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Conversations in a Pub: Positioning the Critical Friend as “Peer Relief” in the Supervision of a Teacher Educator Study Abroad Experience

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Abstract

In this paper, we share the results of a self - study of our experience as university supervisors in a study abroad program for U.S. pre - service teachers. We share the shifts in our thinking that occurred as a result of our daily conversations about our work as teacher educators. Our reflections led us to new understandings of the nuances of field experiences, our constructions of pre - service teachers in the field, and the necessity of personal and professional renewal for faculty, not only as critical friends, but as peer relief.

Keywords

Autoethnography, Study Abroad, Supervision, Teacher Education

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Conversations in a Pub: Positioning the Critical Friend as "Peer Relief" in the Supervision of a Teacher Educator Study Abroad Experience

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In this paper, we share the results of a self-study of our experience as university supervisors in a study abroad program for U.S. pre-service teachers. We share the shifts in our thinking that occurred as a result of our daily conversations about our work as teacher educators. Our reflections led us to new understandings of the nuances of field experiences, our constructions of pre-service teachers in the field, and the necessity of personal and professional renewal for faculty, not only as critical friends, but as peer relief.
Keywords: Autoethnography, Study Abroad, Supervision, Teacher Education

The stories of teacher educators' professional lives and identities are fostered through the portrayals of "self-narratives" (Sachs, 2001) in which the role of the critical friend can be essential to the process of problematizing practice. Costa and Kallick (1993) conceptualized a critical friend as a "trusted friend who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person's work as a friend" (p. 49). Bambino (2002) described critical friends as catalysts for change—the role is evaluative, consultative, and challenging. The role may be formalized through protocols and procedures (Wachob, 2011) or less formal and open-ended through discussions or journals (Hickson, 2011). As Schuck and Russell (2005) state, "a critical friend acts as a sounding board, asks challenging questions, supports reframing of events, and joins in the professional learning experience" (p. 107).

In teacher education, critical friends are valuable change agents who make the work of reflexive practice more collaborative. The critical friend serves as a mirror and a lens, providing a conduit for blending research into practice. As Hedges (2010) describes the relationship, the presence of a critical friend in the field can raise consciousness about practice. In this paper, we describe the role of a critical friend from a different perspective—as one of "peer relief" during a study abroad experience. In other words, we position the critical friend as a colleague who provides relief in the form of a professional clique, serving first as an insider and informant positioned *against* students and then as a reflexive partner positioned *with* students.

Our Context of Teacher Preparation

We are teacher educators in a college of education at a large, research-intensive university located in a major metropolitan city in the southeastern United States. Our department offers three initial certification programs: a Baccalaureate degree (B.S.) in Elementary Education (ages 5-11), a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) in Elementary Education (ages 5-11), and a Baccalaureate in Early Childhood (B.S., ages 3-8). Each program provides field experiences of increasing intensity culminating in a final student teaching internship. During regular field experiences, pre-service begin by observing and teaching individual or small groups of children, eventually teaching the whole day.

CSE: A Study Abroad Option

Pre-service teachers from all three programs may apply to participate in a study abroad experience in Cambridge, England. Applicants from the undergraduate Elementary and Early Childhood programs must have successfully completed their initial field experience (15 day-long observations during one semester) prior to participating in the Cambridge Schools Experience (CSE). For MAT students, the CSE is their first field placement. Therefore, the CSE replaces the second field experience for undergraduate pre-service teachers and the first field experience for MAT graduate students.

Upon acceptance into the program, pre-service teachers participate in monthly seminars to prepare them for the school and cultural contexts they will experience in England. These seminars focus on lesson planning, differentiated instruction, and management strategies. Once in Cambridge, pre-service teachers complete a 4-week, daily field experience in a primary school. The condensed duration of the experience, combined with the high expectations of the host teachers in Cambridge requires pre-service teachers to quickly immerse themselves in the classroom culture. Many of them teach small group lessons on their first day and quickly acquire multiple daily classroom teaching opportunities throughout the first week. The expectation is that they will work toward planning and teaching for the entire school day by the end of the experience.

Participants

Faculty. As faculty supervisors, we met certain criteria in order to be selected for participation in the CSE. We had recent and successful field supervision and/or significant work in our university partnership schools, a record of coaching/mentoring success with pre-service teachers, and a clearly defined research agenda related to pre-service teacher education. As CSE faculty, we were assigned to the program on a two-year rotating basis with one person taking the lead in his or her second year.

For this study, we (Jenifer and Audra) were in our second and first year of participation, respectively. Jenifer is an associate professor with varied supervisory experience. She is the coordinator of the doctoral program in Literacy Studies and teaches undergraduate courses in writing methods. Audra is an associate professor who coordinates the Masters of Arts in Teaching program. She supervises students in the elementary programs, and she teaches courses in elementary methods.

Pre-service Teachers. Through a highly selective application process, we chose eighteen pre-service teachers who received outstanding recommendations. The selected group had exceptional initial field experiences prior to applying for the CSE and the MAT pre-service teachers had extensive volunteer, coaching, and paraprofessional experiences. The pre-service teachers were all female (there were no male applicants) and ranged in age from 20-38 with 14 students under the age of 25. During the CSE, the pre-service teachers and the supervising faculty were housed in a large, family-owned, Victorian guesthouse in the city center of Cambridge.

Our Narrative Methods for Inquiry

Study abroad programs are increasingly popular at institutions of higher education in the United States. In the field of education, study abroad programs for pre-service teachers range from individual global internships to programmatic site-based field experiences in international locations (Brindley, Quinn, & Morton, 2009; Cushner & Mahon, 2002). While there exists a variety of international study abroad programs in education, there is limited

research on the personal and professional outcomes of participation beyond the pre-service teachers' perspectives (Brindley et al., 2009; Cushner, 2007).

As supervising faculty, the study-abroad context profoundly affected our perceptions and beliefs about pre-service teacher education. To trace and examine our learning, we identified a series of tensions between our practices at home and abroad in relation to school curricula, field placements, mentorship, and teacher development. Although tensions are often viewed negatively, we followed Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, and Orr's (2010) advice, and "we began to understand tensions in a more relational way, that is, tensions that live between people, events, or things, and are a way of creating a between space, a space which can exist in educative ways" (p. 82).

Autoethnography. Using an autoethnographic approach (Ellis, Bochner, Denzin, Lincoln, Morse, Pelias, & Richardson, 2008) we explored the impact of a study abroad program on our professional development and the implications for our work as teacher educators. We chose an autoethnographic approach, using narrative inquiry practices, because we wanted to capture our experiences within an unfamiliar world. By using narrative methods to lay bare and then interrogate our work, we "looked inward exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). We looked back into the "between spaces" to gain insight into the culture of supervision and teacher education and how we functioned as guides and mentors.

Data Creation. This autoethnography occurred as part of a larger, longitudinal study of pre-service teacher education across contexts. Throughout the larger study, we kept a running log of personal reflections, emails, and course texts to document our learning. For our self-study, we returned to the collection of our own personal reflections as the data source for our work. Given that language constructs experience (Heath, Street, & Mills, 2008), we logged the artifacts of our interactions (e.g., lesson plans, Keynote presentations, observational notes, journal entries) to systematically explore the linguistic space in which our learning occurred.

Although we did not record our dialogue in the moment, in this self-study we crafted dialogue as one would for an autoethnographic account of learning (e.g., Ellis et al., 2008). The process began by describing the context of the experience as our *story* (Connelly & Clandinin, 1996). Using Clandinin's (2006, p. 48) notion of situating our field text with "attention to the temporal, the personal and social, and place" we told our story chronologically and we situated moments within the spaces and places of our Cambridge experience. We wrote the story together by reminiscing about the experience, returning to source documents, and recalling instances of uneasiness and conflict, as well as moments of joy and pride.

Then we isolated moments, to study them, to turn them around in our narrative hands as if these moments could be relived in a teaching pensieve (Rowling, 1995; see also Schneider et al., 2011). From the story, we created dialectical moments that were teachable moments to us—moments of tension (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2010). These tensions centered on instances in which students did not respond or perform within the frame of our pre-conceived expectations. In these moments we wrestled with our own effectiveness as teacher educators. We wrote through the tensions and, in doing so, learned about ourselves, and our work, through the process of looking back.

Narrative Analysis. Borrowing from Richardson's (2000) criteria for evaluating autoethnographic texts, we were mindful of several aspects of autoethnography and narrative inquiry that share common features with our process. In particular, we addressed the "reality" of our work through the re-creation of the scenes. We chose to write how we felt and to reflect the authentic nature of our conversations. We also wrote like we talked (Denzin, 2003, p. 117) and, therefore, we used humor and sarcasm and self-deprecation in telling our own story. The

act of writing our story required us to take a reflexive stance toward the Cambridge experience and our role as supervisors. Through the recreation of scenes we examined our expectations for students and our reactions to their work. In doing so, we learned much about ourselves. Ultimately, the total experience (both the study abroad experience and the writing about it) affected our practice in many ways. We discuss the impact of this work at the end of the article in an effort to go beyond our story. As Dinkleman (2003) suggests, we transfer our localized knowledge to our larger teacher preparation program as well as to the broader field of teacher education to "better articulate a knowledge of practice" (Loughran, 2007, p. 19).

Our Study Abroad Experience

In this section, we begin with summarized recollections from the first few days in Cambridge to illustrate how we developed into a clique. Then we transition to remembered dialogues to highlight particular instances and tensions that were important for our movement out of reflective self-absorption into reflexive understanding.

From Colleague to Flatmate

Jenifer. I landed in Heathrow and discovered that Audra was delayed. Damn! So I went ahead with the plan for the day—got the car, drove to Cambridge, got necessities from Tesco, made my way to Warkworth House. I was warmly greeted by the owner and house manager. I dropped my bags and went directly to dinner at my favorite pub--The Free Press. Closed. Damn it again! Open for dinner at 4:30. I was too tired. I decided to go to Pizza Hut. Don't judge. It was the closest place and required no thought.

Sitting in Pizza Hut, I wondered how Audra and I would engage in the social dance of transitioning from work colleagues to flatmates. Although we had separate rooms with en-suite facilities, how would our daily lives intermingle? How would we engage with the students? Would we get along? The short answer was yes.

The long answer was I felt everything would go well because we knew each other from four years of working together. We were also friends who socialized outside of work. I knew, based on pre-trip seminars, that we had very similar styles in that we were organized, we put a lot of time and attention into our teaching, and we taught in similar ways. What I didn't know was how I would live with Audra every day for five weeks. I wanted to have dinner and lunch with her (like I did with Jim, my faculty partner from the previous year), but I didn't want to invade her space.

Once Audra arrived safely (whew!), I was eager for her to visit the schools and I was surprised that I remembered how to get to most of them. The schools were tiny and nested in neighborhoods (lots of roundabouts and no signage!). I remembered my camera and took lots of pictures of the ways that guests are greeted in these schools. No test-prep posters (You can get a 6 on the test if you get some rest!) or reminders about standardized testing. Parents and "guardians" were referred to as "carers." What a relief to be back!

Audra. I had been anticipating my first trip to Cambridge for 9 months but it didn't get off to a smooth start. My flight was delayed a day giving me more time to worry about driving in the UK. My worries were valid…everything I knew about the world was in reverse…the seatbelt, the manual transmission, the steering wheel, the side of the road I was expected to drive on. Once I finally arrived in Cambridge, it took me a couple of days to get the lay of the land. I wanted to find time to exercise, figure out a running route, make sure I didn't get lost, and do my laundry. I was also concerned about preparing for the students. Jenifer would say things like, "We have to get bus passes." And I would think, "Bus passes? Who knew?"

It never crossed my mind to worry about getting along with Jenifer. We started each day with breakfast, making a plan for when we would get together for lunch or dinner. I started noticing parts of the program I could change. Number one on my list was the schedule. Last year, Jenifer told me that she and Jim ran around Cambridge to observe the pre-service teachers based on a sign-up sheet. There was no attempt to group observations to one area of town or within one school. They ended up wasting time and petrol. I wanted some order to that madness. The first thing on my list was to implement a structured schedule for observations.

Before the students arrived, Jenifer and I scheduled a visit to each of the nine schools. At each stop, I was simultaneously captivated by the setting and impressed by the progressive nature of the schools. Some grade levels were multi-age, some classes were quite large (30+) and others smaller (<20). Every direction I turned I was greeted by children's work-- all of which reflected a curriculum focus that indicated a strong connection to the local community and current events. I could tell that it was okay to be different. In a matter of days I knew I was in for a tremendous experience.

Looking Back. We identified several factors (compatibility, collaboration, philosophical consonance, and cohabitation) as key features for the sustainability of the program. Clearly compatibility was important. We had to be independent yet work together. We trusted and respected each other's professional judgment and presented a united front to the students while maintaining our individual academic freedom. We were honest with open lines of communication. For example, having faculty supervise in a two-year staggered rotation allowed Jenifer to come with recent experience and Audra to view the program through fresh eyes. Audra's new perspective led to program changes; yet Jenifer could have resisted. We were fortunate because we were philosophically and instructionally similar. Professional compatibility was important.

Another factor for program success was personal compatibility. We believe we both have balanced, even temperaments. It would be unbelievably challenging to lead a study abroad experience if the faculty didn't get along—or if one person was easily angered by driving issues or one was disproportionately flustered by other aspects of life abroad. Our personal compatibility was also tested by the housing arrangement. We lived with the pre-service teachers, ate breakfast with them, went to their schools daily, and held individual conferences everyday after school. The program involved a lot of "together" time with students. As faculty, we needed each other to get away from students and experience peer relief. What we didn't plan for, or realize, was that our daily lunches and dinners would become the context for our own professional development.

Peer Relief in The Free Press

Many of our "peer relief" moments occurred in The Free Press, a small pub located one block away from our bed and breakfast. There was no music, no televisions, no smoking, and no deep fryer. The sign on the wall stated, "in the interest of good conversation, turn off your mobile phone." The patrons were locals and the atmosphere was relaxing during lunch and festive in the evenings. As (almost) daily visitors, we became fans of the food and instant friends with the owners, Craig and Jenna, and the bartender, David.

Our first dinner conversation in The Free Press centered on our need to create a sense of community among the 18 students who were arriving the next day. We designed a tricky scavenger hunt with 15 tasks that would help the students figure out the city, gain a sense of independence, and create group cohesion. We required photographic evidence and sample tasks included (a) find the most unique bicycle, (b) take a picture of the place where the discovery of DNA was announced, and (c) locate a building constructed prior to 1700. We

structured the scavenger hunt as a race and awarded points for creativity and speed. With encouragement from Craig, we made The Free Press the last stop.

On their first full day in Cambridge, we escorted the pre-service teachers to the bus terminal, bought their bus passes, gave them a brief overview of the city and then we put them in teams and sent them on their way. Then we went to the Free Press and waited. After ninety minutes, we heard the first team of screaming Americans stampeding down the alleyway. They burst into the very quiet Free Press, and we were mortified. But Craig didn't care, David had a great laugh, and soon other teams found their way. We celebrated their scavenger hunt success, but most of the pre-service teachers were exhausted, hot, tired, and their feet hurt so they went home straight away. We were surprised by the lack of stamina and disinterest in a group celebration. We remained at The Free Press to debrief.

> Audra: Overall, that went well.
> Jenifer: Yes, most of the teams had a lot of fun. But I was totally shocked when they came screaming in here. I just didn't expect that at all.
> Audra: I know! It was really embarrassing. They had no idea how quiet it was in here before they came barreling in.
> Jenifer: I didn't think they would do that. If I had known, I would have told them to keep it down. This isn't a bar! This is a lovely English pub. Their screaming was so awful.
> Audra: I guess the competition got the best of them.
> Jenifer: Did you notice some of the complaining? *(whining)* "My feet hurt! We didn't know we were going to walk all over town!" Well, we told them to always wear comfortable shoes. It's not our fault they wore bad shoes. I told them so.
> Audra: Yes you told them many times to bring comfortable shoes. But I guess we needed to be more explicit.
> Jenifer: Next year say, "We are going to get your bus passes. We are walking many blocks. You will be walking more blocks after we purchase the passes. Wear comfortable shoes." So much for fun surprises!
> Audra: Yeah, I'll make a note *(laughing*). They are really competitive too! And yet, a little babyish.
> Jenifer: Yes. I noticed that too.
> Audra: Some of them just gave up when they knew they weren't in first place.
> Jenifer: I was also surprised by the lack of creativity in their photos. Although some of the pictures were funny, it's really not creative if five other groups do the same thing.
> Audra: True.
> Jenifer: But overall, I think it was a great way to start. Maybe I'm being too hard on them.
> Audra: *(Sarcastically)* That's so unlike you. No, but seriously, next year, we'll do the scavenger hunt on another day and I'll tell them to wear comfortable shoes.
> Jenifer: Definitely.

Looking Back. In revisiting this conversation, we now recognize that we were critical of the students when they didn't respond in the ways we desired. When they came screaming into the pub, we were embarrassed. When they didn't fully enjoy the scavenger hunt, we were annoyed. And when they didn't meet our expectations, we were frustrated. We viewed their behavior as a deficit and a character flaw. So we privately chastised them. And in an odd way,

this developed our camaraderie—peer relief. It was "us" against "them". Shouldn't they match our expectations? They represented the best of the best—they were so highly recommended. We chose them and groomed them during the pre-trip spring seminars to be like we wanted. How dare they be different? How dare they let us down or embarrass us? Of course they didn't know that pubs were quiet; they hadn't been to a British pub. We were unfair to expect the students to enjoy the scavenger hunt. They had just arrived. They were so "ready to get to Cambridge" and settle in just as we were on our first days (remember Pizza Hut?). Our initial impulse was to be critical of the pre-service teachers—and eventually we used that criticism on ourselves.

Adjusting Our Expectations

The students arrived in Cambridge on a Thursday, met their classes on Friday, and officially began teaching on Monday. We started our first official observations on Tuesday. Audra observed three students in two schools and Jenifer did the same. For the first observation we asked the students to teach a small group lesson. At the end of the day we met at The Free Press to debrief.

Audra: So, how did it go?
Jenifer: Oh my, we have a lot of work to do. How can students get to a second field placement without having any idea of how to teach? When I get home, I'm seriously looking into who recommended these students.
Audra: What happened?
Jenifer: Well, Jessica did a small group extension of the teacher's lesson but all she did was watch the kids. She didn't talk to them, she didn't extend the teacher's lesson, she didn't repeat the directions, she did nothing except stand over them and watch what they were doing. I'm not exaggerating! She stood above them and didn't talk. She was totally lost. Then I went to watch Jackie—she pulled the kids out of the class into a small alcove. She was meek, timid, and didn't really listen to the kids' answers. She was not teaching *them*; she was teaching her lesson. Literally, looking at her plan and reading.
Audra: Wow-that is surprising. Maybe they were just nervous or intimidated? Could be culture shock?
Jenifer: Yes, that is really possible, because their demeanors were very timid. But why would you come to England and put yourself in this situation if you were not confident? How did they get out of their first placement without knowing how to talk to children? I don't get it. It was really bad. How was your day?
Audra: I saw some good stuff.
Jenifer: That's a relief!
Audra: Each of the pre-service teachers I observed seemed comfortable leading their groups, and one of them even taught a whole class lesson. I was really impressed with their lesson planning and ability to assume the role of teacher. They have a ways to go in terms of modeling and developing student understanding, but they have a lot of potential.
Jenifer: So what should we talk about in seminar tonight?
Audra: Well, I think we need to show them that teaching is not telling. We talked so much about "modeling" before we came to England, but I don't think they got it. I think it would help everyone if we provide some specific

> examples of how to set up a lesson with modeling and multiple opportunities to practice.
> Jenifer: You are right— but it is amazing to me that after all of the methods courses, after all of the in-class modeling and demonstrating, that we are teaching it again. There is a complete disconnect between our courses and the application in context! I noticed this last year and that is why I wanted so much prep work on modeling this year. Seriously!
> Audra: But the tables are turned. It is one thing to experience and learn about it as a pre-service teacher, but entirely different to enact and understand it as a teacher. In the spring seminars we didn't practice by having them teach students. They did simulations.
> Jenifer: So true. I didn't even think of that. I just assumed they could transfer knowledge. How could we be surprised that a beginning teacher would not be a perfect teacher?

Looking back. We struggled with the fact that our pre-Cambridge instruction didn't impact the pre-service teachers' teaching. Then, when the pre-service teachers didn't know how to teach in the ways we expected, we projected this problem onto the pre-service teachers themselves; it couldn't possibly be us. But as we continued to see the same problem over and over again, only to see no understanding of how to model, we were boldly reminded that becoming a teacher is a process. Even though we selected the best "students," they still needed guidance in the act of teaching children. We needed to help them understand how to teach in the moment of their teaching. And, much like children, the pre-service teachers needed us to scaffold their learning over and over again.

As their course instructors, we were quick to blame the pre-service teachers, much like pre-service teachers are often quick to blame children. To add to our frustration, this study abroad experience was very challenging. It sounded romantic—to spend the summer in Cambridge, England, but the reality was that we experienced a great deal of pressure because the students had to demonstrate "strong" teaching competencies within a short amount of time. Any student who was not in a hurry to get it right would fail the course. Time was not on our side as there were no extensions or retakes. We were hoping everyone would arrive with competence and repertoires of strategies that we could hone. We didn't expect "needs work." Perhaps the very thing we expected them to possess, we didn't have ourselves.

Are They Mediocre or Still Learning?

The weeks continued in much the same way. We observed students daily and debriefed in the evenings over dinner. We noticed some progress, but not to the extent we hoped.

> Jenifer: So why haven't we seen a superstar lesson?
> Audra: I know! I've seen good stuff but... I don't know. I think we're doing all of the right things. We helped them set clear goals to work on. We are providing really specific feedback. They are learning and their students are learning. But no one is really knocking my socks off. I see a lot of potential for outstanding teaching, but where is it?
> Jenifer: Right—I have only seen one really good, memorable lesson. Carly held a class debate about an environmental accident, then she did a really cool stream of consciousness line, and then ended with an experiment.
> Audra: That is impressive.

Jenifer: Yes. It was phenomenal. Good integration of planning and instruction. And she took so many risks in that lesson: the use of a controversial current event, going outdoors, having differentiated experiences indoors. Plus the fact that she is working with so many kids- over 30 of them I think. Why aren't the others doing this? Or even just trying?
Audra: I can understand why our socks aren't getting knocked off…their grades are on the line. They want to play it safe. I'm bored with almost every lesson.
Jenifer: Seriously! Just try to do something that's above average.
Audra: They do the minimum to pass, but they don't put themselves out there. But I have to ask, would I put myself out there?
Jenifer: Good point. Maybe they're afraid of failure—afraid to take a risk and get it wrong. Or maybe they know the boundaries of their comfort zones. After all, they're beginning.
Audra: Well, it could also be the structure of our teacher education program is partially to blame. The longer I am here the clearer it is to me that we do not provide them with enough structured opportunities to practice what they are learning. A few are able to make the connections and enact them effortlessly. But for others, it is not so smooth. They need more opportunities to practice with real children and to make sense of how to put theory into practice.
Jenifer: Another reason to look at our program when we get home.
Audra: Boy, we have a lot of work to do.

Looking back. Everyday, we talked about teaching. At home, our talks wouldn't have happened. But in Cambridge we had the time and lack of distraction to make space for these conversations. In addition, our daily debriefing became an expected text that we read each night. At the time, we wanted to see significant growth in the pre-service teachers. And we couldn't get what we wanted. What did this mean about us, about the pre-service teachers, and about this context?

We now question why we needed to see "superstar" lessons from these developing teachers. Perhaps we worried that if we were seeing their "best," then what did the rest of the day look like? Was the rest of the day worse? For us, ok was not good enough. And that's where we struggled—then and now.

Our pre-service teachers were successful in this field experience. Even better, they were setting goals and making progress. Their lessons were a reflection of their developmental levels at the time, yet we perceived the students' as sub-par. And we now recognize that their lessons were good enough given their professional development. Were the children learning? Yes. Were children engaged? Yes. Were the pre-service teachers addressing our feedback? Yes. What did we need?

Perhaps we were seeking personal validation as teacher educators. We needed to see "superstar" lessons because if the pre-service teachers were superstars, then we were superstars. It was unrealistic for us to expect a synthesis of all best practices, perfectly executed, in every lesson, given they were in a foreign country with a new curriculum, with no instructional supplies at home, and only four weeks to show remarkable changes. We clearly needed to balance our expectations with their developmental levels.

Reflection and Evaluation

At the end of our four-week experience, everyone was in the mode of reflection, evaluation, and, of course, celebration. So we had a party. Prior to the event, the host teachers

completed course forms, the pre-service teachers created video tributes to their host teachers and schools, and we surveyed the host teachers to gain program evaluation information. During the party, we shared the survey results and the pre-service teachers presented their movies. Then we had a grand conversation about the entire experience, probing the host teachers for ways to improve the program. After the dinner, we, of course, ended up at The Free Press.

> Audra: That went really well tonight; and it was fun too.
> Jenifer: The teachers gave good feedback. They were spot on! I also think study abroad is a bonding experience.
> Audra: I agree- even things like navigating a new country, taking the bus, sitting in the park just to be there- they don't do these things at home.
> Jenifer: Neither do we!
> Audra: Right. They are displaced, they are disconnected, and then reconnected.
> Jenifer: They came here and some of them learned different ways of thinking about the world. Some of them learned that other cultures aren't tied to cell phones, fast food, and Facebook. I think this study abroad changed them as people.
> Audra: Totally. Now let's see if it changes their practice.
> Jenifer: Yeah! And let's see if it changes ours…

Looking Back and Moving Forward. This study abroad experience made us think about our students as people. Most were young and inexperienced. For some, it was their first time traveling abroad. With very little experience they had to learn to be teachers-- to make judgments about children's lives while balancing their understanding of the process and the systems in place. We asked them to do these things in a foreign country. For us, we remembered how difficult it was to learn to be a teacher. We were reminded of the challenges we faced as learners. Teaching is not intuitive for everyone. Rather, it is a process that needs scaffolding and support. We empathized with them.

After returning home, we fell back into the routine of our lives. Finding opportunities to discuss our teaching became difficult, but eventually we made a commitment to meet once a week. We discussed the ways in which the study abroad experience changed our pedagogy. These were easy changes to identify and implement. We know how to learn from our own teaching—how to revise course assignments, how to alter group discussions, and how to create more interactive structures to support student learning of *our* content. The harder work came when we turned on ourselves.

Discussion

Much of the study abroad literature highlights the impact on student participants (e.g., Commission, 2005; Cushner, 2007; Lindsey, 2005) however, we contend that the faculty sponsors experience parallel shifts in their thinking and learning especially when they engage in narrative inquiry. In the study abroad environment we uncovered our own perceptions about pre-service teachers and expanded our learning to "see beyond the story itself and push toward a sophisticated articulation of the knowledge that lies beneath the story" (Loughran, 2010, p. 223). As a result, we made two discoveries about our work. First, we looked more carefully at the ways in which we position pre-service teachers, and ourselves, in the field. Second, we discuss the "critical" component of critical friends and the ways in which narrative inquiry created opportunities for us to hover over small moments to find pivotal decisions for teaching.

Field Placement as Final Exam

When we arrived in England, we knew how to supervise pre-service teachers. We knew how to build rapport and to consult with the host teachers, we knew how to focus the pre-service teachers on one or two areas for improvement based on each observation and to provide extensive written and verbal feedback as well. We even helped the pre-service teachers create professional development plans that replicated the model in the Cambridge schools (learning intentions/success criteria). Each plan was "differentiated" based on each pre-service teacher's needs and classroom contexts. Armed with best practices in supervision, we were ready to observe our best students—the carefully-selected, highly-recommended, and thoroughly seminar-trained pre-service teachers. But we failed to realize how different the "best" students could be. We were surprised by their timidity and their limited risk-taking. We were surprised by the lack of teaching expertise in the lessons we observed. Mostly, we were taken aback by how much teaching we had to do in the moment. We arrived in England expecting to observe the pre-service teachers as they applied their learning from all of their methods courses to their practice. Of course we expected (and wanted) to demonstrate our teaching expertise by providing some helpful hints, encouragement, and tips for navigating new school cultures. But we never imagined they would need so much help and how different each person's needs would be. We never imagined their methods courses would fade to black.

As teacher educators, we needed to recognize that our pre-service teachers are as different from each other as the students who populate our K-12 classrooms. Theoretically, we knew this; we just never transferred this understanding to our practice. We could not teach all of the pre-service teachers in the same way, and we could not supervise them in the same way. Yet, we held the same expectations for all.

We now conceptualize the field placement as the beginning of learning-to-teach rather than the culminating demonstration of expert teaching. A field placement is actually the first site for pre-service teachers to make attempts to bring their theories to practice; it is not a high-stakes, closed-book, final exam for methods courses. In looking back, we now see missed opportunities within our pre-Cambridge, in-Cambridge, and post-Cambridge teaching. We also see the flaws of our teacher preparation program in general. The disconnect between our courses and field experiences had to be re-paired (Zeichner, 2010). Our pre-service teachers needed more experiences in the field, and qualitatively "different" experiences in the field. They needed opportunities to co-teach with expert teachers rather than jump into solo teaching with a sink or swim attitude (Bacharach, Heck, & Dalhberg, 2010). They needed a window into the thinking and decision-making that occurs when expert teachers plan and deliver instruction. They needed expert faculty to scaffold experiences that allowed them to assimilate into the role of a teacher. And once they were in this "apprenticeship" stance, they needed to follow a series of developmental experiences that guided them toward effective teaching. Rather than a supervisor who conducted three formal observations; they needed a critical friend.

The Importance of Peer Relief

If we view ourselves as critical friends to pre-service teachers, then what is our relationship as colleagues? Is it the same? We don't think so. When we lived in Cambridge and existed in the moment, our talks helped us solve immediate problems. Yet, we could not, at the time, engage in truly critical work that had the possibility of changing our practice because we were surviving. Just like the pre-service teachers, we were in a different context and feeling different pressures. We didn't look too deeply at ourselves because we didn't have

time to change. We focused our attention on the pre-service teachers' practice and suspended extended looks at ourselves.

It was only through writing about the experience that we came to understand the impact of our decisions. The nature of writing—the expatiation of thought—led us to a more critical examination of our practice. In writing about our experience, we knew, based on the work of others (Ellis et al., 2008), that we had to capture the events as they occurred. We had to develop an interesting narrative that taught others as we taught ourselves. As we crafted these conversations, we made a conscious choice to be honest about our perspectives and feelings—to reveal our disappointment, annoyance, surprise. It was only through this look back at ourselves that we could see our own limitations.

Throughout our story we did not modify the scenes in order to make ourselves seem more professional. (Although we were tempted to do so.) We were highly critical of the pre-service teachers. At times, we had very personal reactions to their work, their efforts, and their successes/failures. These reactions were brought forward so we could then examine ourselves. Creating this self-study enabled us to freeze moments in time. In other words, the writing was a context for interpersonal reflection between us that led to intrapersonal reflexivity within each of us. We found it most beneficial to pick at the moments that were most embarrassing—most human. The moments in which we behaved as people rather than according to teacher-educator best practices. During those breaks in role we found opportunities to decipher our position and the thought processes behind our actions. These are difficult challenges in the reflexive moment. Can it be that the art of reflexive thought might require a separation of space, time, and mode when the participants are in a challenging and unfamiliar context? In other words, does survival trump reflexivity? And can peer relief function as a mediating factor in this reflexivity?

Like students who participate in study abroad programs, faculty describe the impact of the experience on their overall cultural awareness. Sandgren, Elig, Hovde, Krejci, and Rice (1999) specifically described the impact of study abroad experiences on faculty teaching and professional development. Their causal process theory posits a connection between study abroad experiences and resulting impacts on participants' social and self-awareness that ultimately leads to changes in their teaching. In other words, teaching experiences in international contexts lead to transformations in self-awareness ("new or keener awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, traits or behaviors," Sandgren et al., 1999, p. 48) or social awareness ("new or keener recognition of social reality," Sandgren et al., 1999, p. 49) that ultimately impact their teaching. These resulting changes include adjustments in course content, the techniques used, overarching teaching philosophies, and/or their interactions with students.

Yet most faculty can not participate in study abroad opportunities because of lack of availability or funding. To this end, teacher educators can capture the best moments of study abroad by finding the colleague who provides peer relief-- the colleague who will engage in discussions around continual and meaningful program renewal. We are fully aware of, and participate in, university accreditation processes that require reflection and action plans. However, these are often mired in paperwork, standards, and redundant bureaucratic processes that do little to facilitate the real work that is intended. Instead, we propose something different. Those faculty, who are truly interested in program improvement should grab a pint, join a writing group, meet for lunch, and have conversations about their work. If you think by the end of this experience, we spent a great deal of time in the local pub, you are correct. But, we contend, that it was this very aspect of British cultural immersion that facilitated our own reflexivity. We had to leave our "regular" lives and live in this alternative culture in order to extract this learning. We had to dismantle our work, make judgments about

our experiences, and take philosophical/logistical/personal stances in defense of our decisions only to turn on ourselves and stand "within but against" our own practice in order to learn.

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