New Faculty Cross Borders Through Self-Study in Teacher Education: Global Horizons

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Abstract

This paper outlines findings from a self-study group's investigation of personal and professional experiences between four new education faculty members. Bringing diverse teacher education experiences from three different countries, the group is situated in a Canadian university undergoing a transition toward becoming a comprehensive institution in the competing global era. Three identified themes emerged: professional value, survival, and maintaining balance. Findings revealed that self-study allows participants to share information, identify issues, appreciate personal and professional life, enjoy being teacher educators, understand teacher education, console and support each other to survive in the initial years, and maintain a balanced professional life.

Introduction

Every fall, like clockwork, the recurring ritual of inducting new faculty into established academic programs takes place. The cycle of novice-to-expert begins again. Although varying from individual to individual and context to context, the anxious anticipation of a new journey in our professional lives, the uncertainty of our success in our new endeavour, and the overwhelming *newness* of becoming a part of a collegial community is an experience shared by all new faculty—an experience never forgotten. The first year is naturally a *learning experiment* regardless of the length of years served in academia, and the memories collected during our initiation are often later imparted to others in the form of advice, warning, and, at times, pure entertainment. The first year experience is truly an event to be celebrated and cherished, but also, to be survived.

Background

A unique challenge awaited new hires at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario. In the past five years, the university had undergone robust growth burgeoning from a campus of some 5,000–8,000 students to the present enrolment of approximately 17,000. Growing pains, such as lack of infrastructure to support students, change in university policies to accommodate a large student population, and addition of many new faculty members, were tension points felt throughout the university bureaucracy. Add university issues to a growing faculty emphasis on creating an identity as a learning faculty plus a departmental program review promising even more change to the situational context. The new hires in the Faculty of Education quickly became aware that they would be called upon to jump immediately into the necessary work rather than stepping in *one toe at a time* as recommended by our new faculty mentors. All members of the faculty were experiencing change—regardless of seniority.

We new hires were not hesitant. After all, we expected to carve out our own niche in the Pre-service Department so that our contributions could be valued while developing meaningful, satisfying, and successful careers. Achieving an objective such as this has never been simple.

How would we, as new faculty, develop this *professional value* within the evolving framework of a learning faculty?

Fortunately, there were a number of new tenure-track faculty members in the Faculty of Education who, by banding together, provided a voice to the concerns and issues. Through the use of self-study (Hamilton, LaBoskey, Loughran, & Russell, 1998; Loughran & Russell, 1997; Samaras, 2002) and a mutual sharing of personal experiences and challenges among eight of these newly-hired tenure-track faculty, four of us decided to hold additional meetings in order to explore the art of developing professional value within this evolving framework.

In this group, Peter, Candace, Shelley, and Chunlei were interested in discussing the topic of professional value and how that might be impacted by our various discipline specializations and our diverse, international backgrounds. At the time we began (2006), the senior member of the group was Peter, our specialist in Art Education methods. Peter had been teaching at Brock for 3 years and was additionally completing his doctoral dissertation. Chunlei and Candace were officially new hires as they accepted positions and arrived at the university the previous summer. Chunlei, one of our Health and Physical Education methods specialists, brought to the university a large research grant and several years of experience as an assistant professor at a research-intensive university. Candace, our Technology Integration specialist, was making the transition from her native Texas after several years of teaching at the university level in the southern United States. Shelley, also a new hire as one of our Music specialists, joined the group at mid-year after spending the fall crafting her dissertation to the polish and defend stage.

Methods

This study is situated within the self-study framework with the purpose of “developing a better understanding of particular pedagogical situations” (Hamilton et al., 1998). As each pedagogical situation is unique, full generalizability to other situations is not possible, nor expected; however, providing rich context descriptions by each participant researcher facilitates transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Kirkwood-Tucker and Bleicher (2003) suggest following guidelines from Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) in which quality self-study research also exposes “enough of one’s experiences and beliefs to reveal the relationships, contradictions, and limits of the views presented to enable readers to make connections to their own practice” (p. 205).

Samaras and Freese (2006) define self-study as “teachers’ systematic and critical examination of their actions and their context as a path to develop a more consciously driven mode of professional activity” (p. 11) for three purposes, “first, personal growth and development; second, professional growth and development, and third, classroom and school improvement” (p. 15). To ensure rigor of the process, we incorporated four criteria outlined by LaBoskey (2004, as cited in Samaras and Freese, 2006, p. 59) as essential for the correct practice of self-study:

- Self study is self-initiated and focused on self. Its goal is self-improvement, and it “requires evidence of reframed thinking and transformed practice” (p. 859).
- Self-study is interactive and involves collaboration and interaction with colleagues, students, and the literature “to confirm or challenge our developing understandings” (p. 859).
- “Self-study employs multiple, primarily qualitative methods” . . . which “provide us with opportunities to gain different and thus more comprehensive perspectives on the educational processes under investigation” (p. 859).

- Self-study requires that we “formalize our work and make it available to our professional community for deliberation, further testing, and judgment.” “Self-study achieves validation through the construction, testing, sharing, and re-testing of exemplars of teaching practice” (p. 860).

Data Collection

For new faculty, the opportunity to meet once a month and discuss pressing personal struggles or issues with teaching, scholarship, and service was to serve as a means of working together to negotiate the “three core concerns of early-career faculty: lack of a comprehensible tenure system, lack of community, and a lack of integration of their academic and personal lives” (Cox, 2004, p. 17). Over the initial 9 months of our first term, we kept individual reflective journals, documentation regarding our emails to each other containing insights/concerns, article suggestions, and other resources of interest, as well as collected notes regarding our individual and serendipitous comments during other meetings and informal sessions. However, the heart of the data collected for this research came from the in-depth and lively discussions in our monthly meetings regarding professional value. Topics ranged from developing a definition of professional value of a faculty member according to the community culture at this university to adapting teaching strategies specifically for this population of students. We brought to the table any issue that was currently impacting our professional value. Using these multiple data sources allowed triangulation by comparing across a variety of data to make connections and observe patterns.

Data Analysis

Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) state that “in the collection and analysis of data, it is sometimes hard to distinguish between when the collecting ends and when the analysis begins, for gathering and analysis are complementary, ongoing, and often simultaneous processes” (p. 85). The researchers, or participant researchers as in this research, serve as human instruments through which data generation and analysis occur; therefore, the process of data analysis began with the first meeting of the participant researchers. Over the months of meetings, we informally noted the themes and patterns we saw emerging from our discussions together. For the purposes of this study, each participant reviewed the transcripts of our meetings, their own personal reflection documents, and documented email correspondence to construct their own personal narrative case study report. Case study reports allow the researchers to present the reader with a thick description of the context surrounding the investigation so that “a setting with its complex interrelationships and multiple realities [is revealed] to the intended audience in a way that enables and requires that audiences interact cognitively and emotionally with the setting” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 85) is communicated clearly. The reports, as well as the transcripts from meetings, email, and other collected artefacts, were analyzed using a constant comparative analysis process across cases, in which data was unitized and sorted into emergent categories by assigning codes to each of the unitized data. Themes emerged from analysis of the categories. These themes and the coding process were cross-checked with all participant researchers to ensure credibility and trustworthiness of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Case Studies

The following four case studies, constructed from conversations, transcripts, reflection documents, and email correspondence, are shared here as a means to conceptualize our global perspectives within the context of the self-study group. Specific comments derived from these sources are embedded within the composed text.

Peter's Story

Peter brings to our self study group a wealth of rich experiences in Art Education methods, focusing on teaching and learning in the area of Visual Arts. He also brings an inside, transparent view to knowing and understanding the cultural and institutional perspectives of Brock University as Peter was born and raised in the city of St. Catharines with which the university is situated. This knowledge helps the other members of the self-study group position their understandings of coming to Brock, bringing different personal and professional experiences from a variety of global perspectives.

Peter, unlike the other members of the self-study group, often speaks about the multiple layers of complexity in knowing a place as a young child, growing up in the Niagara region, attending Brock as an undergraduate student, and then moving to Toronto at 22 years of age to pursue his Bachelor of Education degree at the University of Toronto. Thereafter, for a total of 15 years (10 years of public school teaching and 5 years as an Arts consultant), Peter lived and worked in Toronto. After being in Toronto for 16 years, he engaged in doctoral studies in Montreal, Québec, which was followed by a return to his home city of St. Catharines to pursue academic teaching and scholarly endeavours as a professor at Brock University. These varied experiences have offered Peter a different type of global perspective, than the rest of the self-study group, as he has come full circle, back to his roots.

Looking back on these 18 years, away from St. Catharines, Peter talked about the need at that time, as well as currently, to be surrounded by a larger art community. Being raised in a small, conservative, primarily white, middle-class city, Peter was striving to have more diverse, global experiences, and thus sought out the opportunity to study and work in the nearby city of Toronto. He describes how he went to the exact opposite context, moving from a small city to what the United Nations declared as the most multicultural city in the world. Indeed, this was a huge change. He had many worthwhile experiences, teaching for a number of years, students primarily of Chinese and Vietnamese backgrounds, which expanded his perspectives. During the time of his experiences as an Arts consultant in Toronto, Peter shared with the self-study group that the province of Ontario underwent massive changes in public education, with amalgamations of school boards and huge cuts in education. He spoke of his despair in working at one time as part of a team of 12 consultants in the Arts from across the five Metro-Toronto school boards. The number of members on this team was literally cut down overnight from 12 to three in the newly amalgamated Toronto District School Board. It was at this point that Peter began to question his ability to be able to continue in such a role with integrity, honouring his own professional value. Thus, he applied to enrol in doctoral studies. This appeared to be a great reprieve for Peter, as Montreal was rich in offering many opportunities for Visual Arts, as well as a whole new culture. He noted that the city and its emphasis on education has, “almost a European sensibility and cultural background coming through all levels of their operation.”

After having completed his doctoral residency at Concordia University, Peter was offered the opportunity to return home to assume a university teaching position in the same city in which he was raised. Upon returning to his home being surrounded by family, Peter often spoke about the challenges of surviving as an academic, trying to balance the juggling act of teaching and scholarship with personal and professional commitments outside the university. These experiences are very real for Peter as he is in his 4th year at Brock, striving to complete his doctoral dissertation writing.

Peter explained that his first 3 years at Brock were divided both personally and professionally. He eloquently shared that his personal and professional realities were split into

the culture of family and culture of the workplace. It was upon his return to St. Catharines, that his father became ill and passed away with cancer within a short time period. He explained that the culture of his family *exploded* with this loss in his family. Accordingly, Peter felt both a desire, as well as an obligation to support his other family members. During this most challenging emotional time, he found it very difficult to survive in the culture of the workplace. As he began to try to navigate his way back into the workplace, he explained that the two cultures, family and workplace, were always interchangeable for him during his first 3 years as a professor. He explained that, “There is often an unspoken hidden curriculum in the Faculty of Education and that’s what one is trying to explore.”

Speaking to the self-study group during the middle of a 6-month sabbatical in the beginning of Peter’s 4th year, he expressed that it is only now that he is beginning to focus on the culture of the workplace, striving to lead a balanced life. While his primary goal was to see his doctoral dissertation to completion, he shared his need for taking some time to reflect on the personal and professional challenges he has experienced over the past 3 years. In this sense, the opportunity for sabbatical provided a much needed break for him as well. He thoughtfully articulated that it was a chance to reflect on his professional value when he explained that it was a time to:

re-establish himself and reassure myself that I am where I should be because I was beginning to doubt that because I didn’t have a chance to actually think and say, “Am I really where I should be?” And now I am thinking, “Yes!” because I had the luxury of *time* which is what one does not seem to have when one is new in a tenure-track position.

With such reflections, Peter has been able to voice that the sabbatical opportunity has been profitable, both personally and professionally, leading him to continue to think about how to lead a balanced life, particularly in the areas of teaching, scholarship, and service within the university context.

Shelley’s Story

Shelley joined the self-study group mid-year, 2006–2007, as her appointment as an assistant professor began in January of 2007. Prior to moving to St. Catharines, Ontario, Shelley was working to complete her doctoral work at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. She joined Brock mid-year as her desire was to have a draft of her dissertation writing complete prior to commencing the appointment. She was happy to share that she was successful in doing so.

Shelley shared with the self-study group that although she is Canadian, she brings varied perspectives from different global regions within the country. It was a transition to grow up in a small, rural, fishing and farming community on the east coast of Prince Edward Island, complete a Bachelor of Music at the University of Prince Edward Island, become a public school teacher in a small city of about 12,000 people, and then 4 years later, move west across the country to Alberta to begin graduate studies in a city of approximately one million people. After having completed her Master of Education degree, she returned to her home province to teach another year with her school district before being seconded to the local university to teach for 1 year in the Department of Music. Upon her completion of this year, she shared with us that she thoroughly loved her experiences working with university students, so thus returned to Alberta to commence her PhD program, focusing in elementary music education.

During the year that Shelley returned to her classroom after her Master’s work, she explained that she was challenged to identify her own professional value. She felt a sense of frustration philosophically between how she was living out her reality as a teacher within the parameters of the classroom and her reflective practices as a previous graduate student. She

indicated that these two realities were not necessarily in line. She felt that it was challenging to talk with other teachers about some of the academic interests that she held. Thus, the opportunity to teach post-secondary was an exciting endeavour for Shelley. It was this opportunity that confirmed her desire to engage in doctoral studies.

In coming to Brock mid-year, Shelley explained that part of finding her own professional value was in trying to align her goals with other instructors who were teaching similar courses. There were routines and expectations in place by other part-time instructors and Shelley found herself reflecting on how to offer her own contributions within an existing, acceptable structure. She shared that these changes take time. One of her biggest challenges was being familiar with teaching Elementary Music Education methods, having approximately 40 hours of instruction in her teaching at the University of Prince Edward Island and the University of Alberta, and now coming to Brock and having 15 hours of instruction for her methods course. This was, and still is a huge conceptual change for her, which has challenged her to think about the professional value of the Arts within the larger program structure in the pre-service program. Shelley wonders, “How is post-secondary instruction in the Arts valued within this province and within this program?”

During her first 6 months of appointment, Shelley noted that an all consuming part of her time was in completing the final edits of her dissertation writing. In many ways, this can feel like a dark cloud hanging over one’s head. Although she felt accepted here within the Brock community, she noted that there is a subconscious acceptance into the life of academe when one is complete. She shared her enthusiasm of defending in August, 2007.

Speaking from her own experiences, she thoughtfully indicated that the notion of temporality helps to change our mode of survival as academics when we move to a new city, new province, and new place. Shelley expressed the challenges in moving somewhere new without any family or friends. As time passes, she shared that we somehow tend to continue to survive. There are many personal things to get in order when one moves. As these things began to fall in line for her, over time, she came to feel more comfortable. She explained to the group that a bright light for her being able to survive in this new academic context was the opportunities for collaboration. “This is a familiar culture to me,” Shelley articulated. In addition, however, she noted that, “Survival is a lifelong endeavour. I think in academia, we are always trying to keep surviving.” Because of the demands of our work, there is a constant attempt for this.

In trying to survive academically, it is a challenge to lead a balanced life, both personally and professionally. Professionally, Shelley talked about maintaining the balance of finishing the dissertation writing, while teaching, and attending to service expectations. She explained that we all could work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It’s important that Shelley makes regular time for fitness and for singing in a choir. These are ways that she attempts to maintain balance, outside of her academic life. Shelley further shared that now that she has completed the dissertation, she continues to think about how to maintain the balance between this piece of research and her larger research agenda. How does the subsequent writing and publication from the dissertation balance with other research interests?

In reflecting on the overall experiences Shelley has had thus far in the self-study group, she shared that it has been very rewarding and worthwhile for her. She noted that there are many rich perspectives within the faculty and working within the self-study group, she has been able to think more globally, as varied experiences are shared. Others in the group make her think about questions and possibilities that she might not have considered otherwise. Shelley talked of the

need for there to be opportunities for academics to talk openly about their feelings and experiences, allowing us to all acknowledge who we are, both personally and professionally. She shared that, “We need to have more space for those conversations which allow the honesty of who we are to come out.” Shelley also explained,

I think the self-study group has helped me to think about the importance of reflecting on our own practice and using that reflection to enhance our practice. I think it has also really helped me to continue to work with a collaborative community which is really important to me because academia can be really isolating and many of us are used to coming from cultures of schools where people work together and then you move into that position of writing on your own. . . I think for me, the collaborative work fuels me.

Chunlei's Story

With two masters' degrees, a PhD, and experiences working in seven different universities across China, Canada, and the US, Chunlei brings his rich expertise in combining health, culture, and education to the Brock Faculty of Education, and his experience with diverse cultural and educational philosophies to the self-study group. He (and his wife) joined the university community at the same time as Candace and three other new faculty members of the Pre-service Department, and has been participating in the self-study group as a means of situating himself within the workplace culture of Brock.

Chunlei speaks of his childhood in China before the Cultural Revolution. In his family, Chunlei was regarded as the child with the least potential; his oldest sister was recruited by universities because of her academic excellence; his other sister later became a university professor. Chunlei's father encouraged him to attend professional technical school because sending all three children to university would be financially difficult for the family—the family had to care for grandparents as well as educate children! Fortunately, Chunlei did not pass the exam to enter technical school and was returned to the regular high school. At this point, Chunlei found news in a newspaper about what was required to attend graduate school in university. He cut out that piece and stored it in a safe place but was hesitant to mention his dream to his father. He wanted to be a researcher—even if it meant going to university. So, Chunlei made a plan! In his plan, he would fill every spare moment of those 4 years with study so that he would succeed. He was expected to take the national entrance exam in order to qualify to enter graduate studies, and he was the first student in the history of his university's physical education department to pass the national exam and be accepted as a graduate! As Chunlei tells this part of the story, his face crinkles up into a broad smile and he chuckles as he says, “My father was so proud of me because at that time, it was rare to have that type of status.”

During his work in China, Chunlei received the Young Researcher Award of China and was honoured, along with his university president, at a ceremony in Beijing. It was at this time that Chunlei made a new plan—to experience the culture of overseas countries from the perspective of a professor. He travelled to the US where he began his career as a visiting professor and a graduate student all over again in a new culture. Four years later, he and his wife travelled to Canada where they began once more. Chunlei compares the professorial workplace culture of the three countries this way:

I did experience differences between East and West. Although it has changed in China now from what I experienced, my experiences as a Chinese professor meant that my duties were simply to teach. There was more time, and when we found that we had more time, we would do more. Here it was the opposite. Once I got to the [US] states, the working attitudes were different, more stressful, more competitive. Then, I moved to

Canada and found there were differences between the two countries—politically, economically, and culturally. In Canada, it is more relaxed, not too serious, very safe, and multicultural. I found all of these differences impacted my professorship.

Chunlei further explains that, because of his childhood experiences, he never imagined himself as being smart—there was so much more that he could learn. He describes professional value as the act of successfully completing a goal or learning challenge and the satisfaction that results from doing the job to the best of his ability. He speaks about the challenge that he and his wife undertook to move to the US and then again to Canada where they started at zero, cleared all the hurdles, and re-built. He feels as if they have successfully worked back to the standards they had previously established in China, so he is now ready for an additional challenge which he is currently finding in his research and working with the students. In fact, he glows as he talks about realizing that he enjoys teaching at the university level because of the personal satisfaction and value he feels when he observes his impact on the development of new teachers for our profession. One of the attractions of the pre-service program for Chunlei is the unique teaching environment that merges the subject matter knowledge of his discipline with the mentoring/apprenticeship relationship necessary to induct new teachers into teaching! He calls it “a beautiful act—that we can generate and share with future teachers.”

Appreciative is the term Chunlei uses to express how he feels about his experiences within the university setting that allow him to feel valued. However, the differences in the cultures have made it challenging. As he moved from the Eastern educational system to the Western system and then from the US to Canada, he survived by figuring out the language, how the system worked, the expectations, and appropriate procedures so that he could understand the type of effort needed for success; however, his own personal definition of success describes the professional world of academia in terms of being a learning process with teaching as a means of sharing that learning rather than as a competition to outperform others. Chunlei tells the story of the water and the wave as an example of how to survive successfully:

One day there are three waves—there are a lot of waves in the ocean and there is a little wave complaining, “I’m so tiny. I want to have a lot of money and a house but I’m too little.” Well, the tidal wave, who is pretty smart, says. “Hey, Little Wave, do you know who are you are?” “Well,” says Little Wave, “I’m a little wave.” “Ah, Little Wave. You are not a wave, you are water.” The moral is that you cannot just see only the shape or colour; you must see your nature. We should realize, we should remind each other all the time, that we are the same, big or small, so instead of competing, we are sharing.

Although survival and the search for professional value and performance have been huge concerns, of utmost importance to Chunlei is the maintenance of balance—the yin and the yang. He explains that in the Chinese culture, you are expected to take responsibility for your own health and well-being. In the Western culture, the pressure to perform is intense and personal well-being is often ignored. He seeks to constantly maintain this balance—between professional performance and his own health and relationships with his family, between eastern and western perspectives, and between the mixed feelings he has developed as a Chinese Canadian. To illustrate his point, he tells of a story from Buddhist philosophy where:

A man is being chased by a tiger who wishes to eat him! The man knows where a vine is that will help him climb up the cliff and away from the tiger. However, as he climbs, he realizes that there is also a rat chewing at the vine from the top of the cliff—certain impending peril! At that moment, the man sees a beautiful strawberry right next to him. He picks the strawberry and eats it, relishing in the juicy ripe taste! So that’s the end of

the story. This story tried to inform us to live in the moment. Don't think about the past; don't think about the future; think about the moment. The present moment, the mindfulness. . .

Chunlei makes it a point to negotiate the cultures in order to maintain balance so that he can feel professionally valued while satisfied personally. He further explains that the self-study group has been helpful because it has served as an opportunity for self-reflection and a safe place to confirm/disconfirm messages from the collective faculty. He states,

Without this space, you only hear occasional conversation and just little bits and angles of information. This never happened to me before, and I think it helps us feel and see more than ourselves—to help us organize as a whole, and it's powerful because are able to create a collective community voice and enjoy each other at the same time.

He has valued the experience because he feels that, through his participation, he has quickly gained colleagues with whom he feels a deep connection and a personal relationship that he would not have otherwise.

Candace's Story

Candace, a native Texan, came to Brock with 5 years of university teaching in her chosen field of educational technology and 20 plus years of teaching experiences in the Texas public schools as a librarian, music teacher, and K–6 classroom teacher. She teasingly describes her return to obtain her doctoral degree as her mid-life crisis, with her children growing up/leaving the nest and her husband approaching retirement, and as a rebellious form of sibling rivalry—all of her brothers are medical doctors and she tired of being the only one without a “Dr.” in front of her name. She admits that these were probably not the most rational of reasons for embarking upon such a drastic career adjustment, but she and her family undertook the adventure of *putting her through* anyway.

Having spent most of her teaching career in the public schools and several major universities in the southern United States, Candace felt confident that she could handle the typical differences in university and school cultures, but felt she would find cultural differences as major roadblocks. Imagine her surprise when she realized that there were few differences between the Canadian and US cultural or educational systems or basic school structures. Instead, she had two surprises in the actual university structures—a difference in governance and program philosophy about training teachers.

First, the workplace culture in the Brock Pre-service program worked through governance by committee! In the university structures in the South, the governance was handled by directives from administration with changes in your own area/program being handled through simple measures—not via committee, with approval from the full department. Methods for navigating the governmental committees in order to get things accomplished was an initial priority as the Educational Technology course that Candace was hired to teach had to be separated from the current Science methods class. Following proper protocol in a body so entrenched in protocol seemed, at first, slow and unresponsive; and yet, she felt that the participatory element of the process was more free and informative than the top-down administration to which she was accustomed! It was “simply a matter of learning the ropes and figuring out how to adjust them—something that would happen in time.”

The second surprise was the actual structure of the program. At Brock, the current philosophy that underscores program development is one in which training takes place in 8 months, with only 20 hours of instructional time per method course, after which students are introduced into the classroom for their practical experience. Candace had not participated in this

type of program before, even though she had taught technology workshops and courses to Alternate Certification programs—probably the most similar type of program in Texas for comparison purposes with the Brock Program. She had never participated in a program with such a short duration! Boiling down what would be of most importance to pre-service teachers about technology for use in their first practicum experiences was a monumental task. In her previous university courses that ran 60 hours, Candace had taken time to teach skills as well as integration uses of computer technology. A very different mindset would be needed to separate out the skill teaching from the integration teaching. Although surprising, Candace thoroughly enjoyed the process even though it was a challenging, time-consuming endeavour.

Therefore, survival in the first year became a matter for Candace of solving problems that impacted her teaching and the delivery of quality instruction to her students, while staying abreast of technological advances in her field so that instruction would be as current as possible. Finding satisfaction with teaching and service to the department were key components that Candace described as integral to her definition of professional value. However, she definitely felt a conflict between her definition and a new push from the university to become a research-intensive university. A solid plan for a program of research must be developed if tenure and promotion were to be obtained, and teaching and service would no longer be valued as highly from the tenure and promotion committee.

Candace explains that the self-study group became extremely important to her acculturation into Brock culture.

The consistent meetings allowed me to learn how to navigate the system, find out who to contact for answers, and provided a network of people to call if I had concerns. Without this support, it would have taken three times longer for me to feel comfortable working and collaborating here. The self-study group provided a safe space to ask questions, express opinions, talk about differences, and discuss methods for possible change. In addition, Candace credits the self-study group with helping her move towards a better system of balancing her professional needs and her personal life. The reinforcement from the self-study group focused on balance as essential to maintaining a “freshness in the work” and a healthy time for reflection. Candace felt it “was inspirational. I realize that the ideal situation would be to feel satisfied in my professional endeavours, but still have ‘me’ time, and I know from visiting with this group that these are common concerns. It’s informative just to hear how others manage this difficult juggling act.”

Emerging Themes: Transformation as Evidence of Impact

Answering the question, “What is professional value in this learning faculty?” is a task all new faculty members informally undertake. The difference for us, the four new members at Brock University who were participating in this small group, was the ability to meet together in a self-study group established specifically for the purpose of formally investigating this topic from our respective diverse, global perspectives.

Within the context of our global views, we began by constructing a definition of professional value at our new institution. We established the fact that professional value would need to be viewed from three perspectives: issues related to personal views of professionalism, issues related to departmental requirements for professionalism, and issues related to university-wide requirements for professionalism. Each of these three perspectives or levels needed to be addressed to compare and contrast our international backgrounds to find commonalities. With a clear understanding of the types of issues we would discuss, and to make sure there was rigor to our method, we documented how these discussions framed and reframed our thinking, or

transformed our thinking (Samaras & Freese, 2006) about our role as professors in an institute of higher learning. As we documented our transformation, we saw themes emerging that serve as evidence that the reflective process has impacted our skills and understandings.

Professional Value

We defined professional value as “creating an identity in a new position.” We recognized that this identity could vary from institution to institution, and we often found ourselves comparing procedures and policies here at Brock to those experiences with other universities. We have reframed our thinking from our previous experiences to align more closely to the expectations of the Brock University community. For Brock, we identified three components that would provide a sense of identity while satisfying the three perspectives or levels of professional value.

First, we all expressed the idea of a personal performance standard or set of benchmarks for performance. Peter described it as a form of *integrity* when he stated,

I have to wake up every morning and feel good about what I do—what I share and what I give to my students, to my colleagues, even my contribution to you as part of this self study group. And, I want to do what I think is right. . . . personal integrity is very important for me.

Candace described the need to “be satisfied that I perform to that standard of professor that I have concocted for myself personally” and Chunlei added that his idea of professor included one who was “both educating teachers (teaching) and advancing knowledge or understanding of expertise areas (research).”

“Putting the situation into perspective” was the process Shelley described, so that, as Peter added, “we see ourselves fitting into the world we live in—among our families, among our colleagues.”

A component of *satisfaction* was also evident in our discussions. Being able to do our jobs well provided a sense of satisfaction, so the time to perform with integrity in the areas of teaching, research, and service must be available. In our discussions, Peter asked,

How can we have integrity if we do not have a chance to reflect on what we are doing and how we are doing it? If we do not, we go through life with blinders on, only racing ahead, oblivious to the signs from those around us we love, who keep telling us that life is short.

Chunlei added, “You only have 24 hours a day. You are hired working 8 hours for 5 days in a week. You have no time to do research and writing for publication.” Each of the group members felt that time and satisfaction were closely intertwined. Candace called time “the enemy” and Shelley and Peter felt the pressure of carving out time specifically for writing time to finish their dissertations.

Setting performance standards that demonstrated integrity and finding satisfaction by having the time to perform to these standards were large pieces of professional value, but a final component of *currency* was evident. We all had chosen careers in higher education because of a driving need to stay on the cutting edge of the teaching profession. Candace referred to currency as possessing “21st century skills” that would “be a part of developing and improving our program.” We agreed that we were teachers, first and foremost, so the research issues and topics that appeal to us impact our own teaching and knowledge about best practices for teaching. Shelley observed that we sought to provide pre-service teachers with “meaningful . . . experiences that will lead them to feel competent and energized to then lead primary/junior children towards enhanced . . . understanding.” Only by working in higher education would we

have the opportunity to stay on that cutting edge and work with the novice members of our professional community. Chunlei added that he would not “work in an institution only requiring teaching or only requiring research. It had to be both . . . I see my status (e.g., social) reflecting my potential and expertise among our generation.”

Survival as the New Member in a Learning Faculty

Survival issues were uppermost in our initial meetings. Although we all discussed the overwhelming challenge facing new faculty moving to a new institution, Shelley wrote:

Aside from the job role, there are so many things to get in order when one is moving to a new place. Trying to figure out where I wanted to live in an unknown city was somewhat of a challenge. I also felt overwhelmed when I thought about the research that I needed to do to find a doctor, dentist, chiropractor, massage therapist, and optometrist. I needed to apply for Ontario Health (OHIP), change my driver's license, get new license plates—not to mention all the things I needed to do in Edmonton to get packed, arrange moving, and say my temporary good-byes. Again, the tasks were overwhelming. For me, when these personal concerns are not in order, it is difficult to be productive in a professional context. How is my professional value defined when I have so many tasks to focus upon? Where does my professional value fit? I had to consciously remind myself to breathe. It would fall in to place. I had to remind myself of the potential greatness of the opportunity that came my way.

With many of the personal issues resolved, next we were faced with other common challenges associated with being the new faculty member entering an established program. Chunlei listed the “immediate working factors (e.g., new courses, counselling group teaching, email system, administration, library)” that we commonly shared and then explained that working around the “strict rules regarding experience with supervising master's level students before supervising graduate students” would be challenging for the continuance and success of the large research project he was implementing. Candace also had specific issues with being responsible for developing course materials and requirements so that consistency across the team of five technology teachers would be maintained, regardless of who was teaching. Shelley explained the process as one of wanting “to align my goals with those of other instructors so that consistency was maintained across various sections of the course [being] mindful of the routine that was previously established by other faculty members and instructors.”

We all shared the idea that there was too much content to fit into the short instructional time allotted; and yet, that was how the program had been successfully working for years. Together, we discussed different techniques and teaching strategies that allowed us to “renegotiate how to distribute the content in less time,” as Shelley noted. Peter summed it up for all group members when he stated, “I felt like I just got the ball rolling and they leave me!” Having Peter in the group with three years experience with the program was invaluable. He had already worked through reframing his thinking about content and prioritizing content to meet the time frame, and although he still felt that the time was too short, he could share his strategies and success stories with us.

Understanding the policies and procedures for performing successfully in this faculty was important for survival of our first year experiences. In fact, a unique factor influencing the dynamics of this Faculty of Education was the growth in size of the faculty. Peter tells the story this way:

Four new faculty were hired in the pre-service department to start that year. Four new voices, four new perspectives on teacher education! We were up to eight new people in 2

years in the Pre-service department, and it was starting to show. At Pre-service department meetings, questions were being asked from every angle. Why is the format like this? Who designed that model? When was that developed?

The presence of 13 new faculty members over a period of 3 years brought “a strong influx of cutting-edge ideas and unexplored possibilities waiting to be tapped” into the mix, as Candace explained. “The tension between the push to improve and change brought in by new faculty and the homage paid to traditional, historical methods” changed relationships with others and how we sought professional value. Another challenge that would need to be survived! Peter commented that the “majority of my colleagues had been there for many years. They were proud of what they had worked hard at to establish—a reputable pre-service program with very high standards.” Together, we identified practical ways to combine our voices in order to be heard, which meant that we worked to reframe our questions and suggestions so that we presented ideas in a more respectful manner, always mindful of the work and improvements that had preceded ours, identified senior faculty to approach for support, and began planning collaborative projects/student assignments that could be duplicated by others wishing to do so. Understanding how to successfully work in this new context became easier simply because we used each other as a sounding board to work out ideas for best ways to work within the existing structure.

Living a Balanced Life

A final theme that emerged from our stories, reflections, and discussions was the need to live a balanced life while maintaining professional value. Together we discussed techniques for controlling the juggling act between our personal and professional lives. From things as simple as how to manage email effectively so that it does not take over one’s life to the more complex issues of advising graduate students or appropriate committee participation for tenure and promotion, we voiced our concerns related to exactly how balance could be obtained! Explaining the need for *balance* while living in the world of academia is difficult to those not directly involved in academia. Peter states:

When I look back, my job is consuming me. I try to make a conscious effort to find some sense of balance, but I always hear my family and friends say, “Peter, you better slow down!” I tell them I am trying but they just don’t understand my reality. No one in my family is or has ever been in academia, let alone teaching. I find it frustrating at times trying to have them understand the pressures I am under as a new, tenure-track professor, juggling many different coloured balls all at once. It is difficult for them to see what I see.

Therefore, achieving that balance was critical in order to live satisfying and productive personal and professional lives!

Very early in our discussions, we started listing the tensions in our professional lives that could easily fall out of balance. Chunlei compiled a list of challenges that we deal with on a daily basis in the professional world of Brock University, including the following balances:

- One’s personal life and professional life
- Expectations of teaching, research, and service
- Changing focus of the new and old mission of Brock (change in university from a focus on undergraduate teaching to that of a comprehensive research focus)
- Tensions between new faculty (hired with a focus on research) and veteran faculty (hired into a system with a teaching focus)

- Tensions between the Primary/Junior/Intermediate program groups and the Intermediate/Senior program groups
- Tension between the two departments in the Faculty of Education (e.g., graduate program, research culture of the grad/undergrad program and the counselling/teaching as scholarship focus of pre-service department)

How would we deal with balancing all of these needs? Peter expressed it for all of us when he remarked, “I need time to look back and think about what has happened. I think in our busy lives, we don’t do that enough. Balance is what is needed.” We agreed that the self-study group allowed the opportunity to explore ways to achieve this balance. Candace explained:

I truly was able to create a sense of balance between living my personal life and being that professor of high quality. Have I completed all of my goals? No, not yet, but I know where to go to get the information I need. With the help of the self-study group, I have identified appropriate methods for successfully working in this faculty. Plus, I have an idea of how I can set up support for new faculty who follow me and work to build a learning faculty!

Even Shelley who had only been in academia half-time the first year feels confident that her participation in the self-study group has given her “an opening to share my voice and acknowledge my professional value.”

Conclusions: Crossing Borders to Global Horizons

According to Fuller’s seminal work (1969), novice teachers share a common set of concerns that can be expressed in a series of developmental stages. For example, during the first phase of development, concerns are related to self—the self’s ability to perform as a teacher. Much energy and attention is expended at this stage on developing identity as a teacher, pleasing supervisors, and acquiring necessary information to survive in the community context. With experience, teacher concerns move from self to those related to teaching tasks, such as implementing appropriate curriculum, providing adequate student feedback and assessment, or participating in committee work. Finally, after additional experiences, novice teachers move into a phase of concern that addresses the business of education—focusing on students and their learning needs as outcomes of teaching tasks (Fuller, 1969; Fuller & Brown, 1975). The participants in this study were already skilled teachers with many years of public and university teaching in their backgrounds, therefore, the development of teaching skills was not a focus; yet, we experienced similar Stages of Concern (Hall, 1976; Hall, Wallace, & Dossett, 1973). An initial stage was felt by these participants related to issues of *self* or *identity*. Survival needs were our first priority as we struggled with handling the issues related to working in higher education, such as understanding parameters of university expectations and adjusting to requirements of a new faculty position. These concerns were juggled on top of the adjustments for moving into a new province, area, and country. Merely dealing with the paperwork from becoming a new citizen and a new faculty member was overwhelming.

We moved into a second stage of concerns related to the tasks we needed to perform to become a great teacher, scholar, and collaborative partner as required by our department, faculty, and university. Concerns led to our examination of issues related to the delivery of content in the short time frame of the program as well as how to accomplish curriculum or program improvement. The feedback and support received in the self-study group became invaluable during this time. Trowler and Knight (2000) assert that “induction [programs provided by the universities] of NAAs [new academic appointees] is far less significant than what happens in

activity systems and in the cultures created in communities of practice” (p. 28). We found this to be true in our situation. Even though we were all relatively new faculty, Peter had been a part of the system for 3 years and could give information and advice as needed. In addition, the larger self-study group contributed to our learning needs as we had an informal group of mentors who were available and helpful. Then, as new issues arose, the members of the self-study group could advise and direct us. We quickly found ourselves deliberating the issues related to a third stage of concerns—feeling the confidence and skills to focus on the delicate balancing act that faculty members perform as they move between the roles and tasks related to the niche or identity that we establish for ourselves in the academic community. McGill and Beaty (2001) describe efforts in a faculty learning community as “a continuous process of learning and reflection, supported by colleagues, with an intention of getting things done” (p. 11). Within the safe and confidential forum of this learning community, the participants in this study were able to “get things done,” or build the understandings of personal and professional identity necessary to move quickly from the initial stages of addressing survival needs to the real work of academia (teaching, scholarship, and service).

Navigating the path from survival to new horizons can be a lengthy, frustrating, arduous, yet rewarding endeavour. As Chunlei states, working with others:

seems to create a space to express ourselves as new faculty, discuss issues that concern us, help each other to understand the new environment, console each other, release each other’s stress, share information, identify certain common problems, enjoy being around with each other... We seem to feel safe, empathy, supported. Despite time-consuming, this self-study group becomes a truly collective community. It significantly helps us survive in the difficult initial years, and provides strength ready for the years to come.

Educational Significance

Self-study has great potential to advance personal practice and transform overall teacher education practices. In our particular self-study group, the four of us had the opportunity to reconstruct and examine our own personalized professional practice, comparing it to the practices of others in the group. As a collective, we feel that studying our own teacher education practices, through the lens of our international viewpoints, has helped us understand more clearly the complexities of teacher education, especially as they related to teaching, research, and service at our university. In addition, engaging in self-study has provided us with a forum for contemplating, discussing, and later, actively participating in educational changes.

While there is an ever-increasing literature on collaborative self-study, few involve new faculty. This study is unique due to an absence of a body of literature regarding research of a cross-cultural group of newly hired faculty engaged in self-study practices. This research contributes by illustrating the collaborative voice of new faculty from an international perspective. The four of us brought our diverse international experiences, beliefs about teaching and life, and cultural backgrounds together to forge strong collaborative relationships, build understandings of our new university’s culture, and support each other in our search for professional value.

It is our hope that the sharing of such experiences will influence others to contemplate the importance of representing various, diverse global perspectives within self-study groups engaged in teacher education practices. Accordingly, such richness

represented through our personal and professional experiences may encourage others with similar interests to investigate and honour their own professional value.

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