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Book Review

**Polyvocal Professional Learning Through Self-Study Research
by Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan and Anastasia P. Samaras (Editors)
Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense, 2015. 266 pp.
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The editors of *Polyvocal Professional Learning Through Self-study Research*, Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan and Anastasia P. Samaras, are teacher educators involved in transdisciplinary self-study research communities in two different countries, South Africa and the United States of America. The main theme of their book—best described by the title of the first chapter, “The Power of ‘We’ for Professional Learning”—is collaboration between colleagues during self-study research. The book is composed of 13 chapters and offers a comprehensive collection of reports on self-study projects that involved collaboration between the participants. The focus is on “methodological inventiveness” (p. 16) and it presents a wide range of methodological inventiveness with regard to self-study, and examines different approaches from a variety of perspectives and contexts. In Samaras’ words: “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” (p. 6).

The book invites readers to critically engage with the confluence of creativity and inquiry in a variety of different research interests. Different chapters provide good examples of diverse studies as each group of researchers tell their stories; they reveal the variation in processes that resulted from the different emphases placed on creative ways to explore research problems. The chapters are united by their focus on collaboration in self-study research; however, through the many quotes, the reader is able to hear the individual participants’ ideas and voice. Each chapter offers insight into practices that evolved from the narratives of the research partners. Furthermore, all chapters were peer reviewed and these respondents are acknowledged as chapter consultant to each chapter.

A number of the chapters provide an array of experiential explorations that touch on some methodological, ethical, and validity concerns about the processes of participatory self-study research. Issues addressed include the importance of relationships (pp. 42, 53), a framework (p. 42), reflection (pp. 35, 42, 118), the usefulness of technology (p. 96), trustworthiness (pp. 1, 44), validity (p. 24, 121, 191, 207), and processes of data analysis (p.102). These chapters advance scholarship on self-study through their positioning of a range of non-linear research processes that challenge the critique against self-study research methodologies.

Among the strengths of this book is the range of examples it provides, allowing for theoretical and critical engagements with applied research by scholars. Its exploration of the applied studies offers a sense of lived experience that expands our understanding of self-study research. The way the different authors explore professional learning through self-study closes the gap between theory and practice.

The authors strive and succeed to share personal experiences of who they are, and where they come from. This offers a demonstration of the systematic progress of theory and practice—particularly how they reinforce one another.

The most outstanding strength of this collection is its exploration of a broad range of applied approaches to self-study and its inclusion of a variety of collaborative groups that studied a variety of topics. The chapters are designed to be in dialogue with each other, and the conversation that the book affords enriches our critical engagement with self-study. The dialogue that the book generates arises from the variety of approaches to self-study and the individual experiences of researchers and professionals from diverse contexts, reflecting a variety of perspectives on self-study research projects.

This book contributes extensively to the knowledge base of experiential and participatory research approaches as demonstrated below.

Chapter 1 (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras) displays the power of “We” for professional learning and underlines the importance of the researchers’ interaction with others and reciprocal learning that are key to polyvocal professional learning. This chapter illustrates how the authors utilised dialogue with one another as a method in itself.

Chapter 2 (Evans, Ka’ōpua, & Freese), titled “Work Gloves and a Green Sea Turtle: Collaboration in a Dialogic Process of Professional Learning,” describes an arts-based project where the authors engaged in individual and collaborative reflection in a narrative inquiry while they were in a mentorship relationship. They utilised personal artefacts as self-study research tools to become more critically reflective of their personal and professional philosophies and identities.

Chapter 3 (Berry, Geursen, & Lunenberg) reflects on “A Dialogue on Supporting Self-Study Research in the Context of Dutch Teacher Education.” It explores the professional development of teacher educators to provide insight into higher education. The researchers explain from different perspectives how being a teacher educator is multifaceted and culturally determined.

Chapter 4 (Gísladóttir & Guðjónsdóttir) describes “Confronting the Hearing Teacher in Deaf Education: Critical Friends in Self-Study.” The authors report on how they used retrospective data analysis to recall and reflect on how their thoughts, beliefs, and actions developed in a dialogue to support their understanding of their practices. This study explored innovative ways to respond to the cultural and linguistic resources of deaf literacy students in Iceland.

The writers of Chapter 5, Mitchell and Khan, explain in “Jackie and Me, Jackie and Us: Productive Entanglements and Learning Conversations in the Supervision Process” how learning conversations and cultural biography were used to generate reflexivity in the process of supervision. The study highlights the importance of events, relationships, and dialogue in finding meaning in one’s work and developing a research identity.

Chapter 6 (Gil de Lamadrid & Mendoza) explains how “A Technology-Enhanced Self-Study and Reversible Mentorship in a Modern Language Programme” influenced a mentor–mentee relationship through reflections on their online communication, which included a shared blog and e-mail communication. The researchers report on the growth of their relationship, which developed into a personal and truly bidirectional relationship that they labelled “reversible mentorship.”

In Chapter 7, named “Duality in Practice and Mentorship of an English Learner Instructional Coach,” Racines and Samaras report on a transformative self-study. In this study the personal history, memory-work, and photographic self-portraits of Racines were used to study the intersections and interplay of her culture on her teaching practices. Samaras was the critical mentor and they learned in a reciprocal manner to gain deeper understanding of their practices as teachers and facilitators of self-study research.

Chapter 8 reflects on “Creating a Culture of Inquiry in Music Teacher Education: Collaborative Self-Study Approaches in Music.” In this chapter, Stanley and Conway report on their self-study, and how their thinking about music teacher education was changed. They emphasise the fact that their perceptions about collaborative self-study in music education changed and that they realised that self-study is a meaningful, rigorous research methodology.

In Chapter 9, Pithouse-Morgan, Muthukrishna, Pillay, van Laren, Chisanga, Meyiwa, Moletsane, Naicker, Singh, and Stuart collaborate on “Learning about Co-Flexivity in a Transdisciplinary Self-Study Research Supervision Community.” The authors are participants in the Transformative Educational Studies (TES) project, a research-intervention project that aims to enhance self-study research and supervision across universities in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The chapter depicts their learning about collective reflexivity through poetry-based arts research and reflexive dialogues, and accentuates the impact of collaboration in self-study.

Chapter 10 (Johri) is entitled, “Multiple Narrators: Using Double Voice Poems to Examine Writing Personas.” The author, a creative writing teacher in Virginia, USA, explores her influence on the formation of the students’ personas and writing skills through poetic inquiry. Five double voice poems capture the experiential narratives of the students.

Chapter 11 captures the ongoing conversations of the authors in a co/auto ethnographic collaborative study. The descriptive title of the chapter, “Interweavings, Interfaces and Intersections: A Co/Auto-ethnographic Self-Study” by Timm and Conolly, reflects the authors’ personal memory, self-observation, self-reflection, and self-analysis that framed their writing. Both individual and collective insights into their personal and professional lives contribute to this informative self-study.

Chapter 12 focuses on “Integrating First, Second and Third Person Research to Lead the Creation of a Learning Organisation: A Self-Study Dialogue Between Doctoral Supervisor and Student.” The authors, Walton and Harrison, demonstrate how the use of dialogue in a self-study encourages reflection, which generates theories to influence practice. This self-study about supervisor–student interaction uses dialogue as a methodology and as a literary device to establish transformation.

In Chapter 13, “Breathing Under Water: A Transcontinental Conversation About the ‘Why’ of Co-Facilitating Transdisciplinary Self-Study Learning Communities,” the authors (Samaras, Pithouse-Morgan, Chisanga, Conolly, Constantine, Meyiwa, Smith, & Timm) discuss the use of poetry to present personal–professional conversations on the authors’ motivation to co-facilitate self-study learning communities in the USA and South Africa. These multiple perspectives invite other self-study scholars to add to the conversation about co-facilitating transdisciplinary self-study research for polyvocal professional learning.

As shown in the outline above, the chapters reflect a diversity of approaches, which makes the collection unique in its blending of diverse experiences. The book contributes to the international ongoing discourse of interactive theoretical engagement and performance for self-study

methodologies. In terms of its overall contribution, the collection presents new insights into the field of self-study and contributes to the practice of self-study research by drawing attention to a range of theories and practices that underpin self-study. The book has the potential to become an indispensable resource for experts and novice researchers in the field of self-study research, specifically with the focus on professional learning in teacher education as well as other related fields of qualitative research.