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## **A portrait of becoming: Transformative teacher education through an offshore location in the Bahamas**

Javier Gonzalez, Jill Farrell & Stephanie Auguste.

### **Javier Gonzalez**

*Barry University, Miami,  
USA  
ORCID  
0000-0003-4740-9084*

### **Jill Farrell**

*Barry University, Miami,  
USA  
ORCID  
0000-0003-3137-4219*

### **Stephanie Auguste**

*Sheridan Hills Christian  
School, Hollywood, USA  
ORCID  
0000-0001-9588-3341*

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Farrell; Auguste.

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### **Abstract**

This study illustrates the professional learning that occurred among us as we came together to co-construct the curriculum for students enrolled in a master's program in the Bahamas. In choosing to examine the phenomena under investigation through an action research/self-study lens, we hoped to elucidate the dynamics of our individual and collaborative living-educational-theory experiences. As such, our study sought to address the question: 'How is my/our professional learning impacted as we collaboratively construct curricular experiences for fellow educators in an international context, which focused on the social, cultural, and historical context of our actions in this professional learning relationship?'

Our inquiry revealed the emergence of four primary themes: embracing culture; openness/academic freedom vs. control/authority; mentoring and collegial coaching; and becoming/transformation/self-actualization.

**Keywords:** Collaborative action research; Living Educational Theory; living-educational-theory; Teacher education; Internationalization of Higher Education; Transnational teaching.

## Overview

The purpose of this paper is to offer an alternative view to the understanding of how adult professional learning may evolve and be used as a means of transformation, as illustrated through the researchers' use of reflective narratives and on-going professional dialogue, both of which are tools of inquiry and modes of representation (Burley & Pomphrey, 2011; Butler & Kisber, 2010). As teacher educators and researchers involved in the on-going development and implementation of a graduate curriculum and instruction learning community, we realize the centrality of establishing our own 'signature pedagogy' (Shulman, 2005, p. 52). While we continue to construct and craft teaching and learning experiences for participants engaged in the professional learning needed for preparation as curriculum leaders and master teachers, we recognize the central role of communication, coupled with on-going cycles of action and reflection, in nurturing and creating a true learning community.

In this collaborative action research inquiry, two teacher educators (Javier and Jill and a doctoral student – now Dr. Stephanie Auguste), shared the enactment of our own living theories (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). We also shared our pedagogical knowledge and curriculum constructs and how these impacted our respective practices and those of the learners with whom we were engaged. Action research is characterized as a method of inquiry into one's professional practice and judgment in order to provide insight and possible solutions (Mertler, 2016; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). This led us to ponder our own historical and cultural backgrounds as precursors to considering that of the study participants, better to identify potential conflicts and build trust, and to develop balanced questions for subsequent related inquiries (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). Our study aligns with elements of a transformative-emancipatory methodology (Mertens, 2007) wherein we recognize that all participants hold very different ontological and epistemological perspectives. Beginning with our own 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998), we co-created a context of lived experiences wherein participants were studied via an inclusive participatory philosophy that involved, engaged, and valued all participants, regardless of individuals' 'positions' in the social order of the institution or the community.

## Who 'WE' are and Our Work Together: The Context

The context of this study is based on the curriculum revisions made to the second Masters in Curriculum & Instruction program implemented in an off-shore location (Nassau, Bahamas) and, specifically, two courses that needed to be contextualized for delivery in a different culture. Two courses that are required in the program are EDU 566 (Teaching Social Studies in Early and Middle Childhood) and EDU 661 (Community-Based Teaching and Learning). Both of these courses are required graduate-level courses that are taught annually as part of a Masters degree program in Curriculum and Instruction in Barry University's Adrian Dominican School of Education in Miami, Florida. A triadic relationship was created among an administrator (Jill), instructor (Javier) and a doctoral student (Stephanie), to redesign a Masters- level social studies course and a community-based teaching and learning course geared toward an international group of elementary and middle school educators in the Bahamas who teach in government as well as in private

schools. Our university recently celebrated its 10th anniversary for offering our graduate off-shore programs (education, leadership, counseling, and human resources development) in both Nassau and Freeport. Our off-shore locations are supported by the current literature of offering degree programs in which ‘transnational’ faculty-members from the host university travel to another country to deliver their services (Wilkins & Neri, 2018; Bosire & Amimo, 2017; Smith, 2010).



**Image 1.** Historical building of Genesis Academy, Bahamas where our study took place.

**Jill:** Currently, I am the Dean in the Adrian Dominican School of Education at Barry University. I earned my doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction/Instructional Leadership, at Florida International University. I also hold an M.Sc. in Elementary Education and a BFA. Prior to joining the University, I served as a K-8 principal and taught both elementary and middle school science, social studies, mathematics, language arts and art. My current research foci are self-study, action research, classroom inquiry, teacher leadership, collaboration, and empowerment and arts integration.

**Javier:** Currently, I am an associate professor at Barry University’s Adrian School of Education in the Curriculum, Pedagogy and Research Unit with over 30 years of experience in the field of early childhood and elementary education. I earned my Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction with a cognate specialty in Early Childhood Education from Barry University in 2011. I taught in the Miami Dade County Public Schools as well as for the private sector. I also taught at Florida International University, Kennesaw State University (GA) and Chattahoochee Technical College (GA). My administrative experiences included working for the Miami Dade County Public Schools district office to develop and implement the district-wide Competency Based Curriculum, Coordinator of Field and Internship for Barry’s School of Education and leading the 2+2 Program of Barry’s Adrian Dominican School of Education at Coral Way Elementary. I completed my doctoral work in 2011 and was mentored by my beloved professors, Drs. Jill Farrell and Lilia DiBello. In particular, Jill and I have worked and collaborated over the years as colleagues but, most importantly, as one of my mentors throughout my doctoral studies and as a member of my dissertation committee. She has influenced my educational philosophy and my pedagogical lens as a transformational educator and as a student advocate/agent of change. As part of this mentoring process, Jill suggested that we turn our work in the Bahamas into a research study, which we presented as a SIG (Special Interest Group) poster at the American Educational Research Association (AERA.) Eventually, after a few years, I thought that our collaborative efforts were meaningful and had educational value and I suggested to our group that we should submit our study to a journal. In particular, I was influenced and inspired by Jill’s work in

transformative/emancipatory education and Living Educational Theory research (Farrell & Winkle, 2019; Farrell, Veranza, Perkins, Ricketts, & Kimbar, 2012; Farrell & Rosenkrantz, 2008). In short (and in my own words), 'We Experience, Therefore We Are.'



**Image 2.** Javier with his professors/mentors (from left) Drs. Giordano, Farrell, and DiBello.

**Stephanie:** Immediately after graduating with a Masters, I began teaching internationally within the Dominican Republic and The Bahamas as an elementary teacher. Later, I pursued my Ph.D. and began teaching both undergraduate and graduate courses, such as Understanding and Designing Curriculum and Assessment, and Community-Based Teaching and Learning. Through my work with Barry University's Center for Community Service Initiatives, I have been an advocate of service-learning and community engagement within Christian and international school settings. I currently work at Sheridan Hills Christian School in Hollywood, Florida, a Classical Christian School.



**Image 3.** Dr. Stephanie Auguste (center image, left) with mentor/professor Dr. DiBello.

## Theoretical Perspectives

One of several goals of graduate schools of education is to provide the opportunity, resources, and guidance for adult learners to gain the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of the professional educator. Everyone involved in this mission is assumed to embrace life-long learning as a shared value. Stakeholders are motivated to expand their knowledge with the new theories, curricula, and pedagogical strategies emerging from educational research and engagement in critical praxis. This inquiry focused on the reciprocal mentoring and coaching relationship that evolved as we (two teacher educators and one doctoral student) engaged in research on professional learning and educational influence. We, the researchers, achieved new levels of understanding regarding the overlapping relationships of teaching and learning through the methodologies of

collaborative self-study (Loughran, 2007); Living Educational Theory research (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006); and narrative inquiry (Butler & Kisber, 2010).

Teacher education has become a global concern, with individuals and communities of adult learners in many countries seeking the expertise and support of established educational institutions in furthering their education. Technology has accelerated the capacity for the resources of schools of education to become accessible to adults outside of the geographical region of the school so physical distance is no longer a barrier to the development and implementation of educational programming. Though distance learning has grown exponentially as one manifestation of this phenomenon, the actual exporting of teachers and resources for face-to-face (F2F) delivery is also occurring (Wilkins & Neri, 2018; Gopal, 2011).

In order to explore how the professional learning occurred among us through social interaction and professional dialogue, we drew on perspectives from several theoretical frameworks for this study. In particular, our approach was influenced by ideas about the construction of knowledge articulated by Wenger (1998), Shulman (2005), and Nakamura, Shernoff, & Hooker (2009).

## Community of Practice

Lave and Wenger's (1998) community of practice (CoP) theory conceptualizes how groups of individuals form learning communities by interacting. This collaborative social learning network enables the individuals within the group to share ideas and strategies, allows problems and concerns to be resolved, and enables innovations to be built (Wenger, 1998). Furthermore, as Wenger (1998) states, "Learning transforms our identities... it transforms our ability to participate in the world by changing all at once who we are, our practices, and our communities" (p. 227).

Our study is rooted in CoP Theory and investigates how pedagogical knowledge and curriculum constructs impacted our respective practices and that of the learners with whom we were engaged. CoP has been defined as a process in which, "groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do, learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger & Trayner, 2015, para. 4).

As CoPs are developed over time, we effectively fostered mutual respect and trust that extended over a period of five years. Through continuous exchanges, this CoP created a structure that enabled each member to share ideas, innovations and artifacts, and an environment for sharing and applying knowledge (Li, Grimshaw, Nelson, Judd, Coyte, & Graham, 2009).

Wenger (2006) notes that three components must be present for a group to be considered a CoP. First, group members must share a common interest. In this study, we possessed a vested interest in a graduate curriculum and instruction course and/or program taught in Nassau, Bahamas. Secondly, members must form a community. This study's community was developed through interacting and sharing pedagogical ideas (Wenger & Trayner, 2015) regarding the effective delivery of courses to an international cohort in Nassau, the Bahamas. Members were seen as assets, and each member learned from one

another and helped one another in some capacity. Thirdly, members must be practitioners. Members of this CoP shared a repertoire of resources, which included sharing narratives and experiences, providing helpful tools, and offering ways to handle typical problems (Wenger & Trayner, 2015).

Based on Wenger's required components, the CoP framework was utilized to facilitate an understanding of how this group of people engaged in a shared practice that advanced the knowledge and impacted the practice of the professors and the doctoral student. Our inquiry was also grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) notion of 'learning as a social activity' (p. 90) and the mediation of human development through cultural tools and artifacts that regulate relationships between parties. We contend that the way in which we use language as our most prevalent mediational tool, assisted us throughout our on-going dialogue, and led us to engage in and express higher or deeper levels of thinking regarding our pedagogies.

### **Signature Pedagogy**

In constructing this study, we, the researchers, also drew upon signature pedagogy in a theoretical sense. Signature pedagogy has been widely used to examine and gain insight into the forms of instruction that are salient and pervasive teaching practices used for the preparation of members of particular professions (Shulman, 2005). Shulman delineates distinctive features of signature pedagogies. He notes that signature pedagogies make students feel deeply engaged, visible and accountable. These pedagogies tend to be interactive, in which "students are not only accountable to the teacher but to their fellow students" (Shulman, 2005, p. 22).

These dominant teaching strategies feature interactions between students and teacher that 'readily mirror signature pedagogies in the teaching professions' (Shulman, 2005, p. 24). As teacher educators and researchers involved in the on-going development and implementation of a graduate curriculum and instruction learning community, we realize the centrality of establishing our own signature pedagogies, while using these as frames for the continual evolution and development of our practice.

Shulman (2005) notes that signature pedagogies adapt to changes in the conditions of work and to evolving norms of practice. Two conceptualizations of the 'signature pedagogies' we adopted throughout our collaborative action research cycles were Narrative Authority and Knowledge Communities. Narrative Authority emanates from "the implicit narrative knowledge individuals develop through experience and shapes the way we choose to author our lives in relation to others... [and it involves] the living and telling of stories in response to our social/teaching contexts" (Craig & Olsen, 2002, p. 670).

Knowledge Communities are "safe, storytelling spaces and places where educators narrate the rawness of their experiences, negotiate meaning, and authorize their own and others' interpretations of situations" (Olson & Craig, 2001, p. 163).

As such, reflective turns lead to more informed practical action (Schon, 1991). As we expressed our personal practical knowledge with each other through stories, we, in turn, shared our narrative knowledge (Seaman, 2008). This sharing of personal practical



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knowledge was used as a way to reflect, a way of knowing, and a way of bringing meaning to others' stories (Seaman, 2008).

## Methodological Perspectives

Our inquiry examined the lived experiences of the faculty and a doctoral student (at the time), and describes the professional learning achieved and how it was constructed as the CoP developed through the on-going professional dialogue utilized by the researchers. Throughout our inquiry, dialogue was utilized as a research stance which allowed each of us to explore our own ideas, practice and living-educational-theories (Whitehead, 1998), and concepts, in our continuous journey of becoming critically reflective teacher educators (Guilfoyle, Hamilton, Pinnegar, & Placier, 2004).

Additionally, narrative inquiry is used as representative of the iterative and continuous unfolding of the story lived by each of the researchers throughout the research process (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). In turn, it is an 'organic' phase in the research process that allowed time to create, think and reflect on one's and each other's values, stories, and ideas (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2016). It becomes an 'artisanal' process of writing, requiring care, ongoing development, and passion for lifelong learning (Sword, 2017).

Theoretical assumptions for our collaborative action research perspective are also aligned with Whitehead and McNiff's (2006) scholarship of educational inquiry, most specifically their assertion that practitioners need to produce their own living-educational-theories to account for their work through questions raised as they strive to improve their own practice. We continuously engaged in ongoing dialogic inquiry into the social, cultural, and historical context of our personal learning and practice, experiencing 'Bakhtin's idea of heteroglossia' (Guilfoyle et al., 2004, p. 1127). As we reconstructed curriculum for the new Nassau graduate-level cohort, we utilized iterative cycles of professional dialogue, engaging in shared narratives about our learning experiences and interactions with our students (feedback via discussion forums) and one another. These shared narratives or 'gifts' contribute to, and influence the knowledge base and, ultimately, impact on humanity itself (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2016).

As we collaboratively constructed the curriculum, revealing our differing perspectives and interpretations of events through the sharing, we continued the 'living and telling, reliving and retelling' (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p. 543). Kang's (2007) theory of rhizoactivity provided an image for us to use in framing how our work influenced our thoughts and behavior. As we began to share our personal narratives in the course of our curriculum work, the evidence of our influence, what rhizoactivity theory refers to as a 'trace', was revealed through our conversations with each other. The continuous sharing of the flow of information and experience from our past led to re-creating the trace, allowing new knowledge of collaboration and curriculum to emerge. Our educational influence was viewed through the organic botanical theory of rhizoactivity, which describes adult learning relationships through a botanical metaphor of growth and connection and is useful in describing complex images of postmodern learning situations (Kang, 2007). Unable to distinguish between stem and root, this theory served us as a model of educational learning and change as our vocabulary and ideas flowed and emerged anew, allowing a new flow of

learning back to our work and conversation. Through this organic lens, we established our guiding question, 'How is my/our professional learning impacted as we collaboratively construct curricular experiences for fellow educators in an international context, which focuses on the social, cultural, and historical context of our actions in this professional learning relationship?'

Language and a shared understanding of each other's experiences and actions served as a mediational tool in helping to bring ideas to the surface concerning professional learning, forming an emerging living theory. Living Educational Theory is defined within the context of real-life theorizing, evident from the way teachers reflect on their practice, gather data and generate evidence to support claims based on beliefs. The testing of these beliefs for validation occurs through on-going dialogue and critical feedback (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006).

Embedded within the scholarship of Living Educational Theory is the concept of educational influence, referring to the influence educators extend to their students' learning, while enabling them to move forward in their own learning (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). Our educational influence was viewed through a transformative-emancipatory methodology, wherein the CoP we created served as a location where our own lived experiences were studied, utilizing an inclusive participatory philosophy that involved, engaged and valued all of us as participants in the research, regardless of our individual 'positions' in the social order of our institution. Our inquiry led us to a consideration of the historical and cultural backgrounds of ourselves, and our participants, as precursors to the study of our experiences better to identify potential conflicts and build trust, and hopefully leading to individual and social transformation within the academy (Alemu, 2020; Mertens, 2009).

As we constructed curriculum for the Bahamas program, we utilized a narrative and dialogical format to represent the story of our living-educational-theory's experiences and interactions.

We were seeking to understand how our relationships and actions in our work were influencing us in our professional lives outside of the context of our collaborative relationship. Through this sharing, the 'living and telling, reliving and retelling' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 543), and the collaborative creation of curriculum, we revealed to each other differing perspectives and interpretations of events. As we attempted to understand each other's experiences and actions, ideas surfaced concerning professional learning, which led to developing our living-educational-theory.

## **Analysis and Emerging Themes**

Data analysis was conducted to generate prominent themes common among the three of us. Following the concept of a 'community of practice' (Wenger & Trayner, 2015) our data sources included regularly scheduled meetings to construct curriculum, debriefing sessions, teaching and reflections on community, and personal journals of lived experiences. Our sessions were audiotaped and videotaped capturing our ongoing dialogue of interactions, ideas, and reflections. This process of co-creating knowledge (Li *et al.*, 2009) resulted in the emergence of the following four main themes, which are articulated below:



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embracing culture; values of openness and academic freedom; mentoring and collegial coaching; and becoming/transformation/self-actualization.

## **Embracing Culture**

The first significant theme to emerge was the embracement of culture. This theme was most important from the very beginning of this journey when Jill made contact with us (Javier and Stephanie) to initiate a plan for a Masters graduate education program for educators in another country.

### **Jill explains the genesis of establishing a graduate program for teachers in an offshore location**

When I first began this initiative, I had several meetings with the principal, government officials, other educators, and community stakeholders to determine the most pressing needs for professional development and continuing education of the Bahamian educational community. My original purpose in bringing my school's programs to the Bahamas was first and foremost to address a need, to fill a gap, and to respond to the 'cry for help'. The individuals that reached out to me had a burning desire to see alternatives to the limited options available for graduate education specifically for educators so as to address the critical areas identified by the Ministry of Education.

Once a Masters in Curriculum and Instruction was in place, instructors were invited to participate in this endeavor to plan and re-design the program. The key for us in this initiative was to make certain that we embraced the culture of our designated population, making sure that we met their needs and interests (Gribble & Ziguras, 2003; Wilkins & Rumbley, 2018). In subsequent in-person meetings, the three of us discussed how we would address the needs and interests of our new international cohort of students.

### **Javier describes the beginning stages of planning a social studies education course for an offshore location and the challenges that emerged**

I initially met with Jill to discuss how we could better design the course to meet the needs of the Bahamian educators. She was mainly concerned that, because of the social studies content of the course (EDU 566 Teaching Social Studies in Early and Middle Childhood), we should not in any way 'colonize' our American beliefs and values on our Bahamian students but rather embrace and bridge both the historical and contemporary notions of Bahamian and American social studies education. As such, this would require a shift in design in the architecture of the original course, which was geared to American students in graduate education. Jill suggested that we include one of our doctoral students – who had lived and worked as a teacher in the Bahamas – to assist us in redesigning the course content to better suit its new Bahamian audience. This redesign would include the close examination of the assignments and readings of the course to indicate where changes would be needed, but without compromising the integrity and rigor of the original course.

The charge was to create a bridge between the original course of study and introduce new content that was relevant to the social studies/reading curriculum taught by Bahamian

educators. This of course presented a critical challenge for someone like me who was only versed with the curriculum of American social studies and history as presented in a teacher education program for early childhood and elementary education in the United States. In this initial stage I was not too sure how I would go about making the necessary changes to the course. However, Jill's idea of having Stephanie help us redesign the course was most important in this process. We were grateful that Stephanie had experienced living and teaching in the Bahamas.

### **Stephanie expresses her delight in helping us revise the social studies course to meet the needs and interests of the Bahamian graduate students**

I was at ease in gathering information and finding resources to help me with specific historic and cultural areas of the Bahamas that would be used in the revision of the course syllabus. I felt very comfortable maneuvering my way around to resources and knew Bahamian educators that could be used as resources to help me find the information. This was a perfect fit that enabled me to do the work I love with the people I love.

### **Javier describes those early days of planning the revised course with Stephanie**

Of course, Stephanie as an experienced educator familiar with the Bahamian social studies and reading curriculum was instrumental in the redesigning of the course. In the early planning stages, I had to first consider what content and assignments of the original course would remain intact. I then met with Stephanie on several occasions to select the readings and assignments that would remain in the course while discussing how we would integrate the Bahamian social studies and reading curriculum. Even though at first it seemed like a formidable task, we were both delighted by the many possibilities that the revised course would offer our international cohort.

### **Based on his journal notes, Javier shares how he incorporated his own living history as a way to embrace the culture of his new students**

Much planning was ahead of me as well. In particular, I had to find ways to embrace the culture of our new Bahamian students. A course in the methods of social studies education was a perfect way to acknowledge and promote the unique differences of ourselves and others. I decided that during the opening day of the course that I would share my own living history and culture as a first generation Cuban American.

Both my parents had fled Cuba during the Castro revolution of the late 1950s when Cuba became a communist country. Memorable was the fascinating history of my mother who (aged 16 at the time) was part of one of the largest exodus of children to the United States known as *Operacion Pedro Pan* (Operation Peter Pan). The impetus for this historical event was mainly because at the time Cuban parents were concerned that under the Castro regime their children were going to be indoctrinated in Communist propaganda and become wards of the state, resulting in the loss of their rights to educate their children.

This is significant, of course, since children of all races and backgrounds have the right to learn and to grow spiritually in an unthreatening environment. As for myself, a first

generation Cuban American (born in the United States), the traumatic events that transpired in the lives of my mother and family members left formative memories throughout my childhood and young adulthood. These impressions of the living voices and narratives of my family resonate deeply with me even today. As difficult as it was to share these moments with my students, it was an important process that would foster a positive cultural diversity within our classroom community. My new students were fascinated by a moment in history that very few knew had even happened. I then invited my students to share the stories of their own lived histories. And so began our journey in social studies by sharing our own lived stories; in turn, we learnt that we all have our own living histories of suffering and pain but of triumph as well.

## **Values of Openness and Academic Freedom**

The second theme to emerge was our values of openness and academic freedom. The success of our collaboration was attributed to the openness and academic freedom that was allowed among us to collaborate and create a curriculum that was appropriate to our Bahamian participants. According to Dewey (1933, 1986) the idea of open-mindedness is defined as, "... freedom from prejudice, partisanship, and such other habits as close the mind and make it unwilling to consider new problems and entertain new ideas" (p. 136).

However, the theme also revealed the tensions that arose at the time of planning the course (that of the 'unknown') which makes one vulnerable as we learned to be more flexible and open-minded in accepting new ways of teaching and learning. Huxtable (2019) explains, in relation to the original work of Vaughan and Delong (2019):

A culture of inquiry is a safe, supportive space wherein practitioner-researchers are enabled to share their vulnerabilities, to make explicit their values, and to hold themselves accountable for living according to those values. (p. vi)

### **Jill expands on the idea of remaining open-minded throughout the process**

My experience as the first faculty member to teach in our first Masters cohort in the Bahamas was pivotal in shaping my own living-theory of utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy as I rolled out the program with a course called 'Critical Thinking in Science and Social Studies'. My own search for culturally relevant texts and materials uncovered indigenous sources unfamiliar to my students and provided the necessary springboard for critically reflective dialogue and debate on the course's topics and theme. This initial experience showed me the need for a deconstruction and reconstruction of the curriculum that could follow as we planned for and implemented the rest of the program.

At the beginning it was a bit of a struggle to refrain from inserting my own ideas for how the curriculum of each course would be reshaped, but the mutual trust and respect shared within our CoP allowed for the free flow of dialogue, resulting in a synergistic blending of shared values and beliefs that shaped the curriculum. Letting go – of my students, my courses, my control – has not been easy for me but, as I work with faculty and doctoral students who share the same values, similar epistemological perspectives and

philosophies, and are willing and eager to enter into this space with openness and wholehearted in their approach, I know that our students will be the beneficiaries.

### **Javier further elaborates on the hesitancy and vulnerability he felt at first preparing to teach a course in a new way as he allowed himself to be more flexible and trust his colleagues through the process**

As teachers we tend to be creatures of habit and we want to remain in control. At first, I was hesitant about how we could go about integrating course content that was unfamiliar to me, especially under a completely different context in an off-shore location. In particular, the readings and content of the original course would have to be streamlined and expanded with new Bahamian content in line with the curriculum of the Ministry of Education. I had taught the course numerous times, but never in a dynamic that would require an international context, a revamped curriculum, and a modified instructional approach. It definitely required an openness and flexibility on my part in order to successfully move forward with our plan. As such, I trusted the experience and expertise of our resident Bahamian educator (Stephanie) who would be the key to helping us design the course appropriately.

When Stephanie and I met to finalize the course syllabus, I was much more confident when I saw the Bahamian content integrated with the original course of study. In particular, Stephanie brilliantly created a substantive list of books, resources and activities pertaining to Bahamian social studies curriculum. I knew then that this was going to work well!

However, gaining trust among us (the researchers of this study) was half of the challenge. Javier had to find ways to gain the trust and respect of the recipients of the revised course as well. Based on his journal entries, Javier shares how together they achieved a level of trust and respect for each other.

I knew that I would implement Brookfield and Preskill's (2005) Model of Discussion as a way to level the playing field and democratize the classroom dynamic in order not to seem authoritative and controlling over the content of the course. Brookfield and Preskill's (2005) seminal research presents a system of best practices specifically tailored for the college classroom. In particular, I implemented a series of activities from Brookfield's (2011) workshop that were very successful. For example, as a class we generated a 'community of agreements' (p. 9) or guidelines that would set the tone for respectful and mutual intellectual discourse; we created 'circle of voices' (p. 11) to allow groups of students (including the instructor) fair and equal time to respond and voice our perspectives; and opportunities for students to construct critical thinking questions and facilitate class discussions.

## **Mentoring and Collegial Coaching**

The third theme to emerge was mentoring and collegial coaching. Working together to redesign the curriculum of the courses influenced our practice to support and care for one another and, in turn, influenced the practice of the Bahamian teachers as evidenced in the semester-end course survey.

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### **Jill elaborates on the mentoring and collegial process involved with her doctoral students**

I had been fortunate to have been part of another collaborative research project with two doctoral students, Mark and Linda, at the onset of the Bahamas project, which was very beneficial in helping to shape our approach to this research initiative, as well as subsequent studies. The experience of working with my doctoral students as critical friends and dialogical partners as we reconstructed the curriculum for the upcoming courses was transformative for each one of us; it became a model that my faculty colleagues and I used as we rebuilt the remaining courses in the program of studies for our Bahamian students. I think that the way in which our CoP was built, and the synergy of our relational dynamic was successful in helping these teachers in the Bahamas to transform some part of their practice, because we experienced this for ourselves.

I am the better for our collaborative work in crafting these curriculum spaces for our students *along with* my colleagues. We have been educational influences on each other, and the nature of the dialogue in which we engaged throughout our inquiry helped us each to come to new insights within our practice while we each served as influences on the community in which we were engaged (Bahamian graduate cohort of students). Now, several years after the initial study, it's incredibly powerful to see graduates of this program such as Pleshette who have continued in our doctoral program in The Bahamas and are now in leadership positions in Bahamian Higher Education.

### **Stephanie, our doctoral student (at the time), provides an example of how collegial coaching worked among us when developing the course for an international offshore location**

Dr. Gonzalez (Javier) provided me with information on the students themselves, as well as the methods he used to instruct and engage students in the social studies course. I took notes and ingested all that he gave me. I then took those conversations as pointers on how to incorporate new methods of how to facilitate a graduate level course with practicing educators and professionals.

### **Javier pondered how he had also mentored and influenced the Bahamian teachers (students) in the Masters program**

I remember during this time how students were receptive to my seminar-style approach to teaching and learning. Using the Harkness method (Williams, 2018) as a pedagogical approach to learning, I arranged the tables of the classroom together to create a larger forum (community) where all of us could contribute together in a more democratic way. One student was so impressed with my seminar teaching approach that she decided to eliminate the traditional style of rows of desks of her classroom and arrange students in round tables providing a more engaging and empowering environment to learn and work together (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005). The social studies/history middle school teacher invited her principal to observe several of her lessons and she was delighted with her refreshing approach to teaching and learning. This method of teaching and learning was almost non-existent in the Bahamas, since classes to this day are primarily conducted in a traditional manner with students in rows facing the front of the classroom and the board. On

several occasions, I visited the teacher's classroom to provide guidance and support. The teacher expressed how the newfound method provided a voice for all students, strengthened interpersonal skills, instilled confidence, and fostered greater engagement. Educational influence, indeed!

### **Becoming/Transformation/Self-actualization**

The fourth theme to emerge was Becoming/Transformation/Self-Actualization. This theme manifested itself as we looked back and reflected on our collaborative work as a whole. As the aesthetic whole reaches completion, we have a more profound understanding portrait of ourselves such as the artist has with a work of art. Lawrence (2002) explains how the 'self' is:

At play in all parts of the implementation of the methodology-forging relationships, determining context, searching for coherence, defining expression, and balancing a unified representation. Furthermore, self is imprinted on the lens through which the subject of the portrait is interpreted and thereby on the vision attained. Just as we see self-guiding the artist's hand as it is imprinted on the artist's canvas, we hear self-guiding voice as it is imprinted on the portrait. Through voice, self is heard explicitly in the context, language, and content of the portrait, and implicitly in the orchestration of the aesthetic whole. (p. 35)

#### **A more complete portrait of ourselves emerges as Stephanie elucidates on the educational influence she had working with Jill**

Dr. Farrell (Jill) helped me to instill a level of self-confidence that transformed my practice. She continuously reminded me that I was knowledgeable and a person of authority in this area. I recall my first-class session. She was a huge advocate for me. She came to mediate our first meeting with the new students, which set the stage for a communicative and engaging ten sessions and a great semester! This experience allowed me to apply personal beliefs with my professional position.

During each weekend session I would put forth a quotation for the class to discuss as an opening pre-reflection activity. One quotation was by John Adams, "There are two types of education: One should teach us how to make a living and the other should teach us how to live."

After rigorous discussion of how community-based learning helps students build a sense of connection to their communities, students shed tears, challenged themselves, and examined how they contributed or not to the growth of the greater Nassau community. Much discussion also convinced me. As Nassau is a country founded on Christian principles, I felt very much at ease bringing religion and scripture into the foundation of this class. Although Barry is a Catholic institution, it is difficult to bring up my personal beliefs, often masking them with professional principles. Yet, through this experience, much of my work with the undergrad course I taught, I brought some of those principles and beliefs with me. As a way of not letting go of the new-found freedom, to combine religious beliefs with professional principles, the following semester I incorporated a service-learning component into the undergrad course I facilitated.



As with a painting, when one finally finds meaning in a work of art, it becomes a transforming experience. A similar experience is manifested when the researcher reaches a level of self-understanding or transformation. Lawrence (2002) elaborates on this experience:

Making and finding meaning through art is a transformative experience. Once we have encountered seeing and thinking in the aesthetic realm, our ability to think, and see more generally is altered. The alternative that portraiture provides raises a reflective glass to the stories that shape lives, pedagogy, and institutions. In so doing, portraiture illuminates and acknowledges the importance of these phenomena. (p. 36)

### **Javier articulates the transformational nature of the experience teaching the redesigned social studies course for both himself and his students**

Based on the end of the semester course survey, students enrolled in EDU 566 in the Bahamas rated the course favorably and highly effective. Students were highly satisfied with the course content, especially its connection to real life experiences stemming from our visit to the National Art Gallery of the Bahamas to participate in a VTS (Visual Thinking Strategy) experience (Housen & Yenawine, 2001) and its connection to Bahamian art and historical culture. It was interesting to note that, even though the National Art Gallery is a staple of Bahamian history and culture, most of the students had never visited the museum before but were very appreciative of the opportunity to attend.

As a result of revamping the syllabus and content of the course, the students (mainly Bahamian educators) were able to integrate the museum experience into their school's lesson-plans and activities. Students also attributed the success of the course based to Stephanie's carefully curated readings (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, plays) that resonated with our Bahamian participants, especially the piece on the educational crisis in Haiti and its direct impact on the Bahamian educational system. Furthermore, students were also inspired to read the literature selections that included Bahamian themes as they related to their national social studies curriculum. As such, these literature selections allowed course participants to implement and integrate the reading selections in their K-8 social studies classes with their own students.



**Image 4.** National Art Gallery of the Bahamas, downtown Nassau.

**Javier continues:** The impact of our collaborative planning (Stephanie and I) to integrate Bahamian social studies education within the course content affirmed that this process had indeed worked, redefined, and ultimately, transformed the very essence of how we learn and teach others. The process also allowed me to ‘let go’, trust my colleagues and my new international students, and broaden and diversify my pedagogical lens as a teacher-educator and learn deeply about the Bahamian culture and curriculum. Of equal significance is the global impact of the internationalization of Higher Education in current times. Over the years, students who graduated from our off-shore programs were always thankful and appreciative that our university came to them. This trend provided us opportunities that go beyond the silos of ourselves and the institution. It provided a transformational experience to be of service to others in a new context outside of the United States.

### **Revisiting *Our Work* and Further Insight: Where Are We Now?**

Living Educational Theory suggests that what we experience in our personal and professional lives does not end but rather continues and evolves (Huxtable, 2016; Whitehead, 2018). At times our personal and academic lives intertwine and we may lose the momentum that we had when we first started our project. So yes, we left our study for a while, but it does not mean that our experiences within own living-educational-theories and that of our students did not continue to expand and evolve. So, recently, we sat down once again to revisit our work together in order to capture our current experiences and its impact on our collaborative project. We feel that our post-study conversation is purposeful as it offers the reader further insight regarding our work together and our educational influence on our students.

The following are excerpts from a post-study conversation that we conducted. The taped recorded transcription below was modified to provide the highlights of our post-study dialogue. The excerpt below also includes reflective journal entries. Javier organized the interview and developed a series of questions to capture our thoughts, perspectives, and conclusions.

**Javier:** This project has allowed us to develop, expand, and evolve in terms of our individual and collective living theory accounts and I thought we would get together one last time to bring closure to our project. So, the question for each one of you is: ‘Where are you now in terms of your own living-theory?’ ‘How has it evolved from when we first started our project to now?’

**Jill:** Maybe you could share with us where you are in your living-theory. So why don’t you talk to us a little bit since you came up with the question. So, what are you thinking with respect to your living theory?

**Javier:** Well, I thought this question would be important because from the time when we started the project until now a lot has happened. With Stephanie, in particular, now that she’s at dissertation level and working through her dissertation, we had an opportunity when we went back to the Bahamas to continue talking about curriculum, about teaching and learning in terms of what we were doing with our students in the Bahamas; but then we also started our conversation in terms of her dissertation. So, my living-theory continues to evolve regarding my educational influence on Stephanie and how it has not only impacted

her in our collaborative efforts to redesign the social course but also through her dissertation process. In turn, several other students, in particular Hemaghini, who started with me in the Bachelor program, then Masters, is now a doctoral student and she's actually collaborating with me on one of our doctoral courses, EDU 745 Research on Teaching and Learning, as a teacher graduate assistant.

**Jill:** Yes, good.

*As Javier was processing the question that he posed to Jill and Stephanie, he pondered upon his past experiences when he was completing his journey in the Ph.D. program under Jill's tutelage and how his own graduate students were influenced by him as well.*

**Javier:** So, this has been part of this evolution in my own living-theory to continue to impact and improve the lives of my students which in turn impacts what I do as an educator, as a teacher educator. Also, two other students have become part of my educational influence. First, Steven who started with me in the Bachelor's, the Masters and now of course he's in the doctoral program and I am also a member of his doctoral committee. My educational influence has evolved as I continue to work with my students, mentor them, support them, guide them and, in turn, transformed their practice as well. And finally, Laura, who we've hired to work in our department as a visiting professor with us; again, she is one of our students who started with me at the Bachelor and Masters level and now I'm part of her doctoral committee. As such, our work together continues to evolve which has a direct influence on me and on Laura's practice as well. How about for both of you?

*Jill chimes in as she shares her own living-educational-theory in relation to her experiences as a faculty member (at the time) in the doctoral program and our work together.*

**Jill:** It's interesting because I almost feel like I brought this whole notion of living-theory into the school of education. And so, when Dr. Gonzalez (Javier) was one of my students, when he was doing doctoral work, I introduced him to Jack Whitehead and Jean McNiff in one of the classes that I was teaching at the time. I feel like I've been planting these seeds for almost 20 years here at Barry. When I look at my own trajectory, and how my theory about teaching teacher educators has evolved; so when I first came here I was teaching teachers and then once we developed the doctoral programs for the school of education, teaching people who are teaching teachers, teacher educators. I feel that doing my own research and working with doctoral students at varying capacities has actually, I believe, helped me evolve in my own practice and helped me to really look at everything that I do through this lens. So my own research that I started, and it's really interesting because I was doing research with Dr. Whitman, who was my mentor... who was just here...she stopped here to visit and she actually gave me the research class to teach at the time. She said, 'here it's yours'.

And then I really immersed myself in that, in my years when I was just a faculty member and that was for a very short time, and then I became a program director and a chair, and so you know the rest is history; through my own practice and how I was being transformed, through my interactions with my students, and then helping them to be transformed as they began their journeys to be more reflective practitioners; to really look

at their evolving theories about what works, what doesn't work, you know being authentic, being real. Then for me being able to really go back to my roots as a visual artist and embed that into my work and be able to take that and use that both as process and product with respect to my own research. I was able to carve out my own research agenda. But I dabbled with it in all the classes I had with all of you and all the research studies I did with each one of you, Javier, and with many others. And so I guess that's a very long winded way of saying, this is like my life's work. It's this trajectory of being here and being an academic and being in Higher Education and helping people go to that next level. And really go deep in terms of theory and practice. Actually, it's about critical practice; really drawing on the theory and being able to put it to work in whatever environment that we're working in; whether that's a classroom of young children or a Higher Education classroom. I think that for me it's been the way in which I have been able to carve out my research and scholarship agenda and be an effective critical reflective educator and be an educational influence on others.

### **Jill's response inspired Javier to elaborate further on the educational value of collaborating and feeling inclusive**

**Javier:** Yes, and I was going to add that over the years I have actually witnessed how you (Jill) are an invitational leader in the ways you have included many of us (students and faculty alike) to collaborate on research studies/projects together and I always thought that was very admirable. And that *is* a big part of living-theory; to be inclusive of others and how they are influenced by you, and you are influenced by them.

**Jill:** Great, thank you. Yeah, and we refer in the paper to rhizoactivity theory and then this whole idea; so each one us, but for me, you know, I mean as a teacher, we always have to be learning from our students, no matter what level you're at. So, I think that this kind of work and this evolution of one's living theory and testing out new theories and being open, being transformed, transparent, allowing oneself to be in this kind of relationship or relational dynamic triad that we're in here allows, it requires one to be very vulnerable, which is not something that often happens in Higher Education. But I think for me it's been very helpful in terms of modeling. Because I think, and Stephanie you have experience now teaching teachers, that we always want to walk the walk. We always want to be authentic in the way we're telling people what they should be doing when they're teaching. But if you are not doing it yourself, if you're not modeling it yourself, and you're not really authentic in what you're doing, then I think that students, they hear you talking about it, but they are not watching you do it. It really requires you to be able to position yourself, so to that actually changing one's position often, and putting yourself in the position of being the student and learning from your students, while at the same time you're teaching.

*Jill's response motivated Stephanie to reflect on the value of her past experiences with both of us which made her feel validated, and in turn, positively influence the teachers (graduate students) she collaborated with as she completed her own dissertation study.*

**Stephanie:** *I want to chime in here because I think this is a good segue into my thoughts. Just going back to like 5 or 6 years ago, when I first started working with the two of you. I guess you would say on this endeavor with the Bahamas and establishing the alternative curriculum for the C&I program so that it could be adapted to the Bahamas and honestly the both of you really were, I would say, confidence builders, you know, very*

*encouraging. And I remember speaking in two perspectives. One as a doctoral student, but I want to talk about you first, Dr. Farrell. You came in that Saturday to our first meeting with the new students and you just validated my work. I don't know if you realized it but when you came in you spoke to something, but you validated me being an expert in that particular course. And me being the one 'that knows through experience' and with that you gave me the confidence to go ahead and teach that course moving forward. And I'm going to keep rolling with that theme there because now we are talking about expanding our living-theory. Now with me and my dissertation work, I'm actually in that role of now being that encourager to teachers. Being that voice of validating someone else, when I had to go ahead and train my facilitators to be the service-learning facilitators for my dissertation professional development workshop. And I was now the one validating them and encouraging them because they were not. They reminded them of me during that first day of class. In terms of working alongside, you both worked alongside me in those two areas, and I see that when over the summer when I was working with my two trainers and having that sort of similar relationship with them.*

**Jill:** That made perfect sense.

**Javier:** Yes, indeed. And again as we bring closure to this wonderful project that we worked on together, and I think on behalf of Stephanie as well, I will never forget, Jill, when you invited us to present at AERA, one of the most prestigious conference proceedings probably internationally, was just for me beyond words; and that we were part of a SIG (Special Interest Group), that we were part of a very special group and we were going to present our poster during one of the invited SIG sessions. It showed living-theory alive, in full circle, in terms of everything that Dr. Farrell represents, what she values, and everything she has done for her faculty and for her students.

*But Javier ponders that it goes much deeper. He continues as he describes (from his journal entry) the 'tension', the systemic constraint he felt as a classroom teacher (not having a voice) as he transitioned into Higher Education at the commencement of his doctoral studies:*

**Javier:** It really goes back to Jill allowing the voice of her students to emerge at the time, the voice of 'other'. We can go back to those early days of my doctoral studies and how that really reflects the beginning of our living-theory together. As I look back to my early days as a doctoral student, and I think, 'Is this where the tension arose?' that as a K-12 educator I never felt I had a voice. I always felt for the longest time that as teachers we were always 'told what to do' and no one invited the teacher to the bargaining table.

*Javier continues to grapple with the idea of 'tensions' that arise in one's practice:*

Perhaps that was the reason that I left the K-12 setting and transitioned to a career in Higher Education. Why? At the time I thought, the professor always has authority; the professor has autonomy. However, I observed early on when I started in the doctoral program that this was not necessarily the case. During this time, I observed that the doctoral courses were conducted differently. There was a shared responsibility among students and faculty members that I had not experienced before. There was reciprocity in the way we

were learning. The professor was more of a facilitator than a disseminator of information. So long to the podium! The role of the student and professor had shifted.

At the time when attending Jill's doctoral summer seminar, I remember distinctly that Jill would not lecture but rather invite the class to facilitate the weekly sessions and allow us to delve in intellectual discourse. Jill would not intervene nor interrupt her students. She would listen to us intently and take lots of notes. But when she did share her words of wisdom, I was always inspired. In this pivotal moment of my personal and academic career, I felt that I *did* have a voice; that I had regained my voice. The circumstances of that moment provided an impetus of sorts. The true voice of the educator had emerged. The voice of student; of educator; of human being. I will always cherish that moment in time. A career in the field of education can be a very discouraging place for many educators at all levels. However, Jill's inspirational words, propelled me to think anew about the state of education and the important role of the teacher and the influence that a teacher has on others. Not only did she foster the confidence I was searching for, but also gave me the hope that I had lost along the way.

*It occurred to Javier during the concluding moments of the interview to ask Jill, who it was that had inspired her own living-educational-theory.*

**Javier:** So, the question remains for you Dr. Farrell. Where did your motivation come from? Who inspired your living-theory? Where did all this come from? This motivation, this inspiration? Your drive, your passion?

**Jill:** You know, it's an interesting question. I think it's twofold. I think that my personality, my dispositions, whatever you want to call it; I've always been that kind of person that whatever I decide that I'm going to do, I want to be the best I can be. So, I've always had a drive to do; master whatever it is I'm doing. So, remember I started as an art major and then moved to the classroom; and I think I was a wonderful math and science teacher because I had an art background; and then moved into the principalship, then I came into Higher Ed. I had a full career as a teacher, a principal, and then I decided I only wanted to teach future teachers, because I believed so much in it, and really preparing highly effective, reflective teachers that would really make a difference. I mean, I believe in our profession. I believe that every child, every human being, deserves an inspirational teacher that's going to change their life. I had a very difficult time in middle school because I felt that teachers didn't challenge me, they didn't understand me.

Then in high school, I couldn't wait to get out of high school just so I could move on. And so I finished quickly, then went on to university level. But when I came into education and being an educator, again I think it's also partly the combination of going into education with an art background, I was always very motivated to own my craft; to really look at it through this lens of art, you know, but I also was a science teacher. So, the people that were very inspirational in my life, you know Elliot Eisner; I remember going to AERA as a doctoral student. I was lucky that my husband, Bob, was an academic. And so, when I was doing my doctoral work, and going to AERA and Bob would be there, and we would work together. And Bob and I were part of AERA.

I was very, very lucky. I had a lot of pivotal influences in my life. I rubbed elbows with some of the big names, Lee Shulman and Elliot Eisner; I remember meeting Phillip Jackson,



and Michael Apple went sailing on our boat with us. I was very lucky to be fortunate enough to have incredible, inspirational people that were paving the way. When I began here in Higher Ed., and I was very much gravitated towards critical theory and social justice, but I knew that I had to carve out my own research trajectory. I found my niche in the research self-study community and very early on I met Jack Whitehead and Jean McNiff, and Jack was like a giant to me. He was like a guru: he totally propelled me. And I can remember spending time with him at AERA like being a groupie. You know, I was a Howard Gardner groupie. But I remember sitting there and talking to him and he was so approachable and so, I just gobbled everything I could in that body of literature, and it made sense to me.

Every step of the way for me is always about ‘how do I improve my practice?’ ‘How can I be the best me, that help unleash the potential and talent that lie within every single one of the students that I’m interacting with?’ And so, I guess my locus of control is, I have an internal locus of control. That was just the way I was raised. You do well in life by working hard; so, I guess that it’s internal motivation. But, coming into Higher Education later in life really motivated me to want to be a member of the academy, to be a scholar, be a researcher; do this so that I could then mirror that and be a good model for my students.

**Javier:** Yes, that’s perfect. Beautifully said. As we conclude our time together, I want you both to know that you have transformed my life personally and educationally and in turn will continue to influence our current and future students. I’ll be eternally grateful for this wonderful project. So, thank you. The journey continues.

## Concluding Thoughts

This study illuminates the ‘workings’ and ‘doings’ of bringing an American curriculum in a school of education to an international Higher Education cohort of graduate students in the Bahamas. Through a Living Educational Theory lens (Whitehead, 1989), this paper describes the professional learning achieved and how this was developed through the social interaction and professional dialogue experienced as our trio co-constructed the curriculum for an off-shore international cohort of educators enrolled in a master’s degree program. Collaborative action research, using elements of portraiture and narrative inquiry, were used as representative of the iterative and continuous unfolding of the story lived by each of the researchers throughout the research process (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2001). We also feel that our current collaboration developing this paper contributes and adds value to the growing body of work for those working to make room for democratized knowledge and new knowledge production for teachers and learners who have been historically marginalized.

Our study showcased the dialectical relationship that developed between instructors and learners and how this may foster and lead students to transformation within their own practice as we strive to ‘serve the common good’ (Aurelius, 167AC, p. 111) for the betterment of society. Hence, in this process of becoming, we improved and transformed not only our individual practices but also our collective practice and, in turn, inspired the learning and the work of our international students as well.

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