

# **Introduction**

## **Exploring, Inspiring, and Forming New Envisionments through S-STEP**

Christi U. Edge

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The vision for this book emerged from several strands of experience, scholarship, and relationships over time. In briefly attending to three of these strands, I aim to weave and depict the academic themes-- (1) exploring the weavings of teaching and learning; (2) inspiring methods, frameworks, and collaborations; and (3) forming new understandings--in and through the unity of my own lived experiences. For, in editing this book and attending to the inquiries and experiences of others is to also better envision my own.

In 2004, I was on the verge; after six years of teaching high school English and reading, coaching, and sponsoring student organizations, something in my merry-go-round professional life had to change. I decided I would either take the Graduate Requisite Exam or the Law School Admissions Test. While waiting for the test dates, I signed up to take a course as a non-degree seeking student at a local university. Drawn to the title of a course, I found my way across the vast university landscape to—not a classroom as I had expected, but to the office of a department chair. There, seated at a small round table sat the professor, Jane, and one other student—a doctoral candidate. In this space, I was both lost and found. After some exploratory conversation, Jane invited me to stay in the doctoral-level course; she turned a sheet of names to face me and asked whose works I would like to study. What could have been intimidating felt like an invitation. Drawn to Rosenblatt's name, I began by reading *Literature as Exploration* (1938/1995). Through Rosenblatt's words, my inchoate understandings formed shape and substance; through her scholarship, I discovered that of Dewey (1938), and later Clandinin and Connolly (2000), frameworks for literature, philosophy for teaching, an epistemological perspective (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994) that connected experience and knowing, reading and writing, teaching and research, living, and telling. I vividly remember the sparked teaching that followed and the faces of tenth graders who probably cared little about the actual scholarship, but did care about me, and were visibly invigorated by my passion and sense of renewed purpose. Two years later, Jane asked if I would consider continuing into doctoral studies. Again, an invitation that opened a door to a world I had yet to imagine.

In 2011, as a new Assistant professor, I sat in the quiet space of a coffee shop devouring LaBoskey's (2004) "The Methodology of Self-Study and its Theoretical Underpinnings," a lengthy chapter lovingly photocopied by Suzanne, a senior faculty member who placed it in my hands along with an invitation to join a group of seven faculty for a self-study. At the time, I had never heard of self-study research, and

yet as I read, once again, nebulous understandings and unspoken ideas materialized in my mind, as if Laboskey's words had lit a candle, and I could see, for the first time, that which had always been all around me. Two years later, Abby, Bethney, and I ventured off from the dissolving larger group; as critical friends, we had learned to trust in the process of self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP) research and each other. Woven from our shared experiences and disrupted by our differing disciplines, we inquired together, became attuned to our disciplinary values, and transformed our professional identities from K-12 teachers into university faculty and teacher education researchers. Together, we formed a cross-disciplinary perspective that has made prismatic the possibilities of exploring, envisioning, and re-envisioning our practices and our lives as educators and researchers.

In 2014, Alan Ovens and Dawn Garbett, program chairs for the Castle conference, invited Abby, Bethney, and I to join a group who had planned to walk to the sixteenth century Lamb Inn for a bite to eat. Somehow, we'd missed the group, and we didn't know the way. Having heard stories of the treacherous, thistle-lined roadside walk to the iconic inn, but no experience ourselves, we decided to embark and find our way. Through corn fields, cow pastures, then the thistles along the shoulderless, winding road with its fast-flying cars and many blind corners, we arrived. Geoff Mills was seated at the head of the table, and, we thought, acting a bit like Biff from the movie *Back to the Future*. Confident, leading, and with a watchful eye, inquiring who the three "graduate students" were as we joined the group. Two years later, I stood alone in the open space outside the Castle pub; Renee offered me a chair and the invitation to join an in-progress conversation...with Biff and his critical friend, Todd. Reading my face, Todd recognized my caution in joining the conversation. He, of course, was unaware that for the past two years, Abby, Bethney, and I had often joked about our experience at the Lamb Inn and replayed all the ways in which we could have responded with more authority to "Biff's" overly confident ways. Todd called me out; with candor and

care, his question began a way to attend to my emotions and perceptions. As I shared conversations with this small group, my perceptions of what was once clear, was no longer. “Biff” was not at all who we had initially thought he was. My boundaries broken, my heart and mind opened, I saw Biff, Geoff, for the first time. In the morning, as we joined the others for breakfast, I vividly remember pulling Abby and Bethney aside-- “Oh, and by the way, we are friends with Biff and his cronies now.” Ironically, neither Abby nor Bethney pushed back on that fact. If one had experienced something that changed the perspective from which she was seeing, then the others accepted that as a new truth. Such is the bond, the gift of self-study and critical friendships--knowing when to push, when to ask, when to listen, accept, and to learn to create spaces for growth and change. One’s personal experiences have a way of becoming familiar and personal for those in which the experiences were shared; as critical friends, we could envision how the inner life stitched rapidly, could now be unstitched and re-envisioned.

Woven from these threads of experiences, questions, opportunities offered by others, invitations—to enter into a class, to select and to study the works of a scholar, to participate in a self-study, to venture out in the unknown together, to find or make a footpath, to pull up a chair in the open space outside the Castle pub—creates spaces in which we can rethink and re-envision, reframe, to see and re-see practices through the language of scholarship, to articulate the joys and challenges in teaching and learning, in discovering assumptions, scholarship and inquiry, heightened in, by, and through interactions, relationships with others--the community of scholars who are, have been, and are becoming S-STEP.

May this book be a light to illuminate the important, complex, messy-beautiful, purposeful-responsive work of teaching and teacher education practices inquired into and advanced through S-STEP research. May it begin conversations and evoke us to find or to make a way. May the questions and critical inquiries of others lead to

reframing understandings, relationships, and help us to see ourselves differently as a result. May we dare to explore, become lost- and found again.

## **Textiles and Tapestries: Self Study for Envisioning New Ways of Knowing**

Interrelated, dynamic and generative in nature, each chapter in *Textiles and Tapestries: Self-Study for Envisioning New Ways of Knowing* emerges from a complex interplay of personal, professional, temporal, relational, sociopolitical contexts; through self-initiated inquiry that is improvement aimed and utilizes myriad methods, frameworks, interactions, and exemplars of practice for purposes of informing self and others (LaBoskey, 2004). Section one illuminates the *why*—to explore, discover, know, uncover, and understand—by lending focus to the process of exploring and making meaning from weaving inquiry, teaching, and learning through self-study. Section two illuminates the *how*— the act of making new meaning, forming new relationships, creating the tapestries and textiles of knowing by attending to the tools and crafting processes in studying teaching and professional practices. Chapters in this section highlight inventive methods, collaborations, frameworks, and settings. Part three—the *what*—illuminates the new wonderings and knowings we envision and generate (Langer, 2011) from and through doing self-study research.

The initial vision for this edited book was crafted in conjunction with the planned 13th International Conference on Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices, to be held at Herstmonceux Castle, East Sussex, England in July 2020. In the spring of 2018, when our work as conference chairs began—or even six months ago—we could never have imagined the present context in which we now work. The status quo checked, life as we know it put on hold and likely transformed forever. We are living history.

In co-editing this book during this novel time, I am reminded of the role we collectively play in making—making meaning, making a difference in our classrooms, in our communities, and across continents. I am inspired and troubled by the responsibility of teaching, enacting, and becoming. Self-study of teaching and teacher education practices (S-STTEP) provides a broad and sturdy frame, a metaphorical loom, tools and techniques, exemplars, the strength of many strands woven and rewoven over time, diverse contexts, across the globe—tapestries ever unfolding. May this book offer opportunities to trace and retrace threads of thought, experience, practice, identity, relationships—to ponder the paths of inquiry, to celebrate, to wonder into, to dare to envision what has not yet been. We are textile, tapestry—together, a volume of texts, a collective story (a my-your-our story) filled with tensions, inciting incidents, characters who inspire, invite, disrupt and challenge; together, we are able to illuminate, to advocate, create new leads, open spaces, and, through self-study research, to make the invisible stitchings of teaching, teacher education, and research more visible to self and others for purposes of democracy, for equity, for freedom—now and for future posterity (United Nations, n.d.).

This book is dedicated with appreciation to those whose weavings now take a quieter turn toward the tapestries of retirement--John Loughran, Tom Russell, Hafdís Guðjónsdóttir, Deb Tidwell, Geoff Mills, and many more—your tapestries live on, inspiring us, woven in and through us, becoming in the ever-unfolding textiles and tapestries we form as we continue on, begin anew, forge spaces, and craft tools for what is yet to come. Thank you for strengthening our fabric, for making and being a difference, and, in the words of Emerson, for being “an opener of doors for such as come after thee.”

Christi Edge, Marquette, Michigan, USA,

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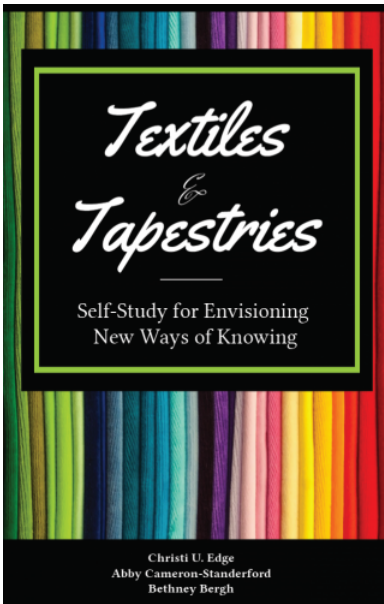
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