

SUSTAINING A COMMUNITY OF SCHOLARS AT A TRANSNATIONAL UNIVERSITY: A SELF- STUDY

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Abstract

In this article we report on a self-study at a transnational research-intensive university in Qatar. We trace the shared perceptions of four emerging scholars, from two disciplines, coming together to build a sustainable community of scholars as an interdisciplinary team. We explore our initial thoughts in developing our group and illustrate the themes of collegiality, mentorship and conflict in sustaining a successful community of scholars. We conclude with lessons learned illustrating how the concept of support played a significant factor in sustaining our community and adjusting to both a transnational education setting and expatriate life. The findings may serve useful to others working in such a setting, and most expressively, provide an opportunity to broaden the continued scholarly discourses of scholarship, community of scholars, and interdisciplinary teams within the context of transnational education.

Keywords: Community of Scholars, Interdisciplinary Teams, Transnational Education, Scholarship

Introduction

Faculty members employed at foreign-based transnational universities face many unique opportunities and challenges in their work environment as they learn to navigate the new terrain on time-limited working contracts, and often arriving with little knowledge of colleagues. However, what is familiar to faculty members is their responsibilities.

Essential academic responsibilities primarily include: educating learners; providing service to a community; engaging in active research and scholarship to advance knowledge; and/or supporting best practice in his or her field. Generating novel ideas, and undertaking a research or scholarly activity is no longer practiced in isolation, but accomplished collectively among teams of interdisciplinary researchers and scholars (Melnik & Fineout-Overholt, 2011). Coming together for these scholarly activities is referred to as a community of scholars (CoS).

In published literature on the concept, CoS is often described as local, in-house, and discipline-specific (Adendorff, 2011; Brahm, Davis, Peirce, & Lamb, 2011; Cash & Tate, 2008; Cumbie & Wolverton, 2004; Cumbie, Weinert, Lupareli, Conley, & Smith, 2005; Jameson, Jaeger, Clayton, & Bringle, 2012; Scott, Justiss, Schmid, & Fisher, 2013; Wilding, Curtin, & Whiteford, 2012). Postlewait & Michieli's work (2010) is the exception. These authors focused on a CoS within a transnational context and outlined the contributions made by their group of scholars, which included translating research findings into several languages, publishing their work for a much broader audience, and encouraging the renewal of often out-dated teaching practices within their specific discipline. Excluding Postlewait & Michieli's (2010) findings, there is a paucity of evidence of how faculty working at transnational universities move toward assembling and sustaining a CoS in general, let alone from an interdisciplinary perspective.

In this article, we present an interpretation of the reflections of a group of faculty, the four authors, on the development of scholarly identity and on establishing and sustaining a CoS within a transnational interdisciplinary context. We first provide an overview of the concepts of scholarship, community of practice (CoP) and CoS as background to a self-study approach. We then demonstrate some of our initial thoughts and perceived benefits in forming an interdisciplinary team. We further highlight the opportunities and challenges that emerged from our CoS by reporting on three inter-related themes: collegiality, conflict and mentorship. We conclude with lessons learned where we present team and institutional support as the driving forces in sustaining and adapting to our new work context. Collegiality, conflict, mentorship, and support have been a focus in many scholarly studies. However, what we maintain is the discovery of a distinctive dimension of the concept of support that has not been previously identified to date about interdisciplinary CoS within the context of transnational scholarship. Our aim is to provide an opportunity to broaden the continued scholarly discourses of scholarship and CoS in this context.

Context of the Study

University of Calgary in Qatar

According to the Council of Europe/UNESCO (2000), transnational education (TNE) is defined as all forms of higher education that are accessible to learners located in different countries from which the main academic institution is centred. TNE is not a new phenomenon, but has expanded across most of the globe (Adam, 2001; McBurnie & Ziguas, 2007). In the Middle East, there has been a rapid expansion in the number of TNE institutions. These include branch campuses, replica offshore institutions, and satellite universities (Miller-Idriss & Hanauer, 2011).

The University of Calgary (U of C), a Canadian university, has joined the TNE movement. A transnational branch of U of C is located in Qatar (UCQ). It was established in 2006 with a vision to “enrich the health and wellness in Qatar and the Gulf region” (Donnelly, 2013, p. 1). Closely associated with this vision is the nation’s aim in becoming a knowledge-based, global intellectual centre (Qatar Foundation, 2012). UCQ offers nursing degrees, one at the undergraduate level and another at the graduate level. The English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program serves as a supportive role to assist with English. Approximately 85% of students require one or more courses in the EAP program prior to enrolment in either nursing program, as the majority of students come from countries where English is not an official language.

Our Community

The four novice scholars involved in this study started working at the University of Calgary in the Fall of 2012. We were all new to a transnational university context. We were brought together our first term by the idea of using microblogging as a reflective pedagogical tool for student nurses involved in a community health course. We have continued to work on a microblogging project, while building and developing our scholarly identity through this interdisciplinary CoS, although 2 faculty members have since completed their contracts and returned to Canada. Table 1 summarizes our collective background information.

Background

Scholarship

Boyer’s (1990) perspectives on scholarship and subsequent development of a framework have been immensely influential. Specifically, Boyer (1990) described four types of scholarship. The scholarship of discovery is often referred to as the traditional view of how research is conducted by academics. Within this type of scholarship, inquiries are made by scholars with the goal of generating knowledge. The scholarship of

integration implies the compilation of facts or perspectives to arrive at a new understanding. “It is about making connections across disciplines, placing the specialities in larger context, illuminating data in a revealing way, often educating non-specialists, too” (Boyer, 1990, p.18). The scholarship of application is in employing knowledge gained, within a specified context, to solve problems, and to facilitate best practices within institutions. It includes acquiring “new intellectual understandings from the very act of application” (Boyer, 1990, p. 23). Finally, the scholarship of teaching is about “transforming and extending knowledge and the continuity of knowledge” (Boyer, 1990, p.23). This renewed perspective on scholarship facilitated in narrowing the gap between teaching and research. Boyer (1990) distinguished teaching as “the highest form of understanding” (p.23) and situated teaching at the very core of scholarship. These ideas seemed especially applicable to working in an interdisciplinary team in the situated context of TNE. In this paper, the term scholarship includes aspects of discovery (the scholarly process), integration (interdisciplinary knowledge), application (best practice in the TNE context) and teaching (our project on a teaching innovation), and the development of scholarly identity refers to our learning and growth across them.

Community of Practice

A learning community emerges when a group of individuals comes together and commits to learning in new ways. Nourishing and nurturing group learning can lead to the building of a CoP. Lave and Wenger (1991) defined what they termed CoP by linking the two previously separate ideas of community and practice. Later, Wenger (2011) added a domain to their concept of CoP to differentiate it from a “club of friends or a network of connections between people” (p.1); rather, a CoP “has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). These authors defined a CoP as a group of people who develop a common sense of purpose and a desire in sharing knowledge and experiences through extensive communication as part of becoming a community of practice. This group of people may work together, or share interests or challenges that are similar. (Wenger, et al., 2002). While people in communities of practice can work in a variety of contexts, the concept of communities of scholars is contextualized in the specialized field of academia.

Community of Scholars

In the advent of a beginning shift in the academy’s view of scholarship and of Boyer’s (1990) *Scholarship Reconsidered* paper, CoS began to materialize across campuses. A CoS is a group of academics that devote time in the art of inquiry and knowledge development. Rizzo-Parse

(2005) identified fundamental attributes of a CoS such as “knowledge vision (focus), a spirit of collegiality (recognition of strengths of the group), and a persistent pattern of critical contemplation (reflection of the group’s contribution to the body of literature of their disciplines)” (p. 119). Within the context of community of learners, Selznick’s work (1996) adds to the list of essential features identified by Rizzo-Parse (2005) to include identity, history, and culture. Extending Selznick’s contributions, Misanchuk, Anderson, Craner, Eddy, and Smith (2000) discovered that communication, collaboration, and cooperation set up a community for success. In our coming together as a group of scholars, we used the CoP framework to develop a CoS.

Self-Study as our Methodology

Self-study research has gained popularity as a research methodology in the field of Education. Although there is a lack of agreement on its definition (Pinnegard & Hamilton, 2009), a person involved in self-study “questions practice with the support of colleagues, and frames, assesses, and reframes his/her practice within the context or broader educational aims” (Samaras & Freese, 2009, p.11). The particular aim of this approach is for educators to transform their practice through examining their own teaching (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002). The self-study methodology has its theoretical and practical roots in teacher inquiry (Samaras & Freese, 2009), action research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; McNiff, 1988) and reflective practice (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983, 1987). Self-study has also evolved from the post-modernist view that “that it is never possible to divorce the ‘self’ from either the research process or from education practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2004, p. 607). Despite the deliberations surrounding its credibility, rigour, and identified shortcomings (as cited in Craig, 2009), self-study is an approach that is increasingly being used in education because it assists in uncovering the tacit knowledge of teachers which is valuable in improving practice (Lasonde, Galaman & Kosnik, 2009).

Samaras & Roberts (2011) consider developing pedagogies to improve learning as an important aspect in the self-study methodology.

Self-study has further been defined by role, situated practice, and purpose (Samaras & Freese, 2009). Approaches to the self-study methodology are varied and may include interviews, personal experience, participatory research, communities of practice, and artistic models (Lasonde, Galman & Kosnik, 2009).

Self-study methodology and these particular definitions are appropriate to our group and context. Our group focused on developing and sustaining a CoS within a CoP framework as we worked in collaboration on a microblogging project to foster reflection in student nurses. We arrived

together as a group to work on this learning innovation, and as our group evolved, we also began to explore our new role as novel scholars in an interdisciplinary team. We were learning collectively in a new work context: a transnational university offering only nursing degrees. This specialized context rarely encountered at other teaching institutions added expectations of close collaboration between the EAP and nursing programs. Finally, our motivations for relocating to another part of the world for work, and in forming a CoS, were embedded in a desire for both personal and professional growth and renewal, two of the three defining purposes mentioned by Samaras & Freese (2009).

While being involved on the microblogging project, we came to realize that we could work on a scholarly piece about our experience as a community, and hence, this self-study evolved in an organic fashion. Focusing on pivotal points in the journey of building a community, we used a reflective process and analysed our observations and experiences to uncover underlying themes. In keeping with the nature of a self-study, the data was analysed inductively and retrospectively. This resulted in rich descriptive data of our journey in developing a scholarly identity through forming an interdisciplinary CoS, and of how this process benefited us.

Findings

In this section, we outline our findings from the self-study as they relate to the perceived benefits and feelings about building an interdisciplinary community. We further describe collegiality, mentorship and conflict as themes that emerged while sustaining our community.

Building a Community

It was not until an impromptu hallway encounter that we discovered our mutual interest in the establishment of an interdisciplinary team and in considering microblogging as a pedagogical tool. Thus, a CoS was conceptualized. We reflected on the early stages of building our community as we remembered our initial thoughts about forming an interdisciplinary CoS and being involved in a project about microblogging.

Scholar 4 reflected:

Working as an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructor and being part of a faculty of nursing, I felt it was important to find a way to collaborate with nurses and was also interested in finding out what went on in a nursing classroom. When I first heard the idea of using microblogging as a means of reflection in a nursing class, I was interested in finding out how the language of reflection would differ in nursing's traditional paper format and that of using microblogging.

Scholar 2 reflected:

The focus of my master's thesis explored reflection as a skill and how it develops with practice. I was involved in a reflective community with a few people from my cohort and a supervisor. It was a great experience to learn to reflect on my practice while having the opportunity to read and witness others' growth in the process. When I hear of the idea of using microblogging as a way to build a community and a reflective forum, I was automatically attracted by the project. As I was new to the university, I considered it a great chance to work in collaboration with nursing faculty and learn more about their program.

Scholar 3 reflected:

It was a good feeling to become part of a group where I felt supported and could share my ideas and thoughts in safe space. As each of us shared in the group, I became more comfortable to bring up questions and admit that I did not know how to teach students whose first language was not English. In being vulnerable the other members of the group helped me not just in strategies but also provided emotional support in the way of encouragement.

Sustaining a Community

In examining the reflections related to sustaining our interdisciplinary CoS, three inter-related themes emerged: collegiality, mentorship, and conflict.

Collegiality

A first theme that emerged from our reflections was collegiality. The excerpts below illustrate how we fostered a collegial environment within our interdisciplinary community.

Scholar 1 reflected:

Coming to a university setting from a college setting was an incredibly overwhelming experience for me. It was unsettling at first, as everyone seemed to have his or her plan. Cooperation or collaboration among my colleagues, was not explicitly apparent as it was in my previous workplace. My frame of reference needed a bit of re-adjustment. When Scholar 3 shared the idea for a scholarly project with me, I immediately felt a connection. My familiar feelings of what it meant to work toward a common goal of improving practice came flooding back. The inclusion of Scholar 2 and 4 into our community only added to my appreciation of the inherent value of being collaborative and cooperative.

In a same way, Scholar 4 depicted collegiality as:

.... Moreover, I formed very valuable connections with nursing faculty who I may not otherwise have worked with.

Along with promoting a form of cooperation and collaboration, our interactions, whether in person or virtual, seemed to foster respect for one another's professionalism and points of views. For example, Scholar 4 revealed:

As an EAP instructor who had not submitted an abstract before, I learned a lot about writing with a team. While writing, I learned about the scholarship of teaching and learning and I learned how to contribute on a team. I somehow had a hard time envisioning where I fit into this project. Working on the abstract with my team members helped inform my own practice as it made me think about how I could get my students ready for what was going on in the nursing classroom. It gave me a glimpse into how reflection assignments may be handled, and it also sparked my interest in how I could use social media, and reflection, in my own classroom.

As can be seen in Scholar 1's excerpt, collegiality was further nurtured in a place of safety as she reflected on the quality of our meetings.

Scholar 1 reflected:

At the outset, the nature of our meetings were categorized by open and safe dialogues about scholarly teaching; our views on teaching, curriculum development, and learning outcomes. Subtly, a shift in conversation led to identification of key terms to use to search the known literature from each of our respective disciplines, sharing the findings with one another, and optimistically, to locate potential venues to disseminate our contribution.

Finally, Scholar 2 and 3 identified how collegiality helped them find their feet in both the new work and living environments.

Scholar 2 reflected:

The professional relationship we developed was very important for me. It helped me make sense of my new working environment. However, the bonds that I developed with the members was made even stronger because of the relationship that continued to develop outside of work. For example, Faculty 3 shared similar difficulties and challenges as me in settling her husband and child in this new environment. These problems were quite stressful, but as we were able to share and support each other through them, we became even closer. Knowing I was not the only one adjusting on a personal level made me better able to focus on work and projects when at work. Similarly, three of us lived in the same compound. Our shared experiences in settling into our living environment

added to the shared experiences and the feeling of closeness, both at work and at home.

Scholar 3 reflected:

We came together to discuss our challenges as teachers and I learned so much about how to be a better teacher especially with students who are second language learners. Many times we shared our discipline specific knowledge with each other spontaneously and in usual places. We could be greeting each other at the park while supervising our children playing and launch into a discussion about something that had happened in our classroom that day. Our lives were intertwined in many different ways – through our children, our recreational activities, our residence and our work setting In many ways this strengthened our collegial relationships.

Mentorship

A second theme we saw emerge was mentorship. Mentorship can be defined as a relationship that embraces “sharing knowledge and experience, providing emotional support, role modeling, and guidance” (Mijares, Baxley, Bond, 2013, p. 23). We discovered that the mentor/mentee relationship was an important part of our interdisciplinary CoS in learning about the process of scholarship and in sharing expertise.

Scholar 4 reflected:

As a new faculty member at a transnational university I learned that presenting at international conferences was something that most members of the academic staff at UCQ were doing. I had not presented in this capacity before. I was quite nervous about this. Working with team members who had more experience than me was really useful. It felt useful when I realized I could help my team members because I have expertise in teaching second language learners, whereas their expertise lays more in nursing and education. It was extremely beneficial for me to carry out my first presentation with someone who knew what they were doing. I feel this helped me find my identity by building my confidence as a scholar. I am grateful for the help and mentorship I have received throughout this process.

Scholar 1's excerpt highlights the personal and reciprocal relationship felt by a faculty member. It further highlights how interdisciplinary mentorship helped her make sense of the new transnational context. This is also emphasized in Scholar 3's comments.

Scholar 1 reflected:

Rizzo-Parse's (2005) visualization of CoS highlighted the need to recognize the strengths of each member of the community. This particular testimonial resonated in me while I was finding my place within UCQ. In our regular meetings I felt a sense of belonging. My contributions mattered to our group and this was acknowledged privately and publically. And as such, the contributions of others consciously assisted me in the pursuit of negotiating what teaching strategies worked best within this new learning environment. Establishing trusting relationships with students at the beginning of every semester is always challenging, more so in this culture because of its unfamiliarity. Being referred to as “Miss”, Maa’m”, or “Dr” by students was initially overwhelming. Working harmoniously with Scholar 2 and 4, I learned to appreciate this form of relationship building among students, but more explicitly they showed me how to make the course concepts make sense to students whose primary language was not English. And it was successful.

Scholar 3 reflected:

As we continued to meet as a group, we began to share our experiences in the classroom and I found it was extremely helpful to have instructors in our group that brought the perspective of teaching students whose first language is not English. I remember being confused at times with my expectations of students in my class compared to where they were actually at with their English language skills. Once I realized that I had to make adjustments to my expectations, I began to wonder how I could best support my students. The EAP teachers supported me by providing various strategies I could try in the classroom and additional readings I could acquaint myself with to increase my knowledge in the area. They also helped with reviewing my midterm and final multiple choice exams.

Finally, Scholar 2 mentions not only mentorship within the CoS, but also mentorship she received through two certificates courses offered at our institution.

Scholar 2 reflected:

When starting this position, I had been away from research for more than 10 years. It's also my first time working in a interdisciplinary team with a PhD prepared, and PhD candidate co-worker. I wasn't sure how I'd fit in. Two things helped me in this regard. The first thing is the knowledge and support given by our group. For example, I would never have been able to start outlining the contents of a paper for publication. I feel I was

mentored through the process of developing a research question, abstract writing and conference application, ethics approval, and making poster presentations, to name a few. A second thing is the support given by the Center for Teaching and Learning. Through them, I was able to join in and complete two certificate courses over two terms that were great refreshers into the scholarly process.

Conflict

A final theme that emerged from our data is conflict. Our community experienced points of tension and conflict, especially in communication. We found that our group experimented not only with how to communicate, but also with means of communication in times of tension. Some forms of communications were felt to both cause conflict, yet have other advantages. Other forms were preferred in times of conflict.

Scholar 1 reflected:

Sometimes, misunderstandings occurred in our writing. How often have I heard that email is a source of disagreements because we rely on one form of communication, when another may be more applicable? The physical distance and the time zones, only add to relying on email. Our communication and a sense of inclusivity seem so more tangible when we used Skype.

While conflict was present, it was seen as an opportunity for self-reflection and learning as apparent in the following excerpts.

Scholar 2 reflected:

Conflict is an inevitable part of group work. However, I hate conflict, and I'm not very good at dealing with it. My tendency is to ignore it and hope that things will pass. If I do address them, I tend to be accusative rather than supportive. There were a few points of tension that arose in the last few weeks. I've been trying to see those conflicts as a learning opportunity. I've tried understanding the other person's point of view or possible reasons for their behaviour. I've also tried different approaches and ways to address problems. I value and respect the people in this group, and I want my actions to reflect that. What helped me a lot was getting mentorship from one of the members on how to approach people. I feel that I'm working through something valuable that I'll be able to apply to other situations.

Scholar 1 reflected:

As much as I valued and appreciated the inherent strength of our group, that is in building our identity as a CoS from an interdisciplinary stance, it was often the source of my struggle to

understand seeing' other'. The subtle nuances of endeavouring to recognize a member's contribution to the conversation on teaching practices, led me to re-evaluate how I conceptualize patience. I was often reminded from a past lesson learned that my journey in explicating the nature of my practice was situated in the challenge of working with tension rather than solely to attempt to resolve tension. It made me a more enriched as an educator.

Lesson Learned

In this section, we emphasize the concept of support as a unique feature with a distinctive dimension in forming and sustaining interdisciplinary communities in a transnational setting.

While reflecting on our journey in developing our scholarly identity since the inception of our interdisciplinary CoS, one overarching concept has emerged, that of support. Support has been the key to our growth and success as a community. We received support from one another, both in our personal and professional lives. This support was apparent in the forms of collegiality and mentorship. It was also present in times of conflict. Finally, institutional support was a meaningful factor.

Community of Scholars as a Support Group

Working at the University of Calgary in Qatar was our first opportunity to be employed at a transnational university, and we had not known each other prior. When we started meeting and thereafter, we made it a precedent to take time from each meeting to share our thoughts, feelings and perceptions, from both a personal and professional perspective. This particular strategy of '*getting to know*' from a personal outlook unquestionably contributed to our sustainability; but it also functioned as a way to form a CoS. Similarly, our shared living conditions and experiences in settling into our new living environment helped to strengthen the bond.

Working, living, and socializing with the same individuals abroad is a common emotionally charged phenomenon experienced by many expatriates. Richardson (2013) described it as a roller coaster ride. Much of the literature on the expatriate life exists anecdotally. Only a few empirical studies offer insight into the expatriate lived experience of working in international posts (Crooke, 1998; Kishi, Inoue, Crookes, & Shorten, 2014; Stahl, 2001). Irrespective of the use of differing contexts, methodologies, and populations, these authors indicated that without an effective coping mechanism; *working abroad* is challenging. None of these inquiries fully addressed the *living abroad* aspect. Indirectly, however, the findings do suggest strategies for the individual to cope with living. However, what was exclusive to our experience is the belief that our CoS was sustained because of its supportive

nature not only in *working* in a transnational university, but also in *living* in a foreign country. Using such a venue to cope, as it relates to *living abroad*, as not been identified to date.

In sustaining our interdisciplinary CoS, support was also the tread that connected our experiences of collegiality, mentorship and conflict. First, the CoS not only functioned as a support in our personal and professional transitions in the transnational context, but it also strengthen our commitment to the work of the group. Indeed, within the vast body of literature on collegiality is an intrinsic belief that professional development occurs when faculty engage in establishing relationship. Collegiality in our CoS further assisted in creating a safe context. Hadar & Brody (2010) discovered that a safe context was a vital feature of a community to allow for professional growth and change. Equally significant, mentorship was also a driving force of support in developing our scholarly identity. We developed mentoring relationships in sharing expertise in our respective fields and in learning of scholarly activities. Parse (2008) claimed that mentors and mentees share a common interest and a unique relationship that takes place while keenly undertaking the unknown. For us, interdisciplinary work and TNE and were big unknowns. Although there is little agreement on common factors that make mentoring successful, it is agreed by many authors that mentoring encourages academic progress and career advancement (Girves, Zepeda, & Gwathmey, 2005). This was evident in our journey.

Collegiality and mentorship in working groups are supportive in nature. However, the role of support in conflict is less understood. Wenger (1998), one of the authors who coined the phrase “community of practice”, stated that “Most situations that involve sustained interpersonal engagement generate their fair share of tensions and conflict.” (p.77). Conflict can even be the cause of failure such as the one reported in a collaboration on an interdisciplinary project (Vanasupa, McCormick, Stefanco, Herter, & McDonald, 2012). Vanasupa et al. (2012), after reflecting on the reasons behind their failed project, made recommendations for successful interdisciplinary teams. Specifically, they said “Embrace conflict as the visible signs of differences in hidden assumptions and mental model. Allow conflict to serve as an entry point into exploring each other’s views” (p.182). This stance was apparent in our community.

The close blend of personal and professional boundaries which characterizes our transnational branch campus served our group in developing close ties and creating an environment where we felt trust, safety, and could support each other even through conflict. We believe this was instrumental in each of us viewing conflict as a learning opportunity, a time for self-reflection, and an opportunity to receive mentoring. As this may represent an innovative discovery of what is meant by support in a CoS,

additional exploration highlighting the role of the interrelated dynamics of collegiality and mentorship in a transnational context, and how these can influence attitudes and reactions to conflict, would help understand the process of sustaining professional learning communities in TNE.

Institutional Support

Establishing a community among faculty to build research and scholarship capacity has increasingly been encouraged at institutions of higher education (Cash & Tate, 2008; 2012; Gelmon, Blanchard, Ryan, & Seifer, 2012; Jameson, Jaeger, Clayton, & Bringle, 2012). As previously identified, UCQ's vision is to "enrich the health and wellness in Qatar and the Gulf region" (Donnelly, 2013, p. 1). To align itself with this aim and vision, UCQ's Research and Center for Teaching and Learning units began to foster a culture of scholarship by strongly encouraging faculty to actively engage in research and by facilitating means to establish interdisciplinary partnerships within the university as well as within the community at large. For example, the Center for Teaching and Learning offers certificate courses entitled *Certificate of Professional Inquiry* and *Getting Published Workshop*. We soon realized, apart from our own enthusiasm, that we were also working within a culture that promoted what Melnyk and Fineout-Overholt (2011) called a "spirit of inquiry" (p. 11) in which the resources within UCQ to complete scholarship and research were visible and readily accessible. This form of support within the organization is a consistent theme in the literature as key to a successful research and scholarship program (Brahm, et al., 2011; Scott, et al., 2013). Further inquiry is necessary in describing and evaluating the catalytic role of institutional support in the forming of interdisciplinary CoSs and in the development of scholarship in a transnational setting.

Conclusion

While CoSs are often formed to facilitate faculty development, in our experience, it was a microblogging project that provided an opportunity for four novice scholars from two different disciplines working at a transnational university to come together to build a CoS. In this paper, we narrated the process of forming and sustaining a CoS and the development of a scholarly identity with the use of personal reflections. Specifically, we focused on the role of institutional support and support through collegiality, mentorship and conflict. Each form of support contributed to our success as a CoS and to our professional growth. We have learned that feeling internally supported within our group facilitated a smoother adjustment to an expatriate life. Similarly, being part of an interdisciplinary team and being supported by our institution facilitated our adjustment to a TNE context.

To ensure the sustainability of our CoS, we have archived our material. Archiving material is not a unique feature, but what is exceptional is our transitory-style context, in which faculty are on time-sensitive working contracts. Because the two founding members had returned to their home country, an invitation to join the COS was extended to another faculty member. Having material accessible on Dropbox™ was instrumental for our newest member in becoming familiar with the COS and in the details of the approved scholarly project. Her contributions to our ongoing discussions have brought what Hassel (2004) described as a benefit to extending the discourse of what is meant by diversity and multiple perspective. This way of thinking is also closely aligned with Rizzo-Parse's (2005) distinguishing feature of a COS “a spirit of collegiality” (p.119). Rizzo-Parse explained that the spirit is gained through embracing the capacities of each scholar within the community. We anticipate that our experience and the continual growth of our community at UCQ will contribute to the continued discourses on the development of scholarship, CoSs and scholarly identity, and has the potential to transform the way communities at transnational educational settings are practiced.

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List of Tables

Table 1: Background of Faculty¹

Faculty Name	Scholar 1	Scholar 2	Scholar 3	Scholar 4
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female
Credentials	PhD, MEd, BSN,RN	MA (TESOL), CTESOL, BSc.	PhD(c), MSc(H.P), BScN, RN	MA (TESL),CTESL, BA
Years of Teaching Experience	24	21	12	10
Research Experience	Novice	Novice	Advanced Beginner	Novice
Experience with working at a transnational university	Novice	Novice	Novice	Novice
Experience with working on an inter-disciplinary team	Proficient	Novice	Advanced Beginner	Novice
Experience with working with students whose primary language is not English	Beginner	Expert	Novice	Advanced Beginner
Experience with microblogging	Beginner Novice with microblogging	Beginner Novice with microblogging	Beginner Novice with microblogging	Beginner Novice with microblogging

¹Benner, based on Dreyfus model of skill acquisition, identified five stages of competencies that nurses pass through.. The stages are: Novice, Advanced Beginner, Competent, Proficient, Expert. Benner, P. (1982), Novice to Expert. The American Journal of Nursing, 82(3), 402-407.