got to ask these questions with one another, which helped us move forward.

### **What Did We Learn?**

While analyzing our journal, we recognized that we each had unique roles in this international research collective. Amber's role as a professional and experienced researcher helped to inspire and develop Lulu and Suguru's thinking (Vygotsky, 1978). Lulu and Suguru used Amber's questions and suggestions to organize their thoughts, refine their research questions and plan out their research methodology. Lulu and Suguru's questions helped Amber in a similar way. Their questions pushed her to thoroughly explain her thinking, rethink her research methods and look at p4cH with new eyes. From Lulu and Suguru, Amber also gained partnership, emotional support, and other much-needed human connections in her lone research position at the Uehiro Academy. The journal did the same for Lulu and Suguru; it gave them a "home base" in a country outside of their own.

For Suguru, the journal was a place where he could practice a new language in a supportive and caring environment. He came to recognize that Amber and Lulu wanted to learn from him, and this gave him confidence in his efforts to communicate. Through this type of open and honest communication with one another we not only made progress on our research projects, but we also connected on an emotional level. As we developed our shared passion for p4cH, we became more familiar with one another, more aware of our cultural differences and unique home contexts, and connected on a personal level. The journal brought us together. It took us out of our isolation and "made our discussions about our research endeavors really fun and inspirational" (American 1/21/2014). It built "colleagues who are working hard with each other to conduct challenging yet fulfilling and meaningful research" (Chinese 1/22/2014). The journal was the medium with which we created our "critical friendship" (Lunenberg & Samaras, 2011, p. 842).

**American researcher.** I have always been interested in culturally responsive approaches to education, but up until this point, I had only experienced cross-cultural education and research in very limited ways. Never before have I challenged myself to inquire, learn, think, and reflect alongside people from different countries. This experience opened my eyes to the value of international collaboration in educational research. It helped me see the importance of reaching beyond national borders to find and develop relationships with researchers who share common interests. The journal was important because it maintained our community of critical friends despite travel and distance. My strong desire to communicate across the language barrier forced me to better articulate my thinking and push my research in exciting new directions.

**Chinese researcher.** While writing the journal, I learned to write to think deeply, to actively encourage ideas, to tease thought out of chaos or nothing. The journal provided me with courage, determination, inspiration, stimulation, and friendship while going through the tough process of conducting research abroad. Before the journaling process I knew that my research was related to my concern for Chinese education, but I wasn't fully aware of the *roots* of my wonderings and motivation. Now I am aware that my prior educational experience, my cultural background, and the situation in my home country are at the heart of the research. The international journal collective really provides me with a safe place that I can think together with international scholars to gain multiple perspectives and to build up personal relationships.

**Japanese researcher.** The online journal helped to create a space where I could talk about my hopes and anxieties with a group of critical friends. It created an extended "experience" (Dewey, 1929) beyond the face-to-face contact that I had with the members of this international research collective. The journal helped me express my confusion and uncertainties about the direction my research was going. I felt grounded by the journal because it gave me a "common language" for describing and discussing my research. It helped me clarify my thinking, and communicate with people from backgrounds different than mine. And although I don't know exactly where I am going with my research, the journaling helped to reassure me that I am going somewhere.

## Conclusions

Interactive online journaling was essential tool for helping us build a culturally responsive community of inquiry in our international research collective. Through the open dialogue that occurred on the pages of our journal we learned how to step back, and use the "paper mirror" (Hubbs & Brand, 2005) to examine how each of our individual research goals were embedded within the cultural contexts our home countries. We made "connections between ourselves and the world around us," (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 62) and discovered other perspectives and context-driven dimensions to the research we were conducting. This process helped each of us situate our research in the unique problems and opportunities of our home countries, *and* helped us weave into our research the new perspectives that were gained from our international partnership. The journal provided a new space, beyond the borders of our nation states, where each of us was "inherently and consistently engaged in [the] cultural production and reproduction" (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 960) of our research in "culturally validating and affirming" ways (Gay, 2000, p. 29).

To create this new space in our journal, we incorporated the four pillars of p4cH: community, inquiry, philosophy, and reflection. This started with our commitment to develop

and maintain intellectual safety (Jackson, 2001) in our new community. We worked hard to listen to one another and to accept virtually any question or point of view as long as it was respectful of the others in our group (Jackson, 2001). The establishment of intellectual safety helped us create a journaling “context in which dialogue and inquiry can unfold” (p. 460). As a part of our inquiries we “kept the sacred spark of wonder alive” (Dewey, 1910, p. 34) by asking questions that were philosophical and about the things that mattered to us most. What is the meaning of my research? How will I know what I know? What is the right approach to my research given the context of my home country? We were each deeply embroiled in the brand new, and often disorienting adventure of constructing international partnerships in our research collective and we used the tools of philosophy and inquiry to make sense of our experience. We recognized confusion as a sign of progress and became more aware of the complexity of the research (Makaiau & Miller, 2012) we were conducting. Through our reflective practice (Loughran, 1995) we lived the examined life (Plato, 1961, 38a), and used our journal as a tool for personal and professional development (Spalding & Wilson, 2002). As a result of this process, we became more aware of the thinking of our international partners, and of our thinking about our own thinking.

From this self-study, a new, more fundamental research question emerged. We asked ourselves, “*What does it mean to be a part of an international research collective?*” Prior to this study we hadn’t taken the time to dig deep into this question. We assumed that our common interest in p4cH, and our willingness to get to know one another automatically made us an international community of inquiry. Then, as we began our reflective practice of writing and thinking with one another, we started to expand on our shallow interpretation of what it meant to be a part of an international research collective. As Causarano (2011) writes,

When we self-reflect, when we use reflective thinking and writing, we use language not as a mere string of words on a page but we use the medium of written language as a canvas of colors to meticulously make choices of how to represent important professional experiences. (p. 549)

We realized that the answer to our new question lie in our own choices of how we wanted to represent our professional experience. This was the important role of journaling and self-study in our international research collective, the two processes helped us “negotiate and co-construct knowledge of our collective understanding” (Lunenberg & Samaras, 2011, p. 842) of what we thought it meant to be a part of *our* international collaboration.

## **Educational Significance**

If one were looking for levers to change [educational research] in a global context, international...collaborations offer a productive and powerful option. (DeZure et al., 2012 p. 32)

This collaborative self-study has significance for the authors as well as other international scholars and researchers in education. As increasing numbers of educational researchers make the decision to go beyond their organizations and transcend the geographic boundaries of their current support systems (Elliot-Johns et. al., 2010) they must have tools for building intellectually safe international communities of inquiry. The findings from this study demonstrate the value of systematic reflection, self-study and journaling in the development of culturally responsive international research partnerships. With tools, like these, educational researchers like us are better equipped to “overcome taken-for-granted beliefs and values in our

individual institutions” and are more open to new “ways of thinking to help us recognize our own cognitive distortions and reinterpret our beliefs and practices” (Elliot-Johns et. al., 2010, p. 81). They help each of us become levers of change who are ready to develop new areas of knowledge that extend beyond our personal and cultural boundaries (Loughran, 2007).

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