Locating Institutional Change at the Grassroots:
Communities of Inquiry and Collaborative Self-Study

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Abstract: Drawing on theories and insights informing practitioner inquiry, self-study research methodology, and culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies, the articles gathered in this special issue of the *Journal for Research and Practice in College Teaching* offer readers a mix of narrative styles, varied genres, and alternate approaches for examining the meaning and potential impacts of our instructional practices as teacher educators. Framing our efforts to bring about change as occasioned by our collective commitment to decenter teacher education with the principles of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies, this article recounts the various iterations of our journey to becoming a community of inquiry and introduces the five self-studies that follow.

Opportunities for university faculty to talk collectively about our teaching practices are typically infrequent, superficial, or worse, nonexistent. For educators invested in the theories, standpoints, and values informing *asset-based pedagogies*—like culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) that "seek to dismantle deficit approaches" (Paris, 2021, p. 365)—this lack of opportunity creates yet another institutional barrier for enacting our social justice, inclusion, and equity commitments. This special issue of the *Journal for Research and Practice in College Teaching* showcases how a small group of faculty, working together in a grassroots community of inquiry since 2017, is re-envisioning collaborative learning and employing self-study research methodology to address our agency as teachers in a School of Education.

We situate our work within the established traditions of practitioner inquiry (Anderson et al., 2007; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Coughlan, 2014; Samaras & Freese, 2006) to emphasize the ways in which inquiry communities can serve as both a "means toward larger goals and as ends in themselves"; that is, how these groups function as the "contexts within which teachers and other practitioners identify the issues they see as important and as one of the major vehicles that support their representations of their ideas" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 54). Underscoring the grassroots quality of teacher-initiated communities of inquiry and citing Joel Westheimer's (1999) analysis of the consequences of these groups for teachers' professional work, Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle observe further that practitioner-led inquiry can become "a site for the merger of the personal and the professional," where "the intrinsic value of the community in its own right is acknowledged" (p. 55).

Because we are especially interested in enacting pedagogical change that reflects our social justice, inclusion, and equity commitments, we also view our research as allied with emerging teacher-scholar-activist scholarship (Andelora, 2005; Kahn & Lee, 2019; Sullivan, 2015; Toth et al., 2019) to foreground the pivotal role faculty can play in creating institutional and social change. This iteration of the *teacher-scholar-activism* construct arises out of long-standing debates about the professional identity of two-year college English faculty (Toth et al., 2019) who challenge the "top-down, neoliberal approaches to [higher education] reform that ignore instructors' disciplinary expertise and can ultimately exclude rather than support structurally disadvantaged students" (p. 2). With both sets of scholars, then, our inquiry community contends that reimagining institutional change as a bottom-up, or grassroots endeavor, empowers faculty to better advocate for our profession—teacher education—and our students despite the challenges we face.

Drawing on theories and insights informing practitioner inquiry, self-study research methodology, and culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies, the articles gathered here offer readers a mix of narrative styles, varied genres, and alternate approaches for examining the meaning and potential impacts of our instructional practices as teacher educators. Framing our efforts to bring about change as occasioned by our collective commitment to decenter teacher education with the principles of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies, this introduction recounts the various iterations of our journey to becoming a community of inquiry. The five self-studies that follow highlight the importance of teacher educators asking authentic questions of practice to prompt intentional study of their teaching and transform the work that happens in classrooms.

The "Hard Re-set" as a Framework for Change

In her 2021 article, "I'm here for the hard reset: Post pandemic pedagogy to preserve our culture," Gloria Ladson-Billings uses the analogy of a hard re-set—the erasure of all data from an electronic device in order to restore it to its original factory condition—to propose a fundamental change in education that acknowledges the COVID-19 pandemic as both a "rupture" (citing Roy, 2020, p. 10) between our nation's past and its future and an opportunity to reimagine teaching "using a more robust and culturally-centered pedagogy" (p. 68). Ladson-Billings writes:

> Although many educators and policy makers insist that we have to 'get back
> to normal,' I want to suggest that 'going back' is the wrong thing for children
> and youth who were unsuccessful and oppressed in our schools before the
> pandemic. Normal is where the problems reside. (p. 68)

Recounting the ways in which schools have functioned as a source of educational disparities, as opposed to serving as the solution, Ladson-Billings argues that a hard re-set in education, post-pandemic, includes a re-commitment to the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy. Connecting

what happens in schools to the conditions of students' lived experiences in U.S. society today, she writes:

> If we are serious about promoting a hard re-set, we must re-deploy the elements of culturally relevant pedagogy—student learning, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness—to better reflect students' lives and cultures and we must re-think the purposes of education in a society that is straining from the problems of anti-Black racism, police brutality, mass incarceration, and economic inequality. The point of the hard re-set is to reconsider what kind of human beings/ citizens we are seeking to produce. (p. 72)

Acknowledging that the hard re-set she envisions will require hard work on the part of teachers everywhere, Ladson-Billings focuses on the two central challenges entailed by a commitment to enact this kind of change: first, to "engage and interrogate [our] own worldviews" and second to "develop the facility to move from the center to the margins" (p. 77).

As a community of teacher educators, our inquiry aims at deepening our individual and collective understandings and enactments of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies in our teaching of undergraduate and graduate students. By necessity, then, our inquiry relies on our willingness and our ability to take up the challenges Ladson-Billings lays down—interrogating our worldviews and becoming more adept at decentering. Educators have long understood that CRP draws on the cultural knowledges, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of diverse learners to make instruction more appropriate and effective for them (Gay, 2002, 2010). Similarly, researchers have long confirmed the benefits of CRP and CSP for student learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009, 2014, 2021; Paris, 2011, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017), and have demonstrated, too, that when teachers have been the beneficiaries of culturally relevant teacher education courses, they are less likely to embrace cultural deficit views and models (Ginsberg, 2009; Irvine, 2003; Jiménez & Rose, 2010). In an era when the urgency to expand and deepen our capacities to reach all students is rightly pressing, the articles included in this special issue fit within the broad framework suggested by Ladson-Billings' notion of a hard re-set in education, guided in part by a set of questions:

- How might we reimagine teacher education decentered with the principles of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies?
- How can we engage our students in the relational work of teaching?
- What do enactments of a CRP/CSP-informed approach to this relational work actually look like in our classrooms?

An Origin Story
or
The Story of Our Arrival

Six fulltime faculty members comprise our community of inquiry. Each of us holds a tenure-track appointment in the School of Education at the University of Cincinnati, and together we claim a range of K-12 and university teaching experiences. Four members of our community identify as women and two identify as men; five identify as White and one identifies as Black. All of us claim English as our first language. Although we share several common research interests related to our work as university faculty—culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies, teaching for equity and social justice, the self-study of teacher education practices—we teach in a variety of disciplines including English education, literacy studies, writing studies, special education, and action research. And while our inquiry has not been lockstep over the years, our community has always been rooted in our shared desire to effect change across the School of Education by bringing about a more purposeful and action-driven pursuit of asset-based pedagogies, with particular emphasis on the benefits of CRP and CSP. In an institutional context that has historically and consistently rewarded siloed areas of expertise, we recognized early that our inquiry would instead require collaborative engagement and critical reflection. That singular recognition, it would be fair to say, has been instrumental to our work.

In her (2012) book, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, Sara Ahmed posits that "every research project has a story" and that, in turn, the story itself may be best understood as "an arrival" (p. 2), that is, as an action—the act of reaching a place or coming to a position or state of mind (see *Merriam Webster*). An arrival, of course, implies there has been a journey, and a journey, by extension, implies a person's readiness to travel, a disposition to move, to find out what lies ahead. For Ahmed, coming to terms with how the discourse and practice of diversity works—or fails to work—in institutions of higher education literally meant "following diversity around" the various contexts and contours of university life (p. 1). Asking open questions—"What does diversity do? What are we doing when we use the language of diversity?"—all the while proceeding "with a sense of uncertainty," Ahmed articulates what all practicing researchers come to know: "The more I have followed diversity around," she writes, "the more diversity has captured my interest" (p. 1).

Like Ahmed, our community of inquiry has been "following around" the idea of culturally relevant pedagogy for the better part of five years, and, like Ahmed, the more we've learned about the discourse and practice of CRP/CSP, the more personally, professionally, and politically invested we have become. Interestingly, what began as a failed attempt to engage the School of Education in a systematic analysis of its course syllabi to identify the presence of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) themes (see Aceves & Orosco, 2014) turned out to be just what we needed to reimagine our inquiry and start following CRP/CSP around in earnest. And while this is no hero story, learning how to abandon a failed research trajectory for a new path that promises to work better remains an early lesson that has served our inquiry community well.

In fairness, the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform's (CEEDAR) Center's tool—or what Terese C. Aceves and Michael J. Orosco (2014) refer to as an "innovation configuration (IC) matrix" (p. 6)—is a well-researched, thoughtful instrument. Drawing on empirical studies to identify CRT themes, effective practices, and instructional approaches (p. 8), the IC matrix can be used to evaluate course syllabi and can thus "guide teacher preparation professionals in the development of appropriate culturally responsive teaching (CRT) content" (p. 6). Yet, despite its credentials, the idea of using a pre-designed rating scale to evaluate whether our courses were attending to the needs and leveraging the talents of culturally and linguistically diverse students was met with a less than enthusiastic response from the majority of the School of Education's faculty. Many simply didn't buy into the premise that much could be learned from syllabi analyses, some didn't necessarily see themselves or their courses connected to CRP/CSP, and a few regarded the idea itself with a measure of suspicion, wondering what other undisclosed uses might be made of the results.

The resistance we received from our colleagues convinced us to reconceive our approach. If we were going to understand how culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies as a discourse and practice works—or fails to work—in our courses, such insight was going to come from examining our individual teaching experiences in the classroom as well as our shared teaching culture as it is experienced across the School of Education. We abandoned the IC matrix approach altogether, issued an open call for participants via email and in person to build consensus for an inquiry community on this topic, and then simply started meeting regularly—reading together, asking questions together, and articulating our stuck points together. In short, we began defining our own understandings of CRP/CSP within the contexts and contours of our undergraduate and graduate courses instead of relying on definitions overlaid on our experiences from the outside.

As with any grassroots, faculty-led endeavor, the number of participants has ebbed and flowed over time, with the initial group—Steve, Mark, and Connie—growing to include as many as 11 faculty before settling into the current group of six who are co-contributors to and co-curators of this special issue—Susan, Miriam, Anne, Steve, Mark, and Connie. Each successive iteration of our inquiry community, importantly and indelibly marked by every faculty colleague who joined the group no matter how long they journeyed with us, has worked to reorient us differently to the project and process of following CRP/CSP around the School of Education.

On Methods and Goals: Practitioner Inquiry and Authentic Questions of Practice

Against the backdrop of the accountability movement at the end of the 20th century, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) identify three core concepts that were concomitantly fueling the teacher research movement and, in turn, practitioner communities of inquiry: "teaching as a deliberative (not technical) profession, knowledge generation for practice from practice, and the value of local questions and uncertainties in grappling successfully with issues of teaching and learning at all levels" (p. 21). Taken together, these three postulates create an environment where teachers can not only gain insight on their practice but also articulate that knowledge so to improve their

practice. For teacher educators, whose work within the university remains under-theorized and under-researched (see Berry, 2004), engaging in the systematic study of our teaching in order to improve our practice resonates with the Arizona Group's (1996) long-standing argument that "educational reform would be better served if teacher educators were more deeply involved in studying, reflecting on, and questioning their own work as teachers of teachers and if academic institutions provided environments more able to support such work" (pp. 154-5). One approach particularly well-suited to these goals and aligned with the core concepts theorized by Cochran-Smith and Lytle is self-study research, or "a form of inquiry in which we inquire into our self as a teacher educator to improve our way of being a teacher educator" (Feldman et al., 2004, p. 973).

As a methodology, Eline Vanassche and Geert Kelchtermans (2016) describe self-study as an approach taken up by teachers seeking to "intentionally and systematically investigate their practices in order to improve them, based on a deepened understanding of these practices, as well as the contexts in which these practices evolve" (p. 1). Calling attention to the methodology's most prominent characteristics, Vicki LaBoskey (2004) portrays self-study as "self-initiated and focused," "improvement-aimed … and interactive" (p. 33). Cynthia Lassonde et al. (2009) stress self-study's impact, noting its benefits for both our theoretical understanding of teaching and our practice. Additionally, Allan Feldman et al. (2004) highlight the connections between the methodological features of self-study and an existentialist perspective, suggesting that improving our practice does not necessarily mean "an improvement toward a set end or even toward some hidden potential"; instead and citing Greene (1988, p. 3), they write that improvement means "gaining 'the capacity to surpass the given and look at things as if they could be otherwise'" (p. 973). Feldman et al. go on to explain:

> This happens because when we engage in self-study, we begin to feel the disquietude, the 'incompleteness of our vocation' (Greene, 1989), our 'living contradictions' (Whitehead, 1989), or 'the incompleteness, contradictions, dissonances, and dilemmas that we have in our way of being teachers' (Feldman, 2002). (p. 973)

In other words, self-study enables our ability to improve our practice because it increases our understanding of our selves—not just as teachers in the classroom but also as human beings in the world.

Despite the use of the word "self" in its moniker, self-study in practice is noticeably collaborative in nature. True to LaBoskey's (2004) characterization of the methodology as improvement-aimed and interactive, researchers engaged in self-study quickly learn that efforts to systematically problematize, reframe, and transform our practice call for and depend upon an interpretive community, or a group of colleagues who are often called *critical friends* (Costa & Kallick, 1993). John Loughran (2007) reasserts this stance when he argues that:

> the need to actively pursue understandings from alternative perspectives,
> or to reframe situations (Schön, 1983), is important in a self-study report

> to demonstrate that different perspectives on teaching and learning situations
> have been sought and considered and to … minimize possibilities for self-
> justification or rationalization of existing practices and behaviors. (p. 16)

Loughran goes on to posit that the goal of self-study lies not just in its ability to improve our practice as individual teachers but may ultimately help the field better articulate "a pedagogy of teacher education" (p. 12). D. Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (2004) put an even finer point on this position, writing that "self-study is important not for what it shows about the self but because of its potential to reveal knowledge of the educational landscape" (p. 575).

Increasing our understanding of the educational landscape writ large explains, in part, the equity work that has animated our community of inquiry and its focus on decentering teacher education with the principles of CRP/CSP. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) observe, practitioner inquiry often:

> work[s] from an equity agenda … intended to improve the education of those
> who have been marginalized by the educational system. … The larger project
> is about generating deeper understandings of how students learn—from the
> perspectives of those who do the work. The larger project is about enhancing
> educators' sense of social responsibility and social action in the service of a
> democratic society. (p. 58)

If, as a profession, we are committed to the "hard re-set" Ladson-Billings (2021) suggests, self-study's ability to help teachers ask authentic questions of practice is a critical step toward achieving that goal. This is not to discount the "messy process," as Amanda Berry (2004) describes it, that is often part and parcel of self-study research. "For many teacher educators," Berry writes, "the difficulties associated with researching personal practice lie not so much in recognizing the complexities inherent in their work (these they readily see) but in finding ways of representing that complexity to others" (p. 1312). Despite its messiness, then, what's clear is the importance of self-study for posing authentic questions that emerge out of our daily practice with students—especially those questions that invite us to rethink our assumptions about teaching and learning—and the necessity of making this research, in all its complexity, public. "The practitioner research movement," Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) assert, "continues to thrive in part because local communities are making public and accessible the distinctive processes and findings of their work" (p. 23). This special issue of the *Journal for Research and Practice in College Teaching* is our contribution to that larger and ongoing effort.

Three Iterations: Pedagogical Dilemmas, Collaborative Self-Study, and Antiracist Pedagogies

Successful university faculty already engage in the reflective study of their teaching practices via formal institutionalized processes like composing annual performance reviews, revising course syllabi, and reviewing evaluations of their teaching offered each semester by their students. Far

too often, however, this kind of reflective study is done in isolation and in accordance with the institution's schedule. Finding ways to reflect on and study our teaching practices more intentionally and in community with faculty colleagues were major impetuses for the formation of our inquiry group. In addition to a shared desire for professional learning and growth, we wanted authentic dialogue, discussion, and debate about what actually happens in our classrooms, especially in relation to our work as teacher educators invested in asset-based pedagogies like CRP/CSP.

Mats Hordvik et al. (2021) describe the collaborative self-study of teacher education practices as "a space and structure to share and debate teacher educators' practices, which promotes dialogue, reflection, interrogation, and interpretation of experiences" (Section 2.1, para. 3). Saili S. Kulkarni et al. (2019) explain further the various structural arrangements collaborative self-study can take, along with the essential role "critical collective inquiry" plays in the process (p. 4). Drawing attention to how collective inquiry "enhances self-reflection through dialog (LaBoskey, 2004)", Kulkarni et al. write:

> This can happen through critical friendships (Bullock & Sator, 2018) and communities of practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Additionally, teacher educators can utilize informal meetings, formal trainings, and discussions as a structure for collaborative self-study (Gallagher, Griffin, Parker, Kitchen, & Figg, 2011). (p. 4)

The benefits of collaborative self-study have also been widely reported. For example, Belinda Y. Louie et al.'s (2003) review of self-study literature found that collaboration provides "social support" to faculty that can "increase the meaningfulness of the work to the researchers" (p. 155) and promote "a culture of reflectiveness (Schoenfeld, 1999) that results in higher-level discourse and critique" (p. 156).

To enact collaborative self-study in our community of inquiry during Years 1 and 2, we worked to identify dilemmas (Argyris, 1993; Windschitl, 2002) from our recent classroom teaching experiences and then employed a critical friends (Costa & Kallick, 1993) protocol to examine our individual teaching practices. In their well-cited article, "Through the lens of a critical friend," Arthur Costa and Bena Kallick define critical friendship this way:

> A critical friend, as the name suggests, is a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work. (p. 50)

At the heart of any critical friend protocol, then, lies trust; the kind of trust that serves as the foundation for providing the social support and fostering the culture of reflectiveness that Louie et al. (2003) regard as hallmark benefits of collaborative self-study.

In his examination of constructivist teaching practices, Mark Windschitl (2002) theorizes four dilemma categories—conceptual, pedagogical, cultural, and political—noting that "these dilemmas, which take the form of conceptual entities for researchers, often exist as concerns or implicit questions posed by teachers who attempt constructivist instruction" (p. 132). The types of dilemmas we surfaced and examined in our community of inquiry included what Windschitl identifies as pedagogical—dilemmas pertaining to curricular design and classroom activities—and cultural—dilemmas connected to classroom culture and prevailing assumptions about how classrooms should or ought to work (pp. 132-133). According to Windschitl's (2002, p. 133) taxonomy, pedagogical dilemmas typically include teacher questions like:

- Do I base my teaching on students' existing ideas rather than on learning objectives?
- What does it mean for me to become a facilitator of learning? What skills and strategies are necessary?
- How do I manage a classroom where students are talking to one another rather than to me?
- Should I place limits on students' construction of their own ideas?
- What types of assessment will capture the learning I want to foster?

Cultural dilemmas, however, take up a different set of teacher questions, for example (Windschitl, 2002, p. 133):

- How can we contradict traditional, efficient classroom routines and generate new agreements with students about what is valued and rewarded?
- How do my own past images of what is proper and possible in a classroom prevent me from seeing the potential for a different kind of learning environment?
- How can I accommodate the worldviews of students from diverse backgrounds while at the same time transforming my own classroom culture?
- Can I trust students to accept responsibility for their own learning?

As mentioned earlier, membership in our inquiry community has ebbed and flowed over the years, with totals reaching 11 faculty members in Years 1 and 2. With such robust membership, our critical friends' discussions included a wide variety of pedagogical and cultural dilemmas which, in turn, resulted in the production of voluminous data, e.g., audio/video recordings and transcriptions from nine sessions, copious peer feedback also recorded in the transcriptions, and individual journaling and note-taking. In recognition of the amount of data being produced—and considering our commitment to keep trust at the center of our

community—we employed a structured ethical reflection process (Brydon-Miller, 2009; Brydon-Miller, Rector-Aranda, & Stevens, 2015) near the end of Year 2 to explore issues related to vulnerability, confidentiality, and ownership of personal stories and socially-constructed data.

Given our abiding interest to promote a more purposeful and action-driven pursuit of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies across the School of Education, and in light of our shared understanding that impactful learning is relational, Years 3 and 4 ushered a turn in our inquiry community's focus toward the design of self-studies. Broadly, these studies aimed to respond to a shared research question: How do learning relationships, including teacher-student and student-student relationships, instantiate culturally sustaining pedagogies across various courses, programs, and theoretical perspectives? With this shift in focus and the launch of our self-studies came a decrease in the group's overall membership, settling into the current group of six who are co-editing this special issue. While each self-study was conducted independently, we employed a critical friends protocol to deepen our individual analyses and help each other plan action steps.

In their exploration of the multidimensional processes by which faculty members become teacher educators, Hordvik et al.'s (2021) claims about how collaborative self-study "produced evolving and meaningful practices, learning, and relationships that resulted in [their] becoming collaborative, committed, and innovative teacher educators" (abstract) offer inspiration. It is perhaps Hordvik et al.'s (2021) recognition of their work as "evolving"—unfinished, in progress, ongoing—that resonates most completely with our experiences. The self-studies we conducted in Years 3 and 4, along with the many conversations we have held around this research, led us to write individual origin stories guided by two questions intended to help us mine our past histories and look to our collective future, e.g., what draws us to this work and what keeps us in this group? Taken together, these two questions encourage us to commit even more deeply to following CRP/CSP around the School of Education and to start sharing what we've learned with the wider public.

This past summer our focus turned once again, this time to the study of antiracist pedagogies. In this third iteration of our inquiry community, we worked with and, importantly, were led by a group of doctoral students in the School of Education to create lessons that could confront the problems Ladson-Billings (2021) identifies as taking a toll on US society and, by extension, the US educational system—namely, "anti-Black racism, policy brutality, mass incarceration, and economic inequality" (p. 72). We sought to champion a curriculum that is asset-based, equitable, and includes a focus on students' social-emotional needs. In their collaborative self-study on culturally responsive pedagogy in higher education, Han et al. (2014) note how "little has been reported about teacher educators who enact CRP in higher education institutions" and how their study findings "begin to fill a void in the literature with an expanded articulation of a CRP framework that can be applied in higher education institutions, beyond the P-12 setting" (p. 308). Our practitioner inquiry stories, introduced below, aim to do the same.

Introducing the Self-Studies

This brief introduction to the five self-studies collected in this special issue begins by recalling Feldman et al.'s (2004) useful advice. "It is important to remember," they write, "that self-study is not a study of the self in isolation, but rather a study of one's self in relation to other people" (p. 971). The first two practitioner inquiry stories, "Relational awareness and culturally relevant/sustaining pedagogies—praxis and possibility: A story in four acts", by Miriam Raider-Roth, and "Creating relational space to support explorations of culturally relevant pedagogy with prospective teachers", by Susan Watts-Taffe, illustrate Feldman et al.'s standpoint and claim masterfully. Focusing on core practices of relational awareness, a key dimension of building strong teacher-student relationships and enacting culturally relevant teaching, Miriam's self-study employed journaling and art-making to chronicle her implementation of relational-cultural pedagogical practices with 15 diverse graduate students. These core practices include challenging, supporting, and voicing, as well as slow description, dyadic text analysis, and nonviolent communication. Key learning emerging from Miriam's inquiry points to the deep impact course readings can have on human interactions during classroom discussions and the notion that teaching explicit nonviolent communication skills (e.g., attuned listening, empowered speaking) can be helpful for discussions of race, culture, and difference.

Susan's self-study also centered on building relational awareness in classrooms, an especially critical skill in a racialized world that leaves so many people feeling unsafe or relationally disconnected from conversations about race. Drawing from her work with undergraduate students preparing to become Intervention Specialists and the data she collected over three consecutive Fall semesters, Susan's self-study highlights two pedagogical goals she set for her students and herself: (1) to feel seen and known, and (2) to be able to sit in relationship with a person or idea that is challenging without needing to judge it, fix it, or dispel it. Characterizing moments of relational presence and authentic connections as types of space that can be created in classrooms, Susan's inquiry reminds readers that exploring ways to enact culturally responsive pedagogy turns on overcoming the disempowerment and isolation that so often accompanies relational disconnection.

Robert V. Bullough, Jr. and Stefinee Pinnegar (2001) once remarked that "the aim of self-study research is to provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than to confirm and settle" (p. 20). In other words, as a form of practitioner inquiry self-study is noticeably generative, able to create knowledge, as Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) asserted, "from practice for practice" (p. 21). The next two stories—Annie Bauer's "Start where we are" and Mark Sulzer's "Tesseract as becoming: A rhizomatic self-study about engaging future English language arts teachers in culturally relevant pedagogy"— skillfully demonstrate how self-study creates an environment where authentic questions of practice emerge and new possibilities for teacher education come into view. Annie's self-study explored the impact of increasing the explicitness with which she talks with first-year teacher preparation students about unintentional biases related to diversity. Drawing from her vast experiences with early career college students planning to become elementary school

teachers, Annie's study aimed to better understand whether increased explicitness—and the cognitive dissonance it can create—might encourage these students to tap into alternate narratives about teaching in high-needs urban schools. Using quantitative analysis and content analysis to examine and interpret student data collected from surveys and course evaluations, findings from Anne's inquiry suggest subtle changes in students' dispositions and their understandings of key concepts like equity, inclusion, culture, and race by the semester's end.

Mark's self-study was also exploratory in his efforts to find new ways to engage future English language arts teachers in culturally relevant pedagogy. Drawing on the Deleuzian notion of immanence to destabilize categories and conditions of meaning, Mark's inquiry was distinctly experimental in its discovery and discussion of themes indispensable to the political, critical, and creative work of becoming. Highlighting the non-hierarchical and interconnected linkages between memory and movement, dimensionality and positionality, and knowing and being, his self-study brings into focus the rhizomatic relations overlaying our work as teacher educators and necessary for moving our disciplinary practices forward.

Reflecting on the power of memory and writing to reshape past experience, Ahmed (2012) suggests that "the act of writing" itself served as "a reorientation, affecting not simply what I was writing about but what I was thinking and feeling" (p. 2). "Allowing myself to remember," she goes on to explain, "was a political reorientation" (p. 2). The final piece in this special issue, "My Self Study" by Stephen Kroeger, resonates with Ahmed's focus on writing and remembering as reorienting actions. Deftly using graphic narrative as a mode of expression, Steve describes aspects of his practice that he understands as fundamental to his ongoing conversion into being an antiracist practitioner, including the origins of his thinking about teaching, self-imposed barriers to talking about his practice, and the connections he sees between his practice and culturally sustaining pedagogies. As his self-study shows, drawing provided Steve with a lens and a process through which he could more completely confront and reveal his positionality within the complex system of education. As a mode of inquiry, drawing reoriented Steve to his experiences as a teacher and a critical friend in our community, enabling him to map concepts, represent learning, and create new linkages to examine his own practice.

Conclusion

At the end of *On being included*, Ahmed (2012) offers an alternate reading of the well-known Freirean definition of praxis that captures the spirit with which our community of inquiry approaches its work. She writes:

> Paulo Freire defines praxis as 'reflection and action upon the world *in order
> to* transform it' ([1970] 2000: 51; emphasis added). I want to offer a different
> way of thinking about the relationship between knowledge and transformation.
> Rather than suggesting that knowledge leads (or should lead) to transformation,

I offer a reversal that in my view preserves the point or aim of the argument: transformation, as a form of practical labor, leads to knowledge. (p. 173)

As the collection of articles in this special issue establish, self-study research opens a critical space for transforming the work that happens in classrooms. Through questioning, reflection, dialogue with trusted colleagues, and a shared willingness to reimagine the status quo, transforming our practice is already leading to new understandings about how to decenter teacher education with the principles of CRP/CSP and, in turn, providing opportunities to become better advocates for our students and our profession, going forward.

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