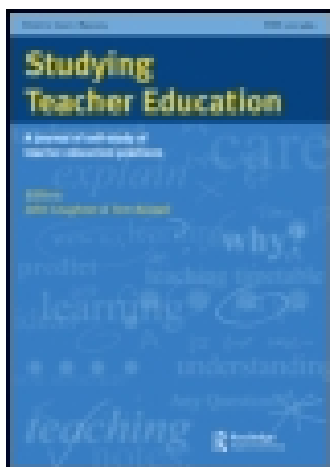


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Journaling and Self-Study in an International Research Collective

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Journaling and Self-Study in an International Research Collective

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Drawing from the theoretical foundations of reflective teaching, culturally responsive education, social constructivism, and self-study, this collaborative self-study investigates the role of an interactive online journal in an international research collective. Each from a different country, the authors came together through a common interest in the “philosophy for children Hawai'i” approach to education and designed an online platform for journaling together. The overall objectives of the study are to examine how interactive online journaling influences international collaboration, individual research interests and goals, and personal and professional development. To analyze their journal the authors use an applied self-study research methodology that is self-initiated, improvement-aimed, and communicative. The findings reveal how journaling can create an international commons, deepen inquiry in the research process, and foster a culturally responsive approach to international collaboration. The discussion explores the impact of the authors' relationships and roles on their joint production of knowledge and elaborates the usefulness of collaborative technologies in reducing face-to-face tensions often experienced in cross-cultural collaboration. The authors explain how community, philosophical inquiry, and reflection in the context of online journaling proved to be powerful tools for culturally responsive researchers who wish to construct their own understandings of what it means to be a part of an international research collective.

Keywords: journaling; culturally responsive education; international collaboration; philosophy for children

Bitácora y self-study en una investigación colectiva internacional

Considerando como punto de partida los fundamentos teóricos de base respecto de la enseñanza reflexiva, educación culturalmente responsable, constructivismo social y self study, este autoestudio colaborativo indaga el rol de la bitácora interactiva en una investigación internacional colectiva. Los autores, provenientes de distintos países, comparten un interés común por el enfoque educativo de la filosofía para niños en Hawai'i, crean una plataforma online para registrar de manera conjunta sus experiencias. Los objetivos se orientaron a examinar de qué manera el registro en línea en una bitácora afecta los procesos de colaboración internacional, los intereses y propósitos individuales, así como el desarrollo personal y profesional. Para el análisis de las bitácoras, los autores consideraron las orientaciones propias de la metodología del self-study, es decir, autoiniciado, enfocado a la mejora y comunicado. Los hallazgos revelan como el registro en una bitácora puede crear un sentido en común compartido, profundizar la indagación en el proceso de investigación, así como promover un enfoque culturalmente sensible a la colaboración internacional. La discusión explora el impacto de las relaciones y roles de los autores sobre su

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producción conjunta de conocimiento y explica la utilidad de las tecnologías colaborativas para reducir las tensiones de las relaciones cara a cara frecuentemente experimentadas en la colaboración intercultural. Los autores explican cómo la comunidad, indagación filosófica y la reflexión en el contexto de una bitácora virtual demostraron ser herramientas poderosas para investigadores culturalmente responsables que quieren construir su propia comprensión acerca de lo que significa ser parte de un colectivo de investigación internacional.

Palabras clave: bitácora; educación culturalmente responsable; colaboración internacional; filosofía para niños

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)

Your big question for me is also the biggest question. 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)

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 be caught in a tree, a bank . . . I don't want to swim to stay same place. Above all I can't swim. I want to float a stream, although there is obstacle. I am floating stream already. (Suguru)

These quotations are from an interactive online journal (Lee, 2010) kept by the authors. We are educational researchers based in Hawai'i who are from three different countries and at different stages in our careers. Amber is a curriculum and research specialist at a large university in Hawai'i, Lulu is a Ph.D. candidate from China who attends the same university, and Suguru is a doctoral student from Japan who visited the university for one year to study (with Amber) the *philosophy for children Hawai'i* (p4cHI; <http://p4chawaii.org/>) approach to education. The p4cHI approach is both a theory of education and a set of classroom practices that aim to transform traditional classrooms into intellectually safe communities of inquiry (Jackson, 2001; Makaiau & Miller, 2012). In each of our home countries, p4cHI is being explored as a viable means for school improvement (Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton, 2000) and, although it is not the focus of this study, it is important to note that the three of us were drawn together because of our shared values, common interest in p4cHI, and mutual commitments to p4cHI research (Kosnik, Samaras, & Freese, 2006).

When we first met, Amber had just begun a longitudinal study to examine the impact of p4cHI on public school students in the Hawaiian Islands and Lulu and Suguru were in the initial stages of formulating their p4cHI-related dissertation topics. Eager to establish a p4cHI research community, we easily connected with one another but eventually got caught between the tension of representing the interests of our diverse backgrounds and having a common ground to discuss our p4cHI research. This is how we started the reflective practice (Dewey, 1933; Loughran, 1996; Schön, 1987; Zeichner & Liston, 1987) of journaling together, and this is when we became interested in studying the role of an online journal in our international research collective.

In this article, we discuss the collaborative self-study that we conducted as we systematically wrote in, and analyzed, our online journal. The three goals that guided our research are as follows:

- (1) Our primary objective was to examine the role of an online journal in our international p4cHI research community.

- (2) We wanted to explore the impact of online journaling on our collaboration and our individual research interests/goals.
- (3) We were interested in learning how our online journal supported both our personal and professional development.

Based on the findings that emerged from the analysis of our data, we explain how online journaling and self-study helped 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). We also describe how journaling and self-study promoted international collaboration (DeZure et al., 2012) by creating a commons (Walljasper, 2010) where we could deepen our inquiry in the research process in a culturally responsive way. We conclude with our personal reflections on the importance of online 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 article we draw upon the literature of reflective teaching, culturally responsive pedagogies, social constructivism and self-study to 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; Erickson & Gumperz, 1996; Henderson, 2001; Loughran, 1996; Schön, 1987; van Manen, 1991; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). 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” (Causarano, 2011, p. 553). In this self-study, we used an interactive online learning journal (Lee, 2010; Moon, 2006) to create the conditions that we needed for reflective practice (Loughran, 1996) in our international research collective.

We selected the practice of reflective thinking via journal writing because Amber had experienced the benefits of this approach in her past teaching and research experiences. Like Spalding and Wilson (2002), she recognized how:

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

At the same time, she also recognized that, in the context of self-study research, the often individualistic, personal, and private act of journal writing can have its limits, especially when the thinking that develops from journaling goes un-shared.

To address this important, yet paradoxical characteristic of self-study research the three of us worked together to explore new ways of interactive journal writing. Like Kosnik et al. (2006), we began to think about the benefits of learning how to dialogue in a virtual community, and how an online journal might provide us with greater opportunities for “constructing our learning together, probing one another’s ideas, and reviewing and reframing our ideas collaboratively” (p. 153). At the suggestion of Lulu we designed an interactive journal that we could both self-reflect in and dialogue with each other over the Internet. In this live and shared online journaling platform, our reflective practice was individualistic and collective, personal and interpersonal, and private and public (Samaras & Freese, 2006, pp. 48–53). It was a self-reflective community of inquiry.

We also hypothesized that, given the cross-cultural aims of our international research collective, the online setting might prove to be particularly accommodating to our budding relationships as critical friends and trusted colleagues from different countries. In our face-to-face meetings we often struggled to communicate with one another effectively. This was mostly due to our language differences, culturally specific styles of communication (Morita, 2003), and different social norms (Leung & Chan, 1999; Takemura, 2014; Ting-Toomey, 1997). We thought that a blended environment, in which some of our interactions were face-to-face and others were computer-mediated, could alleviate some of the vulnerability and awkwardness (Zhou, Simpson, & Domizi, 2012). We liked the idea of having the option to hide behind the screen of our personal computers and we speculated that this new space would provide us with the necessary scaffolding that we needed to make our cross-cultural relationships a success. Similar to the findings of Kosnik et al. (2006) we imagined that our virtual journaling community would make correspondence instantly accessible, and that it would afford us the time we needed to collect our thoughts, make language translations, and properly situate our inquiry alongside one another.

To structure the inquiry and writing that we did in this shared online environment, we used self-study methodologies. We started with our questions, doubts, hesitations, and perplexities (Samaras & Freese, 2006). Then, based on our wonderings, we moved “through the act of searching to find material that [would] resolve, clarify, or otherwise address the doubt” (Spalding & Wilson, 2002, p. 1394). The process was not linear. Our inquiry took many directions, each of which was important to our individual and collective interests. We borrowed from the practices of p4cHI and envisioned the journal as a home base, an intellectually safe (Butnor, 2012; Jackson, 2001; Yos, 2012) resting place where we could cultivate “further inquiry with others that were like-minded in their commitment to critical dialogue, [and] transformational inquiry” (Elliott-Johns, Peterson, Allison-Roan, & Ramirez, 2010, p. 81). We saw the journal as “a mutually self-disclosing context” where we were “free to ask and answer questions, to discuss with others, and to probe for deeper understanding of complex issues” (p. 81).

We also viewed the journal and this self-study as “a ‘community of practice’ without geographic boundaries” (Elliott-Johns et al., 2010, p. 81). Recognizing the “essentialness of collaboration outside one’s university” (Kosnik et al., 2006, p. 155), we looked at the journal as a place where we could transcend the borders of our nation states in an effort to “understand each others’ lives and concerns and [to] build [our] relationships” (Lunenberg & Samaras, 2011, p. 844). This type of cross-cultural and international collaboration was not typical of the work that we did with colleagues in our home countries, and to help us make sense of this new experience, we drew from the scholarship of culturally responsive pedagogy (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Gay, 2000; Pang, 2005; Sheets, 2005; Tatum, 2011).

In line with culturally responsive practices, we made sure to include the validation of each other’s cultures and languages and the co-construction of knowledge (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). We incorporated journal entries that asked about each other’s prior experiences, frames of references and performance styles because we knew that this cultural knowledge would make our dialogue with one another more relevant and effective (Gay, 2000). We also encouraged each other to write in communication styles that were culturally familiar (Au & Kawakami, 1994). We peeled back our own frames of reference, became more open to learning about ourselves, encouraged the questioning of our previously held assumptions, and used our personal stories as teaching texts for one another (Makaiau & Freese, 2013).

We also acknowledged and made transparent the hierarchical relationships that existed between an American mentor and Chinese and Japanese doctoral students. We identified and accepted that there were “historical forces and the residual effects of race-based disenfranchisement” (Tatum, 2011, p. vii) embedded in these relationships. This cautioned us to pay careful attention to the role of language and the fact that the journaling was being done in Amber’s native tongue. We openly discussed the micro and macro levels of our social relations (Omi & Winant, 1986) and through these complicated conversations did our best to “avoid making assumptions about what is essential, what will work and what is desirable. [And] instead work[ed] collaboratively with [each other] to identify what is relevant, useful and appropriate to context” (DeZure et al., 2012, p. 27).

In sum, we used theories of social constructivism to help us frame our self-study. We recognized that the knowledge we produced was experience-based and constructed within our particular social context (Palincsar, 1998; Schön, 1987; Vygotsky, 1978). Aligned with the work of Beck, Freese, and Kosnick (2004), we adopted a “personal, constructivist, and collaborative” approach (p. 1256). It was personal because we started with ourselves, and reflected on our own research processes and interests. It was constructivist because we were “constantly inquiring” about our p4cHI research and ourselves, “never content with present ideas, aware that knowledge is always partial and can always be improved upon” (Beck et al., 2004, p. 1263). And finally, it was collaborative. We developed a community of inquiry where “the views of individuals” were “constantly brought into dialogue with the views of others” (p. 1265).

Objectives

Drawing upon research on self-study and reflective practice, our study aimed to capture the complexities of conducting educational research with international partners. It also explored the possibilities of conducting a self-study with the interactive technology, Google Docs, in an effort to improve cross-cultural collaboration (O’Brien, Alfano, & Magnusson, 2007). The following research questions were used to guide this study: What is the role of journaling in an international research collective? Is there evidence that an interactive online journal can support both collaboration and individual research interests/goals? In what ways does journaling with international partners support personal and professional development?

Methods

This self-study applied a research methodology that was self-initiated, improvement aimed, and interactive (LaBoskey, 2004). Grounded in situated inquiry, we used methods that were process-oriented, focused on the construction of new knowledge, multifaceted, and often paradoxical (Samaras & Freese, 2006, pp. 39–54). We were a team of researchers who worked collaboratively and individually to explore issues that were both collectively meaningful and self-important (Lunenberg & Samaras, 2011; Samaras & Freese, 2006).

Data

Data came from our interactive online journal that we kept with one another for eight months (17/6/2013–22/1/2014). Initially, we wrote in the journal five times per week, and then we moved to writing one entry a week. We used Google documents to share our journal entries with one another in a “live” online setting. “The content of our journals included personal reflections, perceptions and questions” (Elliott-Johns et al., 2010, p. 81).

For example, we started the journal with a number of questions that we brainstormed in one of our face-to-face meetings. “*Why are you interested in p4cHI? What about p4cHI are you researching? Where are you in the research process? How will you do your research?*” From there, new wonderings and insights emerged, and we used those questions and comments to guide further inquiry. This led to ongoing and continuous dialogue (Freire, 1970), which was characterized by careful listening, questioning, and openness to different viewpoints (Lunenberg & Samaras, 2011, p. 844). At the end of our data collection period, we had 70 pages of single-spaced journal entries and written dialogue. Secondary data sources included emails, transcripts of audio-recorded conversations and discussions, and the analytic memos (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007, p. 67) that we each kept throughout the study.

Data Analysis

We drew from the methods of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to conduct 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” (p. 508). We started with the 51 pages of our journal, which we kept from 17 June to 9 August 2013. Individually, we analyzed these early entries and developed initial open codes; then we came together and worked 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 an additional 35 pages of journal entries that were kept from 2 October 2013 to 22 January 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

Collaborative analysis of our journal produced three major themes: an international commons, deepened inquiry in the research process, and culturally responsive practices.

An International Commons

Through the analysis of the data we came to see our interactive online journal as an international commons that encompassed everything that is jointly owned by all of us (Walljasper, 2010, p. 1). From the data we learned that the journal became a place that was ours. Our shared interests in p4cHI and the regular time for reflective writing helped us to work through 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 and helped us overcome the loneliness and isolation that we had experienced prior to forming our international research collective.

Throughout the journal the three of us wrote extensively about our passionate interest in a p4cHI approach to education. In one exchange, Amber started by sharing her excitement for the new p4cHI course that she was developing: “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 am just as passionate about 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? (Lulu, 17/6/2013)

I am also interested so much in p4cHI because it teaches children to think for themselves. In Japan, we have many problems in school (e.g., school violence, bullying)... But how to change? I think p4cHI is a strategy for motivating and promoting children's learning... so that children practice thinking for themselves. (Suguru, 17/6/2013)

As these data demonstrate, our shared values and common enthusiasm for p4cHI brought us together, but additional quotes from the journal show how our language differences challenged this bond.

English was the language that we all had in common, however each of our relationships with the English language was different. Amber is a native speaker, Lulu was quite proficient after living in Hawai'i for more than two years, and this was Suguru's first experience communicating exclusively in English. Throughout the journal we wrote about our differing abilities and how language impacted our communication and relationships with one another.

Suguru wrote extensively about his struggle with English. Later, Amber responded as follows:

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. (18/11/2013)

Suguru followed up on this entry and Amber's comments from a previous journal in which she had expressed guilt and frustration about not knowing Japanese. He wrote:

Yes. I want to improve through this journal. Thank you for reading 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 just a little.... I always appreciate your patience so please don't feel guilty! (21/11/2013)

This dialogue about our language differences was critical in the development of our international research collective. It helped us work through our communication breakdowns, build a climate of trust (Samaras & Freese, 2006, p. 58), and construct a safe place where we could openly talk through the challenges that we were each facing in our own research initiatives.

A Safe Place

The data also revealed how we incorporated the concept of "intellectual safety" (Jackson, 2001, p. 460), a hallmark of p4cHI, into our online environment. Some of examples of this 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" (27/6/2013). This allowed Suguru to dig deeper into the reasons behind his questions, which provided Amber with an explanation about why he was asking these questions. Another example of intellectual safety occurred 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?” (20/10/2013). 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. We had to remember to not be in a rush and to take the time to attend to other people’s thinking and feelings. At times this seemed to slow down the progress of our individual projects, but when we were rewarded with our colleagues’ alternative views and insights, it was well worth it.

Our intellectually safe writing environment also helped to foster emotional support. At one point Lulu wrote: “I feel I am a chicken with head cutting off. I keep running around, but forget where to head for” (6/25/2013). She was discouraged by the change she was going to have to make to her research methodologies so she began journaling to brainstorm alternative methodologies with us, her trusted colleagues. This calmed her down and allowed her to see the previously invisible opportunities that this change in plans had to offer.

Suguru used the journal to overcome the depression he was experiencing as he was trying to move his dissertation forward while living so far away from his committee members. In his writing he called out to us, “Tonight, I struggle to write a proposal for my dissertation . . . I can’t proceed with the work. I get depressed. I don’t know what I do and think” (7/1/2013). That same night, working at home online, Lulu replied, “I have the same feeling with Suguru. I don’t always know exactly where I am heading for” (7/1/2013). The two of them continued their exchange well into the night, and at the end of it all Suguru wrote to Lulu: “Do what you can, with what you have, where you are” (7/6/2013). He had been comforted by Lulu’s willingness to be vulnerable alongside him; together, through use of the journal, they were able to move each of their research processes forward.

In analyzing the way in which the journal supported our emotional development as researchers we also found that journaling gave us emotional support in our personal lives. Amber wrote about her efforts balancing motherhood and a career: “Can I still be a good mom, and be a successful professional?” (7/12/2013). Suguru described the personal challenges of living in another country: “I’m very confusing. I feel frustration” (10/10/2013). And Lulu disclosed the great sacrifices that her fiancé and family in China had to make so that she could complete her degree in the United States:

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 . . . I won’t have to bear the guiltiness and heart aching feeling. (11/16/2013)

As this evidence shows, the journal helped to strengthen both our professional and personal relationships with one another.

We also observed that we wrote online with one another when we had challenges relating to one another in person. An interesting example of this appeared mid-way through the data collection process. Amber and Suguru got into a heated discussion with one another during one of their face-to-face meetings, and instead of debriefing their uncomfortable exchange with one another in person, they used the journal to talk to each other. 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. (10/28/2013)

Amber wrote back:

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. (10/29/2013)

In this case the journal was a mediator and a facilitator of the professional and personal relationships that we were working to develop in our international research collective. Through journaling we learned how to be open and honest with one another. We built a climate of trust, and in this safe environment we learned how to navigate the misinterpretations and misunderstandings commonly experienced in cross-cultural collaboration. Our journal was the glue that held our international research collective together.

Kept Us Connected

The journal played an important role in keeping us together. On 17 January 2014, Amber wrote: “this is a busy life, and through journaling we remain connected to each other’s thoughts, feelings, struggles, and celebrations.” Quite often there were large gaps in time when Amber, Lulu, and Suguru wouldn’t see one another. The business of our own life and physical distance separated us, and we would use the journal to communicate with one another and stay connected.

In our communications we would share what we were working on and we would give each other important updates about the areas of our research that we were collaborating on. This included exchanging information about the theoretical arguments that we were making, reports we were writing, and various methodological decisions that we had to coordinate. At one point in the study, while Suguru was in Japan, he almost quit the international research collective because of a misunderstanding about US research policies, but because we had our journal to work things out in, Amber and Lulu were able to give him the encouragement and information that he needed to move his research forward.

Prior to the start of our journaling project, we had experienced frustrations like Suguru’s, but without our connection to one another we felt alone, isolated, and overwhelmed. As Lulu put it in one entry, “I even questioned what is the meaning for me to do the research . . . I felt like I deserted my mom and dad to come to the U.S. to suffer” (6/20/2013). However, once we started journaling with one another things changed. Amber wrote: “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” (6/17/2013). “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” (1/3/2014).

Through constant connections and encouragement the journal became a place of inspiration and a source of motivation. As Lulu put it:

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. (7/16/2013)

As this quote exemplifies, the journal helped us create a safe and productive research community, and as a result, we became a community of researchers who were better prepared to navigate the complexities of our individual research interests.

Deepened Inquiry in the Research Process

The second major theme that emerged from the analysis of the data highlights the ways in which the journal helped us deepen our inquiry and incorporate the activity of philosophy

into the research process. As “critical friends” and “trusted colleagues” we validated each other’s research and gave each other new perspectives that helped us reframe our interpretations (Lunenbergh & Samaras, 2011, p. 843). We used the journal to ask questions, reflect on our field experiences, and to probe each other about the theories or methodologies that we were developing.

Quite often, as is the nature of most philosophical inquiries, the asking of questions did not lead to immediate answers. To respond to this we started to think through possible answers to the questions in our journal, and then we made appointments to meet with each other in person. At our face-to-face meetings we would use the thinking that we had developed in the journal to further explore questions that we were still interested in, which ultimately deepened our inquiry. In the analysis of the data we learned that this process afforded us the time to reveal what we were confused about, uncovered the complexity of the topics that we were researching, and it supported us in developing possible answers to our questions.

Research is “Up and Down”

Through our journal we also learned how to become more comfortable with our confusion and the many uncertainties embedded in the research process in general. This was most clearly illustrated in an exchange between Amber and Suguru. In response to a journal entry of Lulu’s, Suguru wrote, “I think, research is up and down...our inquiry have many directions...and sometimes I think I’m off track” (6/25/2013). This prompted Amber to respond:

All of your comments remind me 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. We have to remain flexible as researchers...it is a lot like life. (12/15/2013)

Through exchanges like this, we learned to lean on one another, become more philosophical, and view our research as a continual work in progress.

We also learned about the important role that our critical friendships played in developing our philosophical inquiry. As we listened to the questions and thoughts of others we learned to turn our own thinking upside down. In one entry Amber wrote: “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” (10/22/2013). We were constantly learning with and learning from one another. We used philosophical questions, reflection and dialogue to cultivate a reciprocal mentoring relationship 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.

Culturally Responsive Practices

The final theme to emerge from the analysis of the data revealed how journaling created culturally responsive practices (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Gay, 2000; Pang, 2005; Sheets, 2005; Tatum, 2011) in both our research and our relationships with one another. We reflected on our home countries and cultures, and through sharing became more aware of others’ countries and cultures. We learned to situate and tailor our research to the uniqueness of our home countries, and we developed new perspectives on the purpose of our research.

For Lulu and Suguru, the journal played an important role in helping them reflect on their own schooling experience. For example, Lulu wrote this entry after visiting a local school in Hawai'i:

I lived in a boarding school, I got up between 5:00 to 5:30 am, and then recited English words or text, historical facts, and Chinese texts with our classmates in a very organized classroom. I don't remember 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 11 pm . . . 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. (10/07/2014)

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

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 . . . And then I noticed I like to think about something, so I started to study and thought about, how can I go to graduate school. (10/07/2014)

Lulu and Suguru used the journal to reflect on their experiences in the United States and gain insights into their past. They also used the journal to think about the future, and how they would apply what they learned when they returned home. For example, Lulu 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 . . . I need to consider seriously what aspects of p4cHI I want to use in Chinese classroom. I need to find out what Chinese education really needs, and then I can choose what elements in p4c fit the Chinese education the most . . . instead just transplanting a good organ, I need to make sure it fits the body's condition. (7/2/2013)

This type of personal reflection helped Lulu and Suguru increase their understanding of how the research they were doing in the United States would translate to their work at home. It also created excellent opportunities for cross-cultural sharing.

We got to learn about our differences and find commonalities between our cultures. This enhanced our professional growth, and it also gave us cross-cultural perspectives on personal lives. For example, in response to Amber writing about her struggles balancing her family and professional life, Lulu wrote the following journal entry:

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. (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" (11/13/2013).

Our cross-cultural sharing, listening, and reflecting also provided us with the opportunity to gain multiple perspectives on the researchers that we were each becoming. 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 Ph.D. dissertation is like "sending smoke signal" . . . 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. (6/20/2013)

Deeply entrenched in the dissertation process, this quote shows how Suguru came to a deeper understanding of why he was invested in 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. (6/20/2013)

Lulu's focus was more directed towards 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 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. (6/23/2013)

By asking and answering of questions like these, entries in our self-study journal helped us reflect and frame, and reframe our thinking.

What Did We Learn?

While analyzing our journal, we recognized that we each had unique roles in this international research collective, and that there were multiple “learning zones” (Samaras & Freese, 2006, p. 51) at play during our interactions with one another. Amber's role as a professional and experienced researcher expanded Lulu's and Suguru's thinking. They used Amber's questions and suggestions to organize their thoughts, refine their research questions, plan out their research methodology and guide their reflective practice (Dewey, 1929, 1933; Erickson & Gumperz, 1996; Henderson, 2001; Loughran, 1996; Schön, 1987; van Manen, 1991; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Similarly, Lulu and Suguru's questions pushed Amber to better explain her thinking through critical dialogue (Palincsar, 1998), frame and reframe her research questions (Samaras & Freese, 2006), and ultimately look at p4cHI with new eyes. Collectively, we learned how critical journaling and self-study were in ensuring that “the knowledge that we produced was distributed and constructed with various areas of expertise in a collaborative enterprise” (Samaras & Freese, 2006, pp. 50–51).

Like Kosnik et al. (2006), we also learned that “collaboration does not mean harmony” (p. 152). As we stepped into this project we each knew that collaborative reflection is essential to self-study, but we had no previous experiences with the challenges of cross-cultural collaboration. Through the journaling and self-study process we learned how to overcome language barriers, work through miscommunications, and how to use our journal as a tool for facilitating our confusing face-to-face interactions. All of this taught us “the importance of cultivating a culture that encourages and supports personal and professional development” (Kosnik et al., 2006, p. 155). Through open sharing about our backgrounds, home lives, and personal struggles we built an intellectually safe and emotionally supportive research community that helped to advance our individual research goals and create meaningful international partnerships. In addition to these collective insights, we each had personal lessons learned.

The American Researcher's Perspective

This was Amber's first time in a position of research mentorship. Motivated by the loneliness and isolation of her post at the university, she used this self-study to push herself out of her comfort zone and take on the role of mentor for Lulu and Suguru. At the

beginning of this new experience she found herself thinking, “Why are they asking me about their research methods? I’m no expert.” However, as she engaged in dialogue with Lulu and Suguru she came to see that she did not have to be an expert. She realized that a research mentor could be a co-inquirer, in the same way that she was a co-inquirer alongside her students in the classroom (Freire, 1970; Jackson, 2001). She was reminded “that learning takes place best in joint productive activity, that is, when experts and novices work together for a common product or goal and during the activity have opportunities to converse about it” (Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000, p. 21). This lesson was transformative for Amber. In her first ever international partnership, not only did she learn how to think and reflect alongside people from different countries, but also she came into her identity as research mentor.

The Chinese Researcher’s Perspective

The journal taught Lulu how writing could be a method of inquiry (Richardson, 1994). Through journaling she learned how to think deeply, to actively encourage ideas, and to tease thought out of chaos or nothing. Overall, the experience provided her with courage, determination, inspiration, stimulation, and friendship, which she needed as she engaged in the tough process of conducting research abroad. Before she started this self-study she knew that her research was related to her concern about Chinese education, but she was not fully aware of the roots of her wonderings. As a result of the journaling and self-study process, she gained insight into the impact of her prior educational experience, cultural background, and the current state of China’s education system on her motivation for change. She also realized that she wouldn’t have had these insights if it weren’t for the alternative views and multiple perspectives that were provided by her critical friends and trusted colleagues (Samaras & Freese, 2006).

The Japanese Researcher’s Perspective

This was Suguru’s first experience with journal writing and reflective practice. A bit reluctant about the process at first, he learned the benefits of risk taking and vulnerability. As he opened up to discussing his hopes, confusion, and anxieties with our intimate group, he realized how journaling worked to create an extended experience (Dewey, 1929) beyond our face-to-face interactions. The journal was responsive to his needs as an international researcher working in the United States. It gave him think time so that he could formulate his thoughts and respond when it was convenient. The journal became 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 open dialogue and communication with others, he learned that, although he might not know exactly where he is going in his research, he is going somewhere.

Conclusions

Interactive online journaling was an essential tool for helping us build a culturally responsive community of inquiry in our international research collective. It was the medium with which we became critical friends and trusted colleagues. Through the open and critical dialogue (Freire, 1970) 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 was embedded within the cultural contexts of our home countries. The use of collaborative technology, Google documents, was particularly helpful in facilitating this cross-cultural exchange. It offered us a meta-cognitive space where we could unabashedly take the time to think through, edit, and revise our interactions with one another. This ultimately led to “greater sensitivity, understanding, and ethical awareness . . . [and] positive international and social relations” (O’Brien et al., 2007, p. 128). We made “connections between ourselves and the world around us” (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 62) and gained insight into the context-driven dimensions to the research we were conducting.

The online journaling and self-study process helped situate our research in the unique problems and opportunities of our home countries, and it helped us use the questions and perspectives of others to better understand those problems and opportunities. For example, Lulu and Suguru became more cognizant of their reasons for wanting to use p4cHI as a means for school reform in each of their home countries, and Amber learned more about how p4cHI would have to grow and change in order to meet the needs of learners in countries other than her own. For each of us, the journal provided a new space, a place 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 knowledge in “culturally validating and affirming” ways (Gay, 2000, p. 29).

Grounded in parallel theories and practices, self-study and p4cHI ensured that our culturally responsive community was characterized by philosophical inquiry and reflection. We asked: What is the meaning of my research? How do I know what I know? Is what I know in the United States different from what I know in my home country? What is the right approach to my research given the context of my home country? And at the end of our study a new and 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 had not taken the time to dig deeply into this question. We assumed that our common interest in p4cHI 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 initial interpretation of what it meant to be a part of an international research collective. We learned how to use the “medium of written language as a canvas of colors to meticulously make choices of how to represent important professional experiences” (Causarano, 2011, p. 549). Through this process we realized that the answer to our new question resided 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; combined with our background in p4cHI, journaling and self-study helped us to “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, they must have tools for building intellectually safe international communities of inquiry. The findings from this study demonstrate the value of self-study, journaling, p4cHI, and collaborative technologies in the development of culturally responsive international research partnerships. With these tools, 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” (Elliott-Johns et al., 2010, p. 81). They help each of us become agents of change, ready to develop new areas of knowledge that extend beyond our personal and cultural boundaries.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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