Probation, Practitioners, and Pedagogy: Lessons Learned from Self-Study

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Abstract

The reward systems typically found in colleges and universities often serve as a barrier rather than a catalyst for improving teaching. As such, an increasing number of university faculty members are using their own classrooms as a site of inquiry and reflective practice (e.g. self-study) to concurrently advance their own research and teaching. This paper portrays a yearlong self-study of two former practitioners turned probationary faculty members within a college of education at a comprehensive regional university. Findings include tensions within relationships, the influence of our past positions, the engagement of students, and how scholarship requirements influence our professional lives. Finally, the authors suggest five reasons tenure-track faculty ought to consider participating in a self-study.

Keywords: self-study, professor, practitioner

Introduction

Teaching in higher education is an important aspect of tenure-track faculty evaluation. While teaching is a necessary component of a successful tenure portfolio, publishing can make or break a tenure promotion decision. The reward systems typically found in colleges and universities often serve as a barrier rather than a catalyst for improving teaching (Kitchen et al., 2008). Yet, faculty members within pre-professional fields have expressed struggles to balance their desire to influence students through exceptional teaching practices and the expectations placed upon them by publishing-oriented promotion and tenure requirements (Fontenot et al., 2012; Kovarik et al., 2018, Welk & Thomas, 2009). As such, an increasing number of university faculty members are using their own classrooms as a site of inquiry and reflective practice (e.g. self-study) to concurrently advance their own research and teaching (Anderson, 2010; Dismuke et al., 2019; Hamilton, 2019; Kitchen et al., 2008; Ritter et al., 2019).

Focus of the Study

This paper portrays a self-study of two former practitioners turned probationary faculty members within a college of education. Because our comprehensive regional university places such a strong emphasis on teaching, we chose a self-study method with the intent of examining the tension between ourselves, our context, and our history (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Both of us had adjunct experience prior to our current tenure-track positions, however, our previous professional careers involved working alongside practitioners in the field for over 30 years, in contrast to less than 10 years in our current academic roles. Our goal was to examine our teaching practices and not only receive feedback to improve, but also ascertain where connections to our past experiences were demonstrated in our classrooms and other student interactions. Thus, the research questions involved in this study were as follows:

1) Utilizing critical friend feedback and relationship building, how can teaching practices of two tenure-track faculty members be improved?
2) What practitioner experiences from our past are utilized in current teaching practice?

During the course of an academic year, we shared our course syllabi, assignment descriptions, shared reflective journals, and met every two weeks for a total of fourteen meetings. As critical friends (Bambino, 2002; Schuck & Russell, 2005), we analyzed what worked well and what wasn't working through alternating questions in our meetings. In doing so, we frequently probed each other to understand the extent to which our practitioner experiences may have influenced our pedagogy. In addition, we observed each other teach live or via recordings nine times.

While graduate education is something we share in common, one of us teaches primarily synchronously online and the other teaches only face-to-face classes with a likely future online teaching assignment related to a new program start-up. Kitchen and Berry (2021) describe self-

study as “timely and timeless” (p. 1), which was especially true for our study. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, one faculty member was required to pivot his face-to-face classes quickly to a remote synchronous learning format. Therefore, our later discussions more intently focused on the ins and outs of teaching online.

With this collaborative self-study, our aim was to make our teaching practices and thinking behind why we operate in the classroom as probationary faculty members public and open for critique. We desired to reflect and learn about our teaching practices, specifically encouraging each other to maintain a practitioner focus amid an ongoing transition to academia. A central question we considered when designing this study about our teaching was “What does the story tell and what purpose does it serve?” (Loughran, 2010, p. 223).

Collaboration was important to this project as Hamilton and Pinnegar (2013) suggest it is a key component to self-study. We chose to incorporate similar collaborative self-study tenets for our work as Tidwell and Staples (2017) suggested: “(1) engagement with students and/or other educational professionals, (2) professional relationships across colleagues, and (3) involvement in a professional community that encouraged deeper understanding of their practice, and ultimately impacted their view of the students they served” (p. 92). Upon examining our teaching practices and receiving feedback to improve via this collaboration, we sought to understand the depth of our practices and the practitioner experiences upon which they are grounded.

Literature Review

Since the establishment of the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices Special Interest Group of the American Education Research Association in 1993, self-study research has evolved and become an important scholarly endeavor, where participants actively question their

knowledge through a thorough investigation of their practices (Vanassche & Keltermans, 2015) providing insights into their own practice to elicit understanding and possible change (Bullock & Ritter, 2011). A variety of methods are integral to the success of self-study as a practice (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Feldman et al., 2004; Laboskey, 2004; Loughran, 2010); however, concerns include the perceived inability to build upon previous research (Vanassche & Kelterman, 2015). Indeed, while Bullock and Ritter (2011) explored the transition into academia through collaborative self-study, the current study considers the experiences of two junior faculty members approaching the next academic milestone: tenure.

According to Vanassche and Kelterman's (2015) review of existing self-study literature, there exist three purposes of self-study: "the use of qualitative research methods; collaborative interactions are constitutive for the research process; and its validation is based on trustworthiness" (p. 512). While numerous studies have been completed in single disciplines (e.g., Dismuke et al., 2019; Fontenot et al, 2012; Ritter et al., 2019; Welk & Thomas, 2009), self-study research may also be accomplished through transdisciplinary groups (Samaras et al., 2014).

The role of critical friend is crucial to self-study (Bambino, 2002; Ritter et al., 2019; Schuck & Russell, 2005; O'Dwyer et al., 2019; Samaras, 2011). "A critical friend acts as a sounding board, asks challenging questions, supports reframing of events, and joins in the professional learning experience" (Schuck & Russell, 2005, p. 107). The discussion with critical friends can make you aware of blind spots and also to re-examine previously held notions to improve practice (Samaras et al., 2014). Incorporating critical friends in previous research has highlighted the importance of bi-directional examination of what may be otherwise unquestioned beliefs and practices among discussants (Loughran & Brubaker, 2015; Nilsson, 2013).

Dinkelman (2003) found that the results of self-study provide a focus for future growth and immediate impact on the current issue in the study. Finally, "an important outcome of this work has been identified as the construction of an explicit pedagogy of teacher education and the growth in practice that follows from this critical self-examination" (Vanassche & Keltermans, 2015, p. 509).

Context of the Study

The two authors are colleagues at the University of Northern Iowa, a regional comprehensive university. We both teach graduate courses in the same department but in different pre-professional programs. With a combined enrollment of over ten thousand students, our university serves a majority of in-state students with an emphasis on preparing students for success after graduation as evidenced by its high undergraduate and graduate job placement rates. Due to its undergraduate emphasis, the university embraces a scholar-practitioner model requiring excellence in teaching while placing a strong value on peer-reviewed scholarship. Prior to COVID-19, some of our university's classes were offered face to face and others online, however in one author's graduate program, all courses were previously delivered face to face.

Personal history is an important part of self-study methodology (Samaras et al., 2004). As former practitioners, we take pride in our ability to share our personal experiences with the aspiring professionals we teach and mentor. Although both of us had received positive feedback from students on end-of-course evaluations, we knew that teaching is highly valued as a part of the tenure and promotion process, particularly over time. As we settled into our roles as professors, we desired to continue improving as instructors, so we decided to begin a systematic process of providing feedback to each other. Prior to this project, we relied upon occasional

evaluations from department administrators and peers required by the annual evaluation process as our sole source of instructional feedback.

We represent a range of experiences as learners and educators. Dr. Schmid, an assistant professor of postsecondary education, and more experienced of the two, does not consider himself to be a digital native. All of his undergraduate and graduate coursework was delivered face to face. Dr. Townsley, also an assistant professor, has previous experience teaching online, and previously worked with K-12 classroom teachers in digital literacy. In addition, the majority of Dr. Townsley's experience as a graduate student involved some type of distance/remote learning modality.

As professors on the tenure track, we sought to connect our teaching with scholarship in a meaningful way that was mutually beneficial. We did not want to teach for the sake of teaching without reflecting upon its effectiveness. Similarly, we wanted our scholarship endeavors to support what our university values the most: teaching. Kitchen et al. (2008) suggest the purpose of self-study is to simultaneously enhance teaching and scholarship practices, therefore we selected this form of research to frame and support our pedagogical improvement efforts.

We will first describe the method of the study including data collection and analysis. Findings will follow including the four central themes that were discovered. Finally, our discussion will center on five reasons that participating in a self-study is helpful for faculty members, closing with implications and plans for future research.

Method

Data Collection

While "self-study researchers draw on a variety of research traditions in their work, including action research, ethnography, narrative inquiry, and other, mostly qualitative,

traditions" (Bullock and Ritter, 2011, p. 173), our data collection included common elements of self-study including observations, meeting notes, and reflection (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001) with storytelling also an important element of our conversations (Loughran, 2010).

We met bi-weekly, resulting in a total of fourteen meetings. The process for our meetings, questions, and reflections included the following:

1) Questions were prepared before each meeting (after the first meeting, as a result of discussion and reflection after the previous meeting)
2) Leadership of the meeting went back and forth between the two of us
3) Notes were taken by both participants during each meeting
4) After the meeting, each of us reflected on the discussion and sent this reflection to the other person for review and feedback
5) Feedback was offered and again reflected upon / responded to by the initiating individual
6) Questions were then developed for the next meeting based on this feedback and reflection

The discussions were allowed to travel to different places, depending on the current occurrences in each of our classes. This allowed the opportunity to look at all aspects of our teaching and faculty experience. We often reflected on our past experiences and their impact on our teaching and work as faculty members. In addition, our intent was to continually improve as faculty members, providing an overall focus for our meetings and project.

Our reflections were such an important piece of this work, and the back-and-forth communication of the reflections was also important. As an example, during one of his reflections, Dr. Schmid had commented that "I think that my preparation takes on so much more

the method then the content." Dr. Townsley followed up with written comments that this experience "parallels my experience, too. And you're right...teaching a class for the first time (and/or creating one) in an online environment can be an uphill battle." These comments were then discussed in the next meeting. In this way, there was constant reflection, and similar to O'Dwyer et al. (2019), "we used the reflections and reviews to scaffold the deliberation and discussion" (p. 148).

Meeting time was also utilized after course observations. Classes were observed a total of nine times during the academic year. Feedback notes with questions were created during each observation and shared with the teaching individual within 48 hours. These notes were then reflected upon and incorporated into the next meeting for discussion and further reflection. Throughout this academic year, we challenged each other through open, broad, conversations and topics.

From each meeting and subsequent reflection, themes began to emerge, in addition to moments of epiphany. These complications, tensions and fresh perspectives lend themselves to the self-study methodology (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). As these moments and high points surfaced, they were highlighted for later discussion and consideration in data analysis.

During this self-study partnership, we served as critical friends for each other's practice. This started from the beginning with the development of expectations for each other in this role in line with suggestions from Schuck and Russell (2005). The expectations included honest, specific, direct feedback that was timely; offering a balance of challenge and support; an opportunity for venting that was not related to the self-study; and a focus on the relationship aspect of the self-study.

Data Analysis

All observation notes, meeting notes, and reflection notes were combined into one file, organized chronologically, and then coded and categorized in a twostep process. First, one author went through and created initial coding resulting in themes. This coding was then reviewed with the second author, where we discussed our "practice through themes relevant to the group" as suggested for self-study methods (Feldman et al., 2004, p. 969). The final step was reviewing and confirming themes as the most central components of our study. Thick descriptions and an audit trail composed of codes, descriptions and quotes were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the data (Nowell et al., 2017). In order to provide "clear and detailed descriptions of how we constructed the representation from our data" (Feldman, 2003, p. 28), Table 1 depicts the initial codes and final themes, coupled with representative quotes derived throughout data analysis.

Table 1: Coding Link to Themes

Initial codes	**Final Theme**	**Representative Quote**
Art vs. science of teaching Engagement vs. entertainment value in teaching Factors inhibiting vs. discouraging class discussion	Balancing people and pedagogy	Dr. Townsley calls himself "an introvert entertaining on a Monday night"
Supporting students Trust between each other	Relationships matter with students and among faculty members.	"Added benefit to this project is having another person I feel comfortable asking questions about all of the other "higher education" and "department" stuff."
Practitioner to professor Practitioner influence	Practitioner experiences serve as an unshakable teaching influence	"So much of what I think about teaching, I'm realizing, comes from my background in K-12 education. When I've talked about teaching with my colleagues in the past, there's

		a certain amount of common language we share. I'm finding that even though Dr. Schmid was not a teacher by trade originally (hello, housing!), he knows A LOT about teaching "
Motivation for this project Publishing: How and why?	Scholarship, hindrance or helpful, drives our work	"This has been the first time that I am truly excited about a research piece. I am hopeful...and plan on...this becoming a definite defining element of my scholarship in the present and future."

Findings

In these findings, we seek to provide an "inside look at participants thinking and feeling" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 19). The themes represent the most consistent and prevalent discussion items throughout the yearlong process. At the onset, we recognize that one limitation of our approach is that our teaching experiences are a single occurrence and with graduate (masters and post-masters) students only. Indeed, this careful connection to the individuals involved and our context fits one of the criteria for a self-study (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). After one academic year of regular meetings, reflections and analysis, our story is about balance, relationships, the heavy influence of our practitioner background, and that scholarship drives our work.

Balancing People and Pedagogy

Not surprisingly, the practice of teaching was a central cornerstone in our discussions. However, the practice of teaching centered around three dichotomies: art vs. science of teaching, engagement vs. entertainment, and inhibiting vs. discouraging discussion, all which sought to balance our fluctuating desire of prioritizing people or pedagogy.

Art vs. Science of Teaching

This concept was first noted in month two of our self-study, and then reiterated frequently during our conversations and reflection. As Dr. Townsley wrote, In the K-12 world, we talk about the *teacher to student relationship* (the "art" of teaching, if you will) being something that cannot be as easily taught (when compared to pedagogy, the "science" of teaching)." The art of teaching involves the theater aspect of engagement and entertainment as opposed to the mechanics (science) of teaching from lesson planning to lecture and class organization (Marzano, 2018). Both of us reflected on the importance of the art of teaching, but Dr. Townsley had experienced education classes teaching us how to teach. Further, Dr. Schmid teaches a class on "Teaching in College," and this self-study allowed him to incorporate elements from that class and bring this project into the classroom, which provided a dual benefit. As we continued in our discussions, it was apparent that we both considered the mechanics (science) of teaching but focused more on the art of teaching, which resulted in our next conflict.

Engagement vs. Entertainment Value in Teaching

The two concepts of engagement and entertainment were frequently discussed in our conversations and subsequent reflections. Dr. Townsley referred to himself in his reflections as "an introvert entertaining on a Monday night," while Dr. Schmid talked consistently about how to engage students. However, where do the two concepts intersect? Conversations centered on how long a class should go before interaction and the use of humor to bring smiles to the students' faces. This tension continued to the end of the academic year with no clear conclusion, just an acknowledgement that these two concepts were intertwined and important in our teaching practice.

Factors Inhibiting vs. Encouraging Class Discussion

The final dichotomy in this area was how we both inhibit and encourage discussion in our classes. At first, we described what student engagement looks like in our classes, however the conversation went deeper to include specific classroom practices. One discussion point noted numerous times in our data analysis was the amount of time that students had to respond before the instructor moved on. As a result of this frequent observation and reflection, both of us made changes in our teaching that seemed to encourage more discussion in our classes. We also processed ways that we could change where we believed that we inhibited discussion, often due to the organization of the course or time issues that challenged us based on the content set to be delivered during the class session.

Relationships Matter with Students and Among Faculty Members

While we sought to improve our working relationship at the onset of the self-study, the concept of relationships was more frequently multifaceted. First, the relationships that we build with students. This is evident in the feedback that we offered after observing each other teach, and in the ways that we discussed our students or class sessions. As Dr. Townsley wrote in his reflection, “Relationships, relationships, relationships - Dr. Schmid depends on them, does a heck of a job with it, and should continue to do so.” This aspect was again not a surprise based on what we knew of each other before the self-study, but it was more than confirmed during our self-study.

The second and more important aspect of relationships was the relationship developed between the two of us. Going into the self-study, we noted expectations of simultaneously supporting and challenging each other, being vulnerable, and trusting one another. Yet, both of us expressed a sense of anxiety about our classroom instruction being observed by the other person. As the self-study continued to evolve, the relationship appeared to be strengthened. In

the second month of the self-study, Dr. Schmid noted that the personal connection between us was the largest benefit from our time together. In addition to the personal connection, Dr. Townsley wrote that an "added benefit to this project is having another person I feel comfortable asking questions about all of the other 'higher education' and 'department' stuff." Dr. Schmid wrote that "our conversations are focused on teaching and effective practice, but I am always amazed by where they go. It is always engaging, entertaining, and educational - the 3Es!"

The importance of this built relationship should have been obvious to Dr. Schmid as relationships are important to him in general. He consistently maintains contacts with a large number of former students, former colleagues and friends. Dr. Townsley also values relationships but is the more introverted of the two of us, so the breadth of relationships was not as large. This built relationship is now one based on trust, professional involvement, and friendship and has continued to be important as this project was discussed with other faculty in the department and the students in our classes.

Practitioner Experiences Serve as an Unshakable Teaching Influence

Both of us teach in fields in which we were previously practitioners. However, neither of us had processed the ways in which our past professional experience impacted the way that we approach teaching. Throughout our discussions and reflections, remarks about style and what we pulled into the classroom stemmed from our skills, experiences, and philosophies in the field. While Dr. Townsley was originally a teacher, it does not mean that it was his only basis for the classroom, as his experience as an administrator also was incorporated into the classroom. As Dr. Townsley stated,

> so much of what I think about teaching, I'm realizing, comes from my background in K-12 education. When I've talked about teaching with my colleagues in the past, there's a

certain amount of common language we share. I'm finding that even though Dr. Schmid was not a teacher by trade originally (hello, housing!), he knows A LOT about teaching.

Additionally, Dr. Schmid discussed that he "continue{s} to think about our basis for teaching as well - so much of mine comes from an administrator side, but also the student focused side that you have to have in student affairs." A search process was held during our self-study for another faculty member in the student affairs program. Dr. Schmid was "curious about other professionals and how they have developed their styles of teaching when combined with their student affairs practice." A deeper examination demonstrated how his supervision skills were echoed in the classroom. Supervision skills involved setting clear expectations, discussing how evaluations (grading) would be facilitated, developing a trusting relationship, and how organization played a role in all of this. In the end, Dr. Schmid's written teaching philosophy aligns with Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seven principles, but it was developed further with these supervision concepts in mind.

Scholarship, Hindrance or Helpful, Drives our Work

Publication is an important element of tenure, particularly at our regional comprehensive university. Our analysis included several discussions around feeling the tension around tenure and promotion scholarship requirements. Comments ranged from a focus on the 'process of publishing' to the concerns about the challenges inherent with the publication process. Scholarship had not been an exciting part of the position for Dr. Schmid. He stated early in the self-study that "this has been the first time that I am truly excited about a research piece. I am hopeful...and plan on...this [self-study] becoming a definite defining element of my scholarship in the present and future." As this project wrapped up, both of us discussed how reflective self-

study of our teaching can be continued in the future by inviting additional pre-tenure faculty members and therefore increasing our ability to offer and receive feedback to and from others.

Dr. Townsley summarized our semester during our last meeting by connecting what we had been talking about for a year, "So, the big *aha* is that we're both motivated to teach / research when the content is, in our minds, enjoyable." This quote summarizes the tension surfaced by the self-study related to entertainment, relationships, the influence of our past positions, and how scholarship requirements influence our professional lives.

Discussion

In this section we will first respond to our research questions and then discuss five benefits of participating in a self-study for tenure track faculty. We conclude by offering our plans for the future in the area of self-study.

Response to Research Questions

This self-study sought to answer two research questions. The first question was, "Utilizing critical friend feedback and relationship building, how can teaching practices of two tenure track faculty members be improved?" This question was answered in several ways. First, we examined our pedagogy and realized the opportunities for improvement through our discussions and reflection. We concur with Anderson et al. (2020) who discussed that good teachers care about the discipline, teaching and learning, and students. We were able to challenge each other to think more deeply about our pedagogy, including feedback discussions after course observation and our impact on students. As an example, Dr. Schmid observed the participation level of students in Dr. Townsley's classes and questioned the purpose behind pedagogical techniques. This feedback was utilized by Dr. Townsley to go back and review his preparations for upcoming class sessions and incorporate further engagement opportunities for

his students. Second, we were able to incorporate teaching practices into lessons, or borrow activities from one another to incorporate into our own classrooms. As an example, Dr. Townsley had a student self-assessment that he utilized in an observed class that Dr. Schmid was able to borrow and utilize in his next class session. Third, we were able to incorporate reflection into all aspects of the project. We found "the value of self-study [is] when teachers see what they know through reflections about their practice" (Clavijo, 2016. p. 7) and also found how connected reflection with education provided us with valuable insights (Dinkelman, 2003). Finally, as discussed in the findings section, the relationship built between the two of us was extremely strong and has benefited us not just personally, but also as it has strengthened departmental bonds and relationships. Similar to Samaras et al. (2014), "we particularly appreciated being able to learn from each other and discovering unexpected zones of connectivity and relationships" (p. 127).

The second question was "What practitioner experiences from our past are utilized in current teaching practice?" This was an interesting discussion point that was not necessarily apparent early on in our self-study meetings. We were both aware that we were practitioners and would bring into this project several skills and abilities from our pre-faculty days. However, the opportunity to be observed and then reflect on this allowed Dr. Schmid to be able to realize how much of his role as an administrator had an impact on his pedagogical practice. This experience also allowed Dr. Townsley to think about his skills both as an administrator and K-12 teacher, and how both sets of skills were demonstrated in the collegiate classroom. Admittedly, this question needs further examination with other participants in future studies to fully demonstrate the range of skills that can be incorporated into collegiate teaching abilities.

Five Reasons Participating in a Self-Study is Helpful for Tenure-Track Faculty

While a self-study benefits the participants through reflection leading to improved pedagogical practices (Bullock & Ritter, 2011), we believe it also has the "potential to trigger further deliberations, explorations, and change by other educators in their contexts" (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 1170). As such, we offer five reasons tenure-track faculty ought to consider participating in a self-study stemming from the themes in our project.

Feedback is Received That is More Than a Yearly Process from a Tenure Committee or Evaluation System

Our experiences with faculty evaluation systems are cyclical in that probationary faculty are observed by a tenure and promotion subcommittee in the fall, receive a feedback letter from them several months later, followed by evaluation letters from department heads and other administrators several more months after that. This feedback, while often helpful, is frequently delinquent as it relates to classroom application and based only on a single class observation. Indeed, one barrier to faculty pedagogical change is the time needed to deeply reflect upon teaching (Brownell & Tanner, 2017). The self-study process allows faculty to receive feedback within a shorter time period, incorporate the feedback into class sessions, and then receive feedback on those enhancements, all within the same semester. Through this formative feedback from a colleague, we were able to try out new teaching strategies and receive feedback on them in an efficient way by a more objective nonparticipant.

Enhanced Trust Creates Deeper Pedagogical Feedback

An enhanced level of personal and professional trust was developed in our self-study, which enabled both participants to challenge one another differently than they may have been able to before. Because we met frequently and observed each other teach, greater trust allowed us to examine deeper aspects of our teaching that may not have otherwise surfaced. While the

purpose of a self-study is to improve participants' pedagogy (Bullock & Ritter, 2011; Hamilton, 2019), we were only ready to receive and act upon the feedback because of the many hours we spent together observing, reflecting, and raising questions of each other. The resulting impact is that we were able to truly improve our pedagogy in ways that would not have been possible without the self-study experience. We echo Lunenberg and Samaras (2011), who wrote that "receiving and offering honest, yet constructive, feedback that moves beyond technical advice and pushes the researcher to question how his or her research efforts might be interpreted by those involved in the study" (p. 847) was most beneficial to this project.

As an example, during the first observation of Dr. Townsley's teaching, observations centered on certain techniques that he utilized, and there was little challenge present to looking at alternatives. In addition, questions were often surface level and included asking about teaching style, responses to student questions, or working with his co-instructor. During the last observation and as the trust continued to develop, the challenge involved asking why a certain technique was utilized, duration of lecture versus discussion, and why interactions were completed with a certain student. The change in the tone of the observation differed as well - due to the trust, there was less sugar-coated positivism, and a more realistic observation of what was occurring. Dr. Townsley wrote in one of his later reflections that Dr. Schmid's "feedback and speaking to me was especially helpful given what I felt was a lackluster class session last week. To me, this is a BIG part of our ongoing collaboration. Mutual encouragement and a norm of transparent reflection." Without the developed trust, this would certainly not have occurred. Finally, tenure-track faculty members in the early years at a new university are advised to develop strong relationships with their colleagues (Haviland et al., 2017; Solem & Foote, 2004) and as such, may benefit from purposeful time spent together through self-study.

Connection Between Scholarship and Teaching is Enhanced

Research expectations on faculty members can impact how they feel about themselves as teachers (Bullock and Ritter, 2011). Simply put, scholarship is the least favorite part of the faculty position for Dr. Schmid; however, this project allowed him to find passion in scholarship because of its tie to teaching. This project also connected two thirds of the evaluation areas in a faculty position providing greater growth within each of us. As Dr. Schmid stated, "I firmly believe that we are going to be able to use this for research, but also have already used it in our practice...the art of teaching!" The connection to the next self-study was also noted during our conversations with Dr. Townsley discussing his desire

> to take more of a backseat approach (continue to learn and reflect for the sake of improving my teaching) without thinking so much about the publication/writing side of the self-study, which (as I think about it now) may have sidetracked me a time or two during this year.

Finally, scholarship and teaching can coexist in this singular project, which both makes it easier and more exciting.

Relationships Developed Through the Process Extend Beyond What Goals Were Originally Determined

Faculty relationships with colleagues is an important factor in satisfaction with their current institutions (Pifer et al., 2019). Prior to this self-study, the two of us had a collegial relationship. Our interaction primarily consisted of hallway conversations, department meeting deliberations, and college-wide event attendance. At the beginning of the self-study, Dr. Schmid listed as one of his expectations that the relationship would be valued along with the process. What neither one of us could have anticipated was how both our working and personal

relationships would drastically improve. Dr. Townsley discussed the ease with which we both now ask each other for assistance with work tasks or about campus processes as we understand them individually. However, Dr. Schmid values the personal connection formed. These relationships will continue into our next self-study and beyond, providing a strong foundation for not only ourselves, but as improvement to department relationships as well.

Connections Are Found in Regard to Teaching Style and Past Experiences Both In and Out of the Classroom

Entering this self-study, both of us felt that we were effective in preparing our students for work in our respective fields. However, what became apparent during this study was that the way in which we prepare students through our teaching is heavily influenced by our personal history, (Samaras et al., 2004) which for us is our practitioner experiences. Dr. Schmid stated after the first few months that he "truly believe(s) that our article is going to end up stemming from practitioner to teacher style: how much do we pull into our classes that come from what we did as practitioners." His supervision experience with RAs played a heavy role in the way that he organized his classes, built relationships with his students, and evaluated their work. Dr. Townsley also shared the challenges in the transition from our past when he stated that "I get too tunnel in my vision, which may come from being a district administrator - often focused on outcomes and not enough on process." Regardless of the field from which a professor enters higher education, we believe that their pedagogy will be impacted by their professional background. Ultimately, fulfilling our (practitioner-minded) purpose as faculty members enabled us to better understand our roles as academics (Strong et al., 2021). Indeed, participating in a self-study enabled us to more clearly understand how our professional backgrounds influenced our teaching style.

We feel that the aforementioned reasons provide great encouragement for other practitioners to enter into a self-study. We hope that another person's experience would be as enriching as ours provided to us and that we have provided some opportunities for generalizable learning, as Dinkelman (2003) suggests. In particular, academics and practitioners alike are experiencing radical change resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, and self-study can assist in examining teaching practices "with a view to transforming our practice and redefining education" (Berry & Kitchen, 2020, p. 123). We do caution you to read up on self-study literature and gain knowledge prior to entering into the project, as that will only ground you further in the learning that such a project can provide.

Future Considerations for Self-Studies

One of the methodological considerations for conducting a self-study is to "consolidate understanding and suggesting new avenues for research" (Bullock & Ritter, 2011, p. 173). While this self-study was an outstanding experience for both of us, there are several important changes that we would encourage others to make when undertaking a self-study. First, be ready to be flexible. While we had planned to observe each other teach more class sessions than we were able to complete, schedule conflicts, a global pandemic, and issues with recording processes for online classes created challenges that we did not initially anticipate. Second, be as specific as possible in meeting and reflection notes. When reviewing notes at the conclusion of a self-study, details will make coding a smoother process. Finally, we benefited from setting up expectations including critical friend norms (Fahey, 2011) and intentions for participating. We would encourage revisiting and revising norms on a regular basis.

Plans for the Future

As this self-study concluded, plans for the next one were already in place. During the following academic year, two more junior faculty members were recruited to participate in a group discussion and combined observations. The involvement of new self-study participants will require us all to co-create new norms and re-establish our intentions. We both hope to lead the new self-study but continue to receive valuable feedback and skills to continue to improve our teaching. In order to address a common concern regarding self-study methodology's inability to build upon previous research (Vanassche & Kelterman, 2015), our intent is to lead a self-study group every academic year and allow for others in our department to receive valuable feedback, gain deeper relationships, and an outlet for scholarship opportunities.

Conclusion

This self-study created stronger relationships, a focus on pedagogical improvement, and connections between scholarship and teaching. In addition, we realized how our past experiences have impacted our current pedagogy in the classroom. We look forward to our future self-studies and hope that other tenure-track faculty members will also be inspired to undertake their own self-study.

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