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Polyvocal Poetic Play with Dialogue: Co-creativity in Self-Study Writing

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Abstract

We are teacher educators who facilitate and participate in transdisciplinary self-study research communities in our respective home countries of South Africa and the United States of America. Our comparable experiences first brought us together in 2012, intending to learn from each other's work in facilitating these communities. Digital technologies made possible new, virtual ways of connecting the projects we are enacting in transdisciplinary groups. This work is situated within our evolving conceptualization of polyvocal self-study research. In this chapter, we explore *why* and *how* we use and develop literary arts inspired approaches in composing creative accounts of our scholarly work and analysis. We exemplify our self-study writing process to serve as a resource for others as we consider impetus and impact – both for and beyond the self – as we ask, “*What difference can poetry and dialogue make to self-study scholarship?*” Taken as a whole, our chapter illustrates the generativity of making time and space for arts-inspired playful writing. Significantly, the chapter highlights the need for universities to acknowledge and support such faculty efforts in methodological innovativeness. In that manner, faculty will be encouraged to move the field forward by exploring unanswered questions with new methods rather than relying only on traditional methods and replicating what others have already discovered. We offer our learning as an invitation to others to consider forming co-creative virtual spaces for exploratory writing that can contribute to changing the status quo for professional knowledge and practice on a global level.

Polyvocal Poetic Play with Dialogue: Co-creativity in Self-Study Writing

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Self-study scholars begin with wonderings about their professional practice and research their own questions in their own contexts. Although research topics vary, a shared purpose is to challenge, deepen, and extend professional learning and knowledge to make a difference in practice for self and others. Fundamental to this, is awareness of the professional person as an active agent for change. In other words, self-study researchers position themselves as central characters who take purposeful action in their stories of professional growth.

By embracing a self-study stance, teacher educators, teachers, and other professionals undertake to re-imagine their practice and contribute to the well-being of others (Kitchen, 2020; LaBoskey, 2004a; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2015a). As “a body of practices, procedures, and guidelines used by those who work in a discipline or engage in an inquiry” (Samaras & Freese, 2006, p. 56), self-study methodology is distinguished by certain qualities. These include openness, reflection and reflexivity, critical collaborative inquiry, transparent data analysis and process, and improvement-aimed exemplars of professional learning, ways of knowing, and knowledge generation (Barnes, 1998; LaBoskey, 2004b; Samaras, 2011).

Self-study of professional practice can be enacted through a variety of methods (LaBoskey, 2004b; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). This methodological elasticity has motivated self-study researchers to combine techniques and explore and design new methods to advance their inquiries (Tidwell & Jónsdóttir, 2020; Whitehead, 2004). Self-study scholarship frequently displays the methodological inventiveness recognized by Dadds and Hart (2001) in the work of practitioner-researchers who “reached out for their own unique ways of doing or writing up their research, in response to the perceived needs of their particular project and their own preferred thinking and representational styles” (p. 3).

Significantly, methodological inventiveness in self-study research has extended beyond methods of data generation and analysis into innovative modes and designs for self-study research writing (LaBoskey, 2004a; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2020b). Building on pioneering work of qualitative researchers who devised imaginative and evocative approaches for writing as inquiry (for instance, Ellis, 1991; Richardson, 1993), creativity in self-study writing has been inspired by an array of knowledge fields. These include, among others, the literary arts.

Self-study scholars have used a range of literary modes, such as dialogue and poetry, to infuse their writing with emotion, complexity, and unique insights (East et al., 2009; Galman, 2009; Guilfoyle et al., 2002; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2020a). In the literary arts, dialogue can enable readers to come to understand more about the characters in a story and to see how growth happens through interaction between characters (Coulter & Smith, 2009). Correspondingly, dialogic writing has been used to portray how exchanges with trusted peers can deepen and extend individual self-study researchers’ professional growth (see Bullock & Sator, 2018; Martin et al., 2020). Poetry is “a literary form that transforms lived experience into poetic language, the poetic language of verse” (van Manen, 1990, p. 70). And self-study scholars have used the aesthetic, figurative, and rhythmic qualities of poetic language to generate imaginative

and evocative insights into professional learning and practice (see Grimmer, 2016; Hopper & Sanford, 2008; Johri, 2015; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019).

In this chapter, we explore *why* and *how* we use and develop literary arts inspired approaches in composing creative accounts of our scholarly work and analysis. Informed by Mishler's (1990) conception of trustworthiness in inquiry-guided research, we exemplify our self-study writing process to serve as a resource for others. We consider impetus and impact – both for and beyond the self – as we ask, “*What difference can poetry and dialogue make to self-study scholarship?*”

Putting Our Self-Study Scholarship into Context

We are teacher educators who facilitate and participate in transdisciplinary self-study research communities in our respective home countries of South Africa and the United States of America (USA). Our comparable experiences first brought us together in 2012, intending to learn from each other's work in facilitating these communities. Digital technologies made possible new, virtual ways of connecting the projects we are enacting in transdisciplinary groups (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2017; Samaras & Pithouse-Morgan, 2018). This work is situated within our evolving conceptualization of *polyvocal self-study research* (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2015b; Samaras & Pithouse-Morgan, 2018; Samaras & Pithouse-Morgan, 2020).

The theoretical roots of our *polyvocal* self-study research are in Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) detailed study of polyvocality (which he described as polyphony). Bakhtin explored polyvocality as a narrative method in the fiction of Fyodor Dostoevsky, who interplayed diverse voices and perspectives in his writing. Polyvocal narrative methods are also evident in the work of contemporary authors such as American novelist Toni Morrison (1992) and Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2006). These authors interweave different voices and viewpoints in their novels. From our perspective, literary-arts inspired enactments of polyvocality – exemplified by “*plurality, interaction and interdependence, and creative activity*” (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2019, p. 7) – extend ways of performing and representing self-study scholarship.

Self-study scholarship has been characterized by interaction and collaboration (Barnes, 1998). Our polyvocal self-study research has moved us to a multifaceted understanding of working with others as “critical friends” (LaBoskey, 2004b, p. 848). We recognize how our critical friendships are made possible through dynamic and creative inquiry with others (Samaras, 2011; Samaras & Pithouse-Morgan, 2018). Published writing produced within and across our transdisciplinary self-study research communities in South Africa and the USA exemplifies co-creativity (collective creativity) through the co-composition of poetry (Chisanga et al., 2014; Samaras et al., 2016), dialogue (Dhlula-Moruri et al., 2017; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2018), and vignettes (Hiralaal et al., 2018; Samaras et al., 2014). Members of these self-study communities (as featured in Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2020b, pp. 435-436) have found that creative writing practices can have many benefits. For example, they can “show different layers in [the] thinking and the emotions that were part of the self-study process” (Lungile Masinga) and “allow the voices of others to be heard” (Refilwe Matebane). Imaginative writing can also be “of service to [readers]” (Thelma Rosenberg) and “[help] to transform...practice” (Anita Hiralaal).

A literary arts-inspired fusion of poetry and dialogue has enabled and enriched our longstanding transcontinental self-study research conversations, which we have described as *thinking in space* (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2017). Our explorations in using poetry and dialogue are not limited to our interactions with each other. We readily shared and enacted the

method with our students and colleagues as we collectively and extensively examined our work in supervision and facilitating self-study learning communities and over time (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2018). That work also allowed us to study what we had learned across our universities, which we captured through dialogue and poetry with colleagues from each of our universities (see Samaras et al., 2015; Samaras et al., 2016).

Combining Poetry and Dialogue as Virtual Bricolage Self-Study

Through our continuing (often daily), mostly online, critical friend exchanges over the past eight years, we have evolved in our work as self-study facilitators, researchers, and writers. In that process, we have designed and performed a *virtual bricolage self-study method* (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2017; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2019; Samaras & Pithouse-Morgan, 2020). We understand *bricolage* as working on something in an improvisational way, with materials that are freely available (Bricolage, 2018a). As bricoleurs, we let our questions direct our self-study research. We have combined methods and conceived new approaches, often through letting go and letting things unfurl (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2019; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2020a).

Integral to our virtual bricolage self-study method has been the combination of poetry and dialogue for expressing and exploring our individual and mutual learning. In our writing, we have used a variety of poetic forms and modes for data generation, representation, and analysis (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2017; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2019; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2020a). Our poetry is often complemented by a series of short dialogue pieces that tell a polyvocal story of lived experience in self-study research (see, for example, Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2017; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2019). The dialogue pieces are composed using extracts from personal data sources, such as audio recorded conversations or email conversations.

Looking Back at Our Published Self-Study Poetry

Because of our familiarity with poetry as a research practice, it has become almost instinctive for us to begin a new piece of writing with poetry. To start writing this chapter, we looked back over our portfolio of published self-study poetry to consider its impetus, process, and impact. In response to our guiding question, we selected six exemplars of our co-authored poems, composed and published over five years (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2016; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2015b; Pithouse-Morgan, & Samaras, 2017; Pithouse-Morgan, & Samaras, 2019; Pithouse-Morgan, & Samaras, 2020a; Samaras et al., 2015). In what follows, we offer a brief overview of the pieces of writing in which the poems appear. We point out how and why our poetry was generated and how we used it in different ways as we played with poetic forms in our writing over time.

“The Power of ‘We’ for Professional Learning” (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2015b) is the opening chapter of the edited book that introduced our conceptualization of polyvocal professional learning. Drawing on theoretical thinking and the literary arts, we explored how conversations across disciplines, specializations, institutions, and continents can contribute to reimagining professional practice and collaboration in transformative, pluralistic, and creative ways that intensify improved learning for self and others. We used extracts from our transcontinental e-mail communication before and during the book process to make visible our interaction with each other as we developed our book proposal and engaged with chapter proposals submitted by the contributors. The dialogue that resulted demonstrated our learning as editors. We closed the chapter with a poem inspired by our conversations.

“Breathing Under Water: A Trans-Continental Conversation about the ‘Why’ of Co-Facilitating Transdisciplinary Self-Study Learning Communities” (Samaras et al., 2015) presents a transcontinental dialogue with six other colleagues. The conversation explored our personal and professional impetus for co-facilitating transdisciplinary self-study learning communities in the USA and South Africa. In this chapter, we brought together our many voices in a multiperspective and multiverse dialogue as we asked ourselves and each other why we facilitate self-study research. We openly assessed our learning through a series of academic and personal–professional conversations through face-to-face and virtual exchanges using a bricolage self-study method. Our inner and meta discoveries were catalogued through poetry. The chapter served as an invitation to others to extend the conversation about co-facilitating transdisciplinary self-study research.

In “Exploring Methodological Inventiveness through Collective Artful Self-study Research” (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2016), we collaborated with Lesley Coia and Monica Taylor to extend our shared history of innovative self-study research conducted in duos. This article demonstrated how we combined our conceptualizations of polyvocal professional learning (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2015b) and co/autoethnographic research jamming (Coia & Taylor, 2014). We documented how we invented a virtual polyvocal research jamming method using a unique combination of rich pictures, poetry, vocal performance, dialogue, and dance to create an organic representation of our collective learning over time. The article offered new possibilities for exploring how imaginative expression and perception can enrich self-study research.

Subsequently, in “Thinking in Space: Virtual Bricolage Self-Study for Future-Oriented Teacher Professional Learning” (Pithouse-Morgan, & Samaras, 2017), we continued to reflect on our online research conversation as a duo. We dialogued about facilitating transdisciplinary self-study learning communities with university faculty. We introduced our virtual bricolage self-study method using dialogic tools to generate, analyse, and represent data: (1) emails, (2) letter-writing, (3) the co-creation of two online mood boards, (4) photographs, and (5) poetry. Extracts from our emails and letters documented how we discovered similar sources of inspiration and influence in our work. Recognizing our sources of inspiration provoked new insights about the generative potential of understanding and openly communicating our work’s personal and professional impetus.

For “Polyvocal Play: A Poetic Bricolage of the *Why* of our Transdisciplinary Self-study Research” (Pithouse-Morgan, & Samaras, 2019), we created a poetic bricolage composed of frequently used words in three of our published research poems. We asked, “*Why?* Why does our work together exist? And why should anyone care?” By composing a poetic bricolage, we could see and communicate how our manifold interests, practices, and methods have converged to support dynamic co-learning and re-learning. Discovering the *why* of our work generated a deeper understanding of our attraction toward transdisciplinary scholarship, which offers university faculty diverse possibilities for co-learning and co-creativity.

In “A Sense of Place: Exploring Place and Identity Through Virtual Bricolage Self-study Research” (Pithouse-Morgan, & Samaras, 2020a), we offered an account of a new episode in our longstanding transcontinental research conversation. We demonstrated how we combined memory-work and poetry as virtual bricolage self-study to wonder how inquiring about our past informed our understanding of how place informs our professional identity development. We described how we composed and exchanged oral and written memory pieces in response to a guiding research question. And we demonstrated how we formed a sequence of poems using words and phrases from our memory pieces. We shared how we pulled together short segments from our memory pieces to create a dialogic response to each line of our final poem. This co-creative

exploration of place and identity generated new insights for each of us and expanded our understanding of each other and our critical friendship.

Creating a Poetic Bricolage

To move our current inquiry forward, we inserted the text of our selected six poems into an online vocabulary visualization tool, Word Sift (<http://wordsift.org>), which generated a word cloud that made visible to us our 50 most frequently used words (Figure 1).



Figure 1. A word cloud showing the 50 most frequently used words in six published poems

We then picked words from the word cloud as starting points (see Figure 2) for creating a “poetic bricolage” (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2019, p. 5) using the text of the six selected poems as source material.

- Heart**
- Polyvocality**
- Space**
- Learning**
- Difference**
- Methodology**
- Growth**
- Inventiveness**

Figure 2. Eight focal words selected from the word cloud

In the arts, bricolage signifies “construction or creation from a diverse range of available things” (Bricolage, 2018b). Constructing a poetic bricolage from available material offered by our published poems offered a “container . . . for a gradual distillation of our multifaceted and complex learning, experienced over time” (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2019, p. 7). We chose to arrange the poetic bricolage using the traditional Japanese Renga design, a type of linked-verse poetry usually generated by two or more poets as a kind of conversation (see Poets.org, 2004). To create a Renga, one poet writes the first stanza, three lines long with a total of seventeen syllables (5/7/5). The next poet adds the second stanza, a couplet with seven syllables per line (7/7). To create our Renga (see Figure 3), we followed this pattern, with Kathleen composing the three-line stanzas and Anastasia composing the corresponding two-line stanzas. However, we blended poetic tradition with digital technology by co-creating the Renga over several days via emails between South Africa and the USA. For each stanza, we began with a word from the word cloud (shown in bold in the Renga) and then put together the rest of the stanza around that central word.

Polyvocal Poetic Play (March, 2020)

Witness, the brave **heart**
A whole heart healing process
Re-remembering self

Knowing and re-knowing self
Through **polyvocality**

Create open **space**
For sharing, interaction
Active listening

Diverse, dynamic **learning**
Research professional practice

The power of “we”
Self, **difference**, confluence
In many voices

Multiple professionals
Making **methodology**

Growth, inspiration
Challenge, deepen, and extend...
Change is possible!

Power of **inventiveness**
Impact - bringing new knowledge

Figure 3. A Renga poem: “Polyvocal Poetic Play”

Creating a Dialogic Bricolage

As we arranged the Renga, we saw how each stanza could serve as an entry point for further exploration and dialogue. Building on this, in response to the Renga, we created a dialogic bricolage by combining excerpts from published dialogues that accompanied the six selected poems. We lightly edited our chosen extracts for flow and coherence. In what follows, each stanza of the Renga is followed by an exchange between our two distinctive voices from different contexts.

Polyvocal Poetic Play with Dialogue (March, 2020)

Witness, the brave heart
A whole heart healing process
Re-membering self

Anastasia:

I have been studying and designing elements of facilitating self-study methodology along with Kathleen, who has been doing similar work with her colleagues in South Africa. And, for me, as from the USA, I was so surprised that facilitating self-study in the South African project wasn't for the same purposes. In South Africa, there is largely the theme of healing and having a safe place. After apartheid, there's a lot of anger and hurt and pain, and those words came out.

Kathleen:

Place – being born into apartheid South Africa, and becoming an adult in post-apartheid South Africa, is fundamental to who I have become and am becoming as a university educator and researcher. Looking back as an adult, I see what I did not notice as a young child – the exclusive whiteness of my early schooling, set in a white suburb in apartheid South Africa. That exclusivity feels suffocating and sad. My appreciation of the pedagogic value of many of my learning experiences as a schoolchild is marred by repugnance for that stifling uniformity. I am so grateful that I don't still live and learn in the racially exclusive world of my childhood. And, in my teaching and my research, I try never to forget that.

Anastasia:

I am from another generation, historical time, and context than Kathleen. I did not grow up in the South African apartheid era, but in the USA, where racial divisions were and sadly remain prominent. Things change slowly and sometimes do not seem to change at all.

Knowing and re-knowing self
Through polyvocality

Anastasia:

How wonderful we have both had the opportunity to participate in and facilitate, as you so beautifully stated, “multifaceted educational encounters that excite my curiosity and expand my ways of knowing, seeing and being in the world...continually changed by these interactions...developing a taste for wide-ranging learning.”

Kathleen: Learning is always an adventure because I don't know where it's going to end up. I'm not sure what we're going to find out. I really enjoy that process and that feeling of not knowing.

Anastasia:

I've been able to really grow and be inspired by transdisciplinary polyvocal experiences.

Create open space
For sharing, interaction
Active listening

Kathleen:

What is emerging is an emphasis on polyvocality, dialogue, conversations, collaboration, and collegiality as the lifeblood of self-study of professional practice. Polyvocal learning conversations happen through self-study of professional practice, and also, such discussions contribute to professional learning. And this learning is enhanced through bringing a mindful, multiperspectival awareness of our encounters with the world and the people who inhabit it.

Anastasia:

I've been continually enriched by my experiences in moving out of my lens. We just assume everybody is from our world, don't we? And it really limits our understanding and theirs. That's been where I've been able to really grow and be inspired by transdisciplinary polyvocal experiences. I thought, "Wow! I never thought of self-study research being used in ways that were out of my own context." So, in terms of thinking about facilitating self-study in different geographic locations, that was a really good experience for me.

Kathleen:

We all (understandably) tend to take our own contexts for granted. Still, in transdisciplinary, transnational, transcultural spaces, we need to engage in processes of cultural, linguistic, and disciplinary translation and explication. It's because of that dynamic interaction that we keep learning.

Diverse, dynamic learning
Research professional practice

Anastasia:

Books have been written on self-study and a specific discipline or according to various self-study methods and with a focus on teacher educators' professional practice, but the polyvocal calls for a seamlessness that transcends that.

Kathleen:

If I were not working beyond teacher education in our self-study community, my teacher education practice would be much poorer, much less interesting. For me, that has been one of the greatest gifts of this transdisciplinary research project.

Anastasia:

I work as a self-study scholar, studying my teaching and exploring and inventing self-study methods with colleagues who work outside my discipline and college. Those collaborations led me to new discoveries beyond my wildest imagination!

The power of "we"
Self, difference, confluence
In many voices

Anastasia:

We remarked on the power of the "we" to develop the "I." We each grew in our individual understandings because, and only because of the collaboration; it wasn't possible to learn what we did alone. Despite living and working on different continents, we continue to collaborate, invent, and to play virtually – and at the edge of possibilities for learning.

Kathleen:

When we got together with our co-facilitators to talk about our experiences in the self-study learning communities in South Africa and the USA, we were very interested to see what would come out, what would be similar, and what would be different.

Anastasia:

Our focus is on the many voices, whose voices, and the so what and for whom of this group of professionals working with others and beyond the self.

Multiple professionals

Making methodology

Kathleen:

There is a growing interest in self-study of professional practice beyond teaching and teacher education. I think that the “so what” question, or as Claudia Mitchell always asks, “What difference does this make anyway?” (2008, p. 366), is vital to make some sense of what the field of transdisciplinary self-study looks like – in relation to the well-mapped area of self-study in teaching and teacher education.

Anastasia:

Yes, new landscapes to travel. Improvement aimed for other fields. The Self-Study of Professional Practice is really just emerging, and our work with practitioners who are not all teachers has landed us at this new entry port to explore what difference this does and can make! What can other fields learn from a methodology that has mainly been used by teachers, for teachers? We have observed the crossover impacts. Our questions drive the study, and then we adapt any method(s) that allow us to study them.

Kathleen:

I think that the transnational, transcultural contributions are an important innovation. Also, the focus on methodological inventiveness.

Growth, inspiration

Challenge, deepen, and extend...

Change is possible!

Kathleen:

We developed a deep and dialogic understanding of why we are drawn to facilitate the development of transdisciplinary self-study communities.

Anastasia:

We both appreciated our work in taking us to the edge of possibilities and especially when we did not know where our initiatives would take us. We have given ourselves permission to play with new ideas and pedagogies and ways to research those. We sanction and value play with passion and purpose for ourselves and for our students and encourage our diverse students and colleagues to keep exploring. It does get complicated because we are breaking so much new ground, so we have to be patient with the process.

Kathleen:

One of the connections that has been very strong between the self-study learning communities in South Africa and in the USA has been our focus on creativity and the arts. Arts-inspired research practices have worked well for us to visualize our changing use of self-study methodology through place, space, and time.

Power of inventiveness

Impact - bringing new knowledge

Anastasia:

It's the creative side that I must nourish. I am now playing with the idea of creating a mood board with digital and visual art faculty at the university for a third faculty self-study group. That's a lot of bricolage and sparked by my letter writing with you, Kathleen.

Kathleen:

I love the idea of creating a bricolage from our already constructed poetry. We might focus our gaze on how self-study works as a polyvocal methodology – using combinations of methods and inventing new methods – similar to Bakhtin's special polyvocal artistic thinking.

Anastasia:

Kathleen spoke of the unknown results, and I saw that in both of our stories. We embraced our inventiveness, which remains prominent in our work as self-study teacher-scholars and, as Kathleen noted, having a good long time of exploring in different ways – a flow “in a different world.”

Returning to Our Eight Focal Words

We have been working in co-creating in self-study research for almost a decade, yet this new piece of writing allowed us to pause and ask: “*What difference can poetry and dialogue make to self-study scholarship?*” In responding to this question, we return to the eight focal words selected from our word cloud: *heart, polyvocality, space, learning, difference, methodology, growth, inventiveness.*

Heart

Poetry and dialogue can be entry points for self-study researchers to access and portray the emotions that give life to human experience and yet are often disregarded or downplayed in written accounts of research. Playing with language and form in poetic and dialogic ways can bring passion and purpose to the writing. And when self-study researchers begin to infuse their writing with elements of the literary arts, this can set their imaginations alight in ways that reanimate professional practice.

Polyvocality

Our engagement with polyvocality in our writing has enabled us to understand and express how dialogic encounters with diverse forms of seeing, knowing, and doing can intensify professional learning and knowledge for ourselves and others. Polyvocal ways of writing in self-study illustrate the intrinsic value of plurality and heterogeneity, opening up new pathways for reimagining self in relationship with diverse others.

Space

Our thinking in space has generated creative, multidimensional writing that could not have been produced by us as individual researchers. This distinctive writing practice has emerged from exploring in-between the very different contexts in which we live and work, in-between our distinct personal and professional experiences, and in-between disciplinary and methodological

domains. We have each grown in our understandings of our work and selves as self-study researchers and facilitators because and only because of this shared creative writing space.

Learning

We see ourselves as lifelong learners. We embrace that self-study scholars are unique researchers in the design element of using multiple methods to explore their questions. Along with self-study colleagues, we have further recognized a need for a beginner's mind that "stresses openness and the ability to explore without preconceptions" (Smith et al., 2018, p. 279) – a willingness to explore, embrace mistakes, cultivate, collaborate, experiment, learn and share.

Difference

Self-study requires not only studying the self, but also considering the impact of this work with others and for others. This is what Weber (2014) described as "the potential ripple effect in/of self-study for learning and growth for many" (p. 8). We have experienced the value of making our inquiries public in imaginative and engaging ways so that others become interested in learning with us. The ripple effect means that the work is taken up for critique and continuing conversations about making a difference in professional practice, often with broader implications for social change.

Methodology

In this chapter, we have worked to capture the importance of not getting stuck in the status quo of what method or methods can be used to explore our questions and represent our inquiries. We offer to the self-study school of thought and action our enactment of polyvocal self-study bricolage as a writing practice. Our bricolage involves designing and interlacing artistic and literary methods and doing that virtually, given the distance of our professional settings. We worked on cataloguing our collaborative history of what difference our co-creativity has made for us as self-study scholars. We have explored the impact we have witnessed of using artistic virtual bricolage for us, our students, and our colleagues. That history of our co-creativity in writing is now documented for us and others in our imaginative play with poetry and dialogue.

Growth

Looking back on our work together and now through the conduits of poetry with dialogue has enabled us to see the development of our polyvocal transdisciplinary thinking and design over time. We better understand how our conversations invited us to think more freely in open co-creative spaces, to invent virtual bricolage self-study we did not know was even before us. This writing allowed us to look back and celebrate our work with our self-study colleagues and students who joined us in our explorations and discoveries and the ways we have each grown personally and professionally.

Inventiveness

We are innovators in developing research methods that diverge from the conventional to “enable new, valid understandings to empower practitioners to improve their work for the beneficiaries in their care” (Dadds & Hart, 2001, p. 169). Embracing the arts in multiple formats – including our earlier work with poetry, mood boards, visual research artifacts, dance, dialogue, and choral reading – has inspired our methodological inventiveness, expanding our way of knowing, thinking, and writing about self-study.

Looking Forward

We hope our work will offer some creative inspiration to self-study scholars, both novice and more experienced, who might be hesitant about using arts-inspired modes in their writing. Our collaborations with many students and colleagues who have no formal training in the arts have substantiated our belief that creativity is an innate human characteristic. We have experienced how self-study researchers who might not see themselves as artists can come together and enjoy playing with elements of the arts. The arts allow us to see ourselves and others in ways we could not see otherwise. And so, the hands-on experience of composing poetry and dialogue, especially when it is done with trusted critical friends, can infuse professional practice and research with inventiveness, emotion, and fresh insights.

Taken as a whole, our chapter illustrates the generativity of making time and space for arts-inspired playful writing. This is particularly valuable in a higher education milieu that often seems to favor linear production and measurable outputs over the extemporaneous processes of mutual learning and discovery. Importantly, the chapter highlights the need for universities to acknowledge and support such faculty efforts in methodological innovativeness. In that manner, faculty will be encouraged to move the field forward by exploring unanswered questions with new methods rather than relying only on traditional methods and replicating what others have already discovered. Playing with concepts and techniques together has provided us with the stimulus and courage to keep playing as we realize the impact of our experimenting – both for others and ourselves. We offer our learning as an invitation to others to consider forming co-creative virtual spaces for exploratory writing that can contribute to changing the status quo for professional knowledge and practice on a global level.

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